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# Strategies Nonprofit Leaders Use to Achieve Financial Stability Through Sustainable Funding

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Jerel Colemon

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Walden University  
2019

Abstract

Strategies Nonprofit Leaders Use to Achieve Financial Stability Through Sustainable  
Funding

by

Jerel Colemon

MS, University of Phoenix, 2012

BS, University of Cincinnati, 1987

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2019

## Abstract

Leaders of nonprofit organizations fail to achieve financial stability to meet their mission and vision without sustainable funding. The achievement of fiscal sustainability is the most pressing challenge facing the nonprofit sector. Through the lens of the balanced scorecard model, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies that nonprofit organization executive leaders used to secure sustainable funding for financial stability. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with 5 executive directors of nonprofit organizations in Ohio who had implemented strategies to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability and a review of their organizational documents relevant to sustainable funding. Data were analyzed using Yin's 5-step process for analysis. The 3 emergent themes resulting from data analysis were a sustainable programming strategy, a relationship collaboration strategy, and a donor commitment strategy. The findings of the study indicated that leaders of nonprofit organizations secure sustainable funding for financial stability through effective programming to fulfill their mission, developing collaborative relationships with internal and external stakeholders, and improving donor commitment to receive funding through reoccurring donations and endowment sources. Leaders of nonprofit organizations could use the findings of this study to provide comprehensive services that result in improved living and economic conditions in the communities they serve through implementing strategies for sustainable funding to meet the mission of their organizations.

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## Dedication

To my family. Thank you for your prayers, patients, and encouragement. My Virgil and Colemon families created something in me to level up to the pinnacle of education achievement. I love you all. To the memory of Fonz. My four-legged best friend that hung in there with me as long as he could. You were truly loved and are truly missed.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) require adequate and ongoing funding sources to maintain financial stability and fulfill their organizational mission and vision (Helmig, Ingerfurth, & Pinz, 2014). Leaders of NPOs noted that achieving fiscal sustainability is the most pressing challenge facing the sector (McDonald, Weerawardena, Madhavaram, & Sullivan Mort, 2015). Achieving financial stability within NPOs is increasingly problematic because of reduced government subsidies and increased commercialization of the nonprofit sector; therefore, NPO leaders must generate additional sources of revenue if they want to survive in an increasingly competitive market (Helmig et al., 2014).

### **Background of the Problem**

The nonprofit sector contributed an estimated \$900 billion to the U.S. economy in 2013 (Bushouse, 2017); yet, pursuits of nonprofit missions have become more challenging for NPO leaders due to declines in local and state government funding, growth in the numbers of NPOs, and many for-profit firms entering markets traditionally served by NPOs (Topaloglu, McDonald, & Hunt, 2018). Community- and social services-based NPOs rely heavily on government grants and philanthropic giving for program and operations support (McDonald et al., 2015). Innovative ideas may be necessary for many organizations to create new business models that rely less on government grants and philanthropic donations. King (2015) suggested that the most impactful charities have attributes of financial sustainability, cross subsidization,

entrepreneurial spirit, decentralization, and rigorous measurement. Tevel, Katz, and Brock (2015) noted the need for additional research regarding how strategic decisions affect the financial stability and sustainability of NPOs. Chikoto and Neely (2014) recommended research on additional strategies for the financial stability of NPOs to fill the gap in the existing body of literature. Junior et al. (2014) stressed that nonprofit leaders need to adopt a form of management that develops strategic actions for growth and sustainability. Junior et al. recommended that nonprofit leaders adopt a form of management that enables planning for continuity and generates instruments that can measure financial and nonfinancial performance. With the background of the problem provided, the focus now shifts to the problem statement.

### **Problem Statement**

NPOs without sufficient funding fail to achieve financial stability and fulfill their organizations' missions, oftentimes leading to complete organizational failure (Helmig et al., 2014). Of the 5,341 NPO leaders who responded to a 2015 survey, 53% reported less than a 3-month reserve of funds, 24% operated with a deficit in 2014, and 52% reported that they were unable to meet all client demand for services because of a lack of funding (Castillo, 2016). The general business problem was NPOs lacking sufficient funding fail to meet their organizational objectives. The specific business problem was some NPO executive leaders lack strategies to secure sustainable funding for financial stability.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some NPO executive leaders use to secure sustainable funding for financial stability. The target population consisted of executive leaders of five NPOs in Ohio who had implemented strategies to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability. The implications for social change include the potential for NPO leaders to meet their organization mission, improve the lives of those receiving their services, and improve economic conditions in the communities served.

### **Nature of the Study**

Three research methodologies exist: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Qualitative researchers explore aspects of social phenomena through open discourse, generating thematic data (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). I selected the qualitative method in this study to explore a contemporary phenomenon through open discourse. Quantitative researchers focus on predictions, generalization of findings, and relationships among variables to answer questions of *how much* or *how many* (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Mixed-method researchers use elements of qualitative and quantitative methods (Hussein, 2015). My focus was not on generalization of findings, predictions, or relationships among variables; therefore, neither quantitative nor mixed-method research was suitable for this study.

I considered three research designs: (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, and (c) case study. Phenomenological researchers focus on the meanings of participants' lived

experiences and perceptions (Bevan, 2014). A phenomenological design was not suitable for this study because I did not collect data based on the meanings of participants' lived experiences or perceptions. Business researchers use ethnographic research to understand social influences that affect organizational culture (Jervis & Drake, 2014). I did not focus on organizational culture; therefore, the ethnographic design was not appropriate. Case study researchers take an interpretive approach, often collecting multiple types of data and applying qualitative analysis techniques to provide insights into important concepts (Krishnasamy et al., 2016). A case study is descriptive in nature, suitable for studies in which researchers seek to conduct an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon in a bounded, contextual setting (Shekhar Singh, 2014). A case study design was an appropriate choice for use in this study because I collected multiple types of data from sources to conduct an in-depth and detailed exploration of phenomenon within a real world, contextual setting.

### **Research Question**

What strategies do some NPO executive leaders use to secure sustainable funding for financial stability?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What successful strategies do you use to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability?
2. How do you use the strategies to secure private funding from local community members to achieve financial stability?

3. What strategies do you use to secure philanthropic endowment funding to achieve financial stability?
4. How do you secure local government funding that helps you achieve financial stability?
5. How do you secure state or federal government annual appropriation funding to facilitate achieving financial stability?
6. What strategies do you use to secure grant monies?
7. What strategies to secure sustainable funding to achieving financial stability were most effective?
8. How do you convince donors to provide ongoing, year-after-year funding?
9. What other sources of funding have helped provide financial stability?
10. What other information can you offer to help understand the strategies and processes you employ to obtain sustainable funding that result in financial stability?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The balanced scorecard (BSC) model, developed by Kaplan and Norton (1992), is a model for strategic evaluation and, more specifically, is a performance measurement and management system for balancing short- and long-term financial and nonfinancial measures (Hansen & Schaltegger, 2016). Arnaboldi, Lapsley, and Steccolini (2015) discussed the benefits of using the BSC as a guiding principle to maximize the benefits and impacts that innovation and knowledge management deliver to an organization's



innovation strategy. The BSC was the conceptual framework for this study. The key elements leaders focus on when using the BSC model are: (a) vision; (b) strategy; (c) financial perspective; (c) customer perspective; (d) internal business process perspective; (e) and innovation, learning, and growth perspective (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). Leaders use the BSC model to achieve an integrated and balanced means of measuring organizational performance and as a comprehensive basis for linking corporate financial planning and strategic planning (Arnaboldi et al., 2015). The BSC model is also a tool used by leaders to measure progress in discrete areas of management throughout an organization (Sorooshian, Aziz, Ahmad, Jubidin, & Mustapha, 2016).

The BSC has achieved widespread interest in the public sector (Arnaboldi et al., 2015). Kobelsky, Larosiliere, and Plummer (2014) surmised that NPO leaders use the BSC for performance measurement because their measure of organizational effectiveness extends beyond profitability. The BSC model aligned with the purpose of this study because understanding and aligning the linkages between strategy management, organizational objectives, and assessment of organizational performance is critical to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Balanced scorecard (BSC):* A performance measurement system that enables an organization to define its strategies and objectives over a range of perspectives allowing management to supplement financial measures with a diverse mix of nonfinancial metrics (Elijido-Ten & Yulianda, 2014).

*Financial stability:* A NPO's ability to continue operations if faced with a decrease in resources (Chikoto & Neely, 2014).

*Sustainable funding:* A means for continuous and reliable monetary resources achievable through diverse sources of funding (Chikoto & Neely, 2014).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are realistic expectations of the study assumed true without verification of truth that may offer a fundamental base for developing a theory and research instrument (Heflin, 2015). My assumptions for this study were that NPO leaders' answers to interview questions were open, honest, and complete. Additional assumptions for this study were that the reviewed organization documents were accurate.

#### **Limitations**

Limitations are potential weaknesses that are out of a researcher's control (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer, 2013). Limitations could potentially affect the results of a study. One limitation of this study was the accuracy of interview data collected relied on the experience, knowledge, and opinions of leaders in five NPOs and, therefore, did not reflect the views of the broader population of leaders in nonprofit, community-based organizations. The sample population restricted to five NPOs located in Ohio was also a limitation. Because of the limited scope of the study, limited, if any, transferability of the findings by future researchers exists due to the various organizational structures, governances, and missions. The results based on data from these NPOs are not

confirmable for all organization types and sizes. A final limitation was that I relied on the honesty of participants as well as the accuracy of supporting documentation to identify leaders of five NPOs who implemented successful strategies to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are factors that limit the scope and set the boundaries of the study (Pascucci, 2017). Delimitations result from specific choices made by the researcher. For a qualitative case study, common delimitations are the case study design, small sample size, and geographical isolation (Stewart & Gapp, 2014). The target population of NPO leaders who rely on endowments, charitable gifts, and government grants limited the scope of the study. I was not targeting leaders of NPOs who derive funding from the sale of goods or services. Another delimiting factor was that the sample population was restricted to leaders of five NPOs. The participant inclusion criteria of leaders who successfully implemented strategies to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability in a NPO also limited the scope of this study. Another delimitation was answering the research question required focusing on strategies leaders used to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability; therefore, I did not address other issues that might affect leaders in the nonprofit sector.

### **Significance of the Study**

Multiple NPO leaders evaluate their business practices and strategies for functionality, growth, and long-term survivability (Mataira, Morelli, Matsuoka, &

Uehara-McDonald, 2014). Changes in business practices may result in effective streamlined processes, effective management teams, and organizational financial stability. Executive leaders of NPOs may use the findings of this study to build a strategy of sustainability to secure financial stability and make a positive contribution to the communities they serve.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Executive leaders share the potential to implement strategies and effective business models that foster organizational value, trust, and credibility sought by potential funding sources. Effective leaders of NPOs remain dedicated to fulfilling their organizational missions while seeking additional insights and information to improve business practices (Sanders & McClellan, 2014). From the findings of this study, leaders of NPOs may gain insights to implement effective strategies for improving sustainable funding, expanding funding sources, and retaining existing sources.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications of positive social change include NPO leaders' ability to convey reliable information and provide comprehensive services that improve living and economic conditions in the communities served. Stephan, Patterson, Kelly, and Mair (2016) discussed the growing interest in how NPO leaders can drive positive social change through meeting the needs of clients. NPO leaders may use the findings of this study to improve the lives of those receiving their services through implementing strategies for sustainable funding to meet the mission of the organizations.

### **Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The goal of this qualitative multiple case study was to provide leaders of NPOs with strategies to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability. From the findings of this study, NPO leaders might gain insights into implementing effective strategies for the improvement of sustainable funding, expansion of funding sources, and retention of existing sources. Innovative ideas may be necessary for many organizational leaders to create new business models that rely less on government grants and philanthropic donations. Junior et al. (2014) stressed that nonprofit leaders need to adopt a form of management that enables planning, setting objectives and targets that provide the continuity of its activities, and generating instruments that can measure the financial and nonfinancial performance in order to develop strategic actions for growth and sustainability. Kaplan and Norton's (1992) BSC was the conceptual framework for this study.

I organized this literature review by themed content from in-depth research, analysis, and synthesis. I used articles from scholarly journals, dissertations, and seminal books as resources in this study. Of the 205 sources referenced in this study, 194 were peer-reviewed, scholarly journal articles (or 94.6%) and 187 had publication dates from 2014–2018, with two sources published in 2019, equating to 92% of the sources. Seventy-seven sources were unique to the literature review. I used keywords, such as *nonprofit organizations* or *not-for-profits*, *balanced scorecard*, and combinations of *sustainable funding*, *financial stability*, *financial sustainability*, *business strategies*, and

*successful strategies* as search criteria in Google Scholar. I used similar search criteria in the Walden University Library to search multiple databases, such as Proquest Central, Business Source Complete, Emerald Management, and Taylor and Francis.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some NPO executive leaders use to secure sustainable funding for financial stability. The recommendation of nonprofit advocacy organizations, such as National Council of Nonprofits, is for NPOs to move beyond business models largely reliant on grants and based on a cost-covering philosophy to one that recognizes a need for more than full cost recovery. Some leaders of NPOs may benefit from these findings by a greater understanding of the business implications that enhance organizational capacity and social implications that sustain the organizational mission. The BSC model aligned with the purpose of this study through linking strategy management, organizational objectives, and assessment of organizational performance, which is critical for securing sustainable funding and achieving financial stability.

### **Balanced Scorecard (BSC)**

In this study, I explored strategies leaders of NPOs may use to secure sustainable funding and financial stability. NPO leaders use the BSC to achieve an integrated and aligned balanced focus to measure organizational performance across the four linked perspectives of financial; customer; internal business process; and innovation, learning and growth (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). The BSC is a framework for strategic evaluation

and, more specifically, is a performance measurement and management system used by leaders to balance both short- and long-term financial and nonfinancial measures (Hansen & Schaltegger, 2016).

Martello, Watson, and Fischer (2016) noted that Kaplan and Norton introduced the BSC framework for the purpose of designating, evaluating, and measuring factors that drive an organization's performance. Kaplan and Norton (1998) provided executives with a method of translating a company's strategic objectives into a coherent set of performance measures. When fully deployed, leaders use the BSC to transform strategic planning from an academic exercise into the nerve center of an enterprise (Chen, Yu, & Lin, 2015). Chen et al. (2015) applied BSC to help overcome organizational challenges and achieve new success, while Martello et al. examined the use of the BSC at a NPO with specific outcomes desirable to carry out the strategic plan. Ndevu and Muller (2018) examined the use of the BSC to operationalize performance management in local government. In their study, the BSC was a comprehensive framework for municipality leaders to translate vision and strategy into a coherent and linked series of objectives and performance indicators, not just a collection of critical, financial, or nonfinancial indicators of the BSC's four perspectives (Ndevu & Muller, 2018). Arnaboldi et al. (2015) proposed amending the BSC method to use in open innovation projects by adding a fifth perspective of open innovation and collaboration to communicate a company's intended open innovation strategy. Ndevu and Muller postulated that organizations use BSC to: (a) clarify or update a business's strategy, (b) link strategic objectives to long-

term targets and annual budgets, (c) track key elements of business strategy, (d) incorporate strategic objectives into resource allocation processes, (e) facilitate organizational change, and (f) increase companywide understanding of the corporate vision and strategy. As the context and operating environment of individual organizations vary, the BSC has continued to evolve and branch because of spanning industries, sectors, and even countries (Perkins, Grey, & Remmers, 2014).

### **Supporting Theories**

**Performance management frameworks.** Lee and Nowell (2015) synthesized scholarly literature on performance measurement approaches for the nonprofit sector that integrated Kaplan and Norton's (1992) BSC for nonprofits with other models of NPO effectiveness to present an integrated framework of nonprofit performance. Lee and Nowell's integrated framework served as a benchmark for new and existing performance management systems. Newcomer and Brass (2016) viewed measurement, analytics, and other evaluation related capacities within NPOs as part of an integrated evaluation mission support function. Situating performance measurement and data analytics within the broader field of evaluation was theoretically beneficial to public organizations and NPOs (Newcomer & Brass, 2016). Willems, Boenigk, and Jegers (2014), using the supporting perspective of Newcomer and Brass, pointed out that a one-size fits all solution to measuring nonprofit achievement of goals is unlikely and stated nonprofit performance encompassed four concrete areas of interest: (a) financial performance, (b) stakeholder performance, (c) market performance, and (d) mission performance. Willems



et al.'s empirical perspective on nonprofit effectiveness measurements provided researchers and practitioners a detailed overview of the criteria to consider when measuring nonprofit effectiveness.

NPO leaders may use Lee and Nowell's (2015) integrated framework as a guideline to assess organizational performance regardless of experience in using a performance measurement system. Lee and Nowell leveraged seven core perspectives in conceptualizing NPO performance to develop testable propositions aimed at explaining variation in the adoption of different measurement approaches. Newcomer and Brass (2016) outlined initial steps to develop a strategic and comprehensive approach to using evaluation in public organizations and NPOs. Integrated analysis and synthesis of different perspectives allowed Lee and Nowell to realize the significance of the diverse approaches to conceiving and evaluating nonprofit performance in order to inform, practice, and advance theory. Implementing BSC within the traditional business environments may address issues of organizational-wide performance management by identifying core dimensions of performance within all types of organizations (O'Boyle, 2015). Leaders use the BSC to provide feedback for both internal business processes and external outcomes for improved strategic performance and results (Chen et al., 2015). Perkins et al. (2014) concluded that the BSC could help in effectively managing and providing clearer answers to questions around organizational performance. Leaders must choose the BSC best matched to the needs of their organizations in order to ensure success (Perkins et al., 2014).

**Business-like frameworks.** Kretschmer, Spinler, and Van Wassenhove (2014); Sanders and McClellan (2014); and Svensson and Hambrick (2016) each presented different theoretical frameworks for a NPO to achieve sustainability and financial stability. NPO leaders face an increasing expectation to be more business-like (Sanders & McClellan, 2014). Kretschmer et al. used supply chain theory as a framework to resolve a NPO's feeding program challenge. Although the researchers focused on solving a mission problem versus a business problem, implications for business decision makers existed in that strong leadership resulted in financial stability and accountability. Sanders and McClellan explored alternative ways to understand and practice nonprofit organizing within a business-like framework while remaining firmly grounded in their dedication to mission work. Also addressing business-like elements as a success factor in their multidimensional framework, Svensson and Hambrick addressed the need for NPOs to build upon organizational capacity (i.e., internal human resources, financial, and structural capacities) to accomplish organizational goals and objectives.

Nonprofit organizing, rearticulated within a business-like framework, may lead to potential transformative redefinitions of the business-like imperative that acknowledges rather than suppresses conflicts inherent in the practice of nonprofit organizing (Sanders & McClellan, 2014). Kretschmer et al. (2014) identified cause-effect relationships as drivers for program performance and sustainability, which was a first step for academics and practitioners analyzing the strategic choices in similar humanitarian supply chains. Sanders and McClellan (2014) used stewardship and sustainability as discourse for

discussion about nonprofit organizing that acknowledges and supports tensions between financial imperatives and social mission. Svensson and Hambrick (2016) determined that small NPOs may increase their organizational capacity through leveraging local partnerships and understanding the role and usage of paid versus volunteer staff members. BSC and its derivatives are the most utilized performance management tools in the wider business environment, also adopted by other organizations outside of the for-profit sector (O'Boyle, 2015). Creating a BSC for NPOs has potential limits related to an organization's capacity, or incapacity, to obtain noneconomic support and the ability of top management to correlate its activity with operational levels (Chelariu, Dicu, Mardiros, & Pavaloaia, 2017).

**Sustainability balance scorecard (SBSC).** Some organizational leaders reposition themselves for sustainability. Hansen and Schaltegger (2018) along with Sands, Rae, and Gadenne (2016) furthered research of the BSC to examine the sustainability balanced scorecard (SBSC) that accounts for social and environmental measures. Hansen and Schaltegger differentiated their SBSC to consider ethical environmental issues to study the diversity of proposed SBSC architectures. Sands et al. initiated an in-depth study of a SBSC model and identified direct associations between value creating processes integrated within SBSC's four perspectives.

Neither Hansen and Schaltegger nor Sands et al. considered NPOs in their studies to determine if SBSC is preferred to BSC for a NPO. Hahn and Figge (2018) argued that use of the SBSC focus on for-profit firms and use of BSC to address positive

sustainability outcomes at the overarching societal level was not suitable for profit-oriented organizations. Perkins et al. (2014) attempted to provide a simple taxonomy for the different forms of the BSC through a process of identifying and labeling the major, significant, and minor changes that have occurred throughout the evolution of the BSC. The BSC is a powerful tool that, when applied in an appropriate manner, may have significant benefits for the organization (Perkins et al., 2014).

### **Alternate Theories**

**Transformation leadership.** Leaders use transformational leadership theory to increase an organization's potential to achieve its goals by developing followers to their full potential and increasing their job satisfaction (Freeborough & Patterson, 2016). Posner and Kouzes (1988) defined transformational leadership theory as a set of five observable, learnable practices: challenge familiar organizational processes, inspire a shared vision among employees, enable employees to act in accordance with their vision, model the way for employees to perform, and encourage employees through recognition and celebration of success. Amanchukwu, Stanley, and Ololube (2015) also referred to transformational theory as relationship theory because both focused on the connections formed between leaders and followers. In these theories, leadership is the process by which a person engages with others and is able to create a connection that results in increased motivation and morality in both followers and leaders (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Transformational leaders motivate and inspire people by helping group members see the importance and higher good of the task as well as fulfilling members' individual

potential (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Valero, Jung, and Andrew (2015) perceived nonprofit executives as transformational leaders within organizations having the ability to create stimulating environments where members engage with others and identify shared purposes. Leaders and members can exchange ideas and find solutions to the needs of organizations and the community.

**Resource dependency theory and resource-based view.** Using a theoretical framework of the resource dependency theory and resource-based view theory for analysis, Arik, Clark, and Raffo (2016) explored the impact of using multiple strategies for NPO performance during a time of crisis. Also encompassing resource dependency theory, Gras and Mendoza-Abarca (2014) and MacIndoe and Sullivan (2014) stressed the need for understanding vulnerabilities of NPOs and presented different perspectives to attaining organization sustainability through financial stability. Arik et al. responded to a heightened demand that NPO leaders had for accountability and transparency to compete for government, donor, and investor funding. Arik et al. stated that organizations, including nonprofits, have concerns of insufficient resources to meet the purpose of the organization. Gras and Mendoza-Abarca argued that resource dependent theory provided NPO leaders with a theoretical perspective to engage in market-based income generation to manage dependencies on government grants and private donations as sources of funding. As such, market-based income should stabilize a NPO's flow of financial resources, increasing chances of survival (Gras & Mendoza-Abarca, 2014).

Social and political relations between NPOs and the entities that support them

exist (Sacristán López de los Mozos, Rodríguez Duarte, & Rodríguez Ruiz, 2016). Gras and Mendoza-Abarca (2014) cautioned that NPO leaders embracing resource dependency theory for financial stability might cause a shift of dependence patterns. Meaning, when NPO leaders generate high proportions of market-based income, their dependence shifts to commercial markets and decreases focus on the NPO mission. The importance and concentration of an NPO's resources might determine the degree of dependence (Sacristán López de los Mozos et al., 2016). Likewise, the ability of NPOs to raise their own funds might serve as a measure of independence and autonomous action (Sacristán López de los Mozos et al., 2016). Gras and Mendoza-Abarca concluded that market-based income was beneficial to NPOs at lower levels of use. MacIndoe and Sullivan (2014) examined financial vulnerability, resource dependence, and organizational characteristics and leadership to conceptualize interorganizational collaborations as a possible response to NPO uncertainty. Concluding that financially vulnerable nonprofits are less likely to engage in cross-sector collaborations, MacIndoe and Sullivan provided a cautionary note to public and private funders who urge collaboration to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and fiscal health in the nonprofit sector.

### **Application to Business Practice**

Chikoto and Neely (2014) stressed the necessity for NPO leaders to strengthen their financial capacity and, in the long term, bolster their financial sustainability. Business units customize scorecards to fit their mission, strategy, technology, and culture (Kaplan & Norton, 1998). The key elements some business leaders focus on to use the

BSC framework are: (a) vision; (b) strategy; (c) financial perspective; (c) customer perspective; (d) internal business process perspective; (e) and innovation, learning, and growth perspective (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). The information from the four perspectives provided balance between external measures such as operating income and internal measures such as new program development (Kaplan & Norton, 1998).

**Vision.** Ghasabeh, Reaiche, and Soosay (2015) viewed leaders of change as facilitators for the generation of new ideas and motivating employees to approach organizational challenges with an open mind. Beltrán and Miguel (2014) noted visionary leaders possessed an entrepreneurial spirit with a capacity to identify and grasp opportunities. An entrepreneurial spirit is a way of thinking and denotes behaviors; qualities; and characteristics of independence, leadership, creativity, innovativeness, and a willingness to take calculated risks (Beltrán & Miguel, 2014). Espíritu-Olmos and Sastre-Castillo (2015) referenced entrepreneurial intention as a combination of personal values and personality traits with psychological factors or work values, however personality traits have the greatest influence. Personality traits linked to individuals' entrepreneurial intention are kindness, need for achievement, risk, extroversion, tolerance for ambiguity, and inner control (Espíritu-Olmos & Sastre-Castillo, 2015). Rosenkranz (2016) and Beltrán and Miguel referred to the described entrepreneurial intention as entrepreneurial spirit. Beltrán and Miguel discussed how having an entrepreneurial spirit paved the way for many successful paths for economic recovery of a creative industry in crisis. Rosenkranz credits entrepreneurial spirit for turning journalistic ethics from

normative ends into the means of economic production as severe industry changes posed threats to individual economic subsistence. An entrepreneurial spirit exerts a powerful influence on individuals, teams, and businesses (Cardon, Post, & Forster, 2017). There are benefits to the traditional strategic management process including a clearer sense of strategic vision for the organization, and sharpened focus on what is strategically important (Martello et al., 2016).

**Strategy.** Nonprofit leaders can use the BSC to transform their organization's strategy, set measurable goals, and design a timetable for execution (Chelariu et al., 2017). Leadership development, new approaches to change management, and social entrepreneurship are significant to strategies proposed to achieve sustainability within NPOs (Sacristán López de los Mozos et al., 2016). Rosenbaum, More, and Steane (2017) sought to understand change from the perspective of those within the nonprofit sector and identified a number of characteristics of change management that may be unique to the nonprofit sector. NPOs are not exempt from the benefits of strategies leaders use to change business models for improved performance and financial stability.

Innovation in technology can greatly influence a NPO's business model to improve performance, stability, and competitive positioning. Hu (2014) examined how business models affect technological innovation performance through organizational learning. Spieth, Schneckenberg, and Ricart (2014) formulated the business model relationship with technology in a two-way manner of value creation and value capture to engage customers and influence profitability. However, Tongur and Engwall (2014)



cautioned businesses to the pitfalls of focusing on technological innovation, describing how innovation in technology may present risks to existing technology and the dilemma organizations face by the shift to current business models.

Some organizational leaders rarely consider what else may happen when pushing for positive social change, and may damage stakeholders' trust in an organization (Wilburn & Wilburn, 2016). Wilburn and Wilburn (2016) postulated that the potential risk for some leaders of organizations considering integrating business strategies with emphasis on positive social change, is not considering the surrounding efforts in making the change. Dutot, Bergeron, and Raymond (2014) stated that strategy is the force that mediates between the organization and its environment. Kaplan and Norton (1992) demonstrated how the scorecard helps a company clarify and update strategy, communicate that strategy throughout the company, align unit and individual goals with the strategy, link strategic objectives to long-term targets and annual budgets, and conduct periodic performance reviews to improve the strategy.

**Financial perspective.** The balance of strategic targets generated by the system of strategic planning is important for generating sustainable financial performance (Endrianto, 2016). Similar to implementations of other performance management systems, Perkins et al. (2014) concluded successful BSC implementations might improve measurable performance by improving leaders' ability to manage assets, while reducing costs through an increased understanding of their business operating environment. Endrianto (2016) stipulated NPO strategic objectives for the financial perspective of BSC

as shareholder values, or values for owners of capital in the form of stable financial returns. Martello et al. (2016) described the financial perspective of BSC as a strategy for growth, comparability, and risk viewed from the perspective of the shareholder.

McDonald et al. (2015) used a sustainability classification system to categorize NPOs by the strength or weakness of their financial performance and relative value contributed to society. Strategies discussed for NPO financial stability included revenue enhancing strategies, donation-enhancing strategies, and strategies for cost reduction (McDonald et al., 2015). Mayer, Wang, Egginton, and Flint (2014) found that the impact of a change in diversification depended on composition of a NPO's portfolio and that increasing diversification did not necessarily lower volatility. Wicker, Feiler, and Breuer (2013) did not comment on how diversification affected volatility, but stated the level of revenue diversification differed depending on the type of organizational mission.

**Customer perspective.** The purpose of the BSC in a NPO is putting customers at the top of their strategic maps (Chelariu et al., 2017). Martello et al. (2016) described the customer perspective of BSC as the strategy for creating value and differentiation from the perspective of the customer. Wu and Chen (2014) maintained that an organization's engagement with information technology (IT) innovation must entail a learning process for achieving organizational benefits, including operational excellence, competitive advantage, and internal and external customer relationships. IT value is differential in forms of performance perspective of the BSC across different workflow stages (Wu & Chen, 2014). Crisis prevention and avoidance is a priority for product harm

consideration; however, in the event of services crisis, most studies focus on consumer's perspective and discuss the crises' effect under the domains of consumer behavior, marketing communication, and strategy (Wattegama & Ping, 2015). Acknowledging the entrepreneurial perspective in finding a strategy to manage crises is essential (Wattegama & Ping, 2015). Endrianto (2016) posited that synergy between vision, mission, and strategy, in terms of improving organization performance, is achievable by communicating the BSC from top management down so that all roles within organizations know their respective responsibilities to achieve a common goal.

**Internal business process.** Chen et al. (2014); Mao, Liu, Zhang, and Deng (2016); and Turel and Bart (2014) filled gaps in research and extended the knowledge for drivers to positively impact organizational performance and potential for competitive advantage. Findings of these researchers have practical implications for leaders of NPOs to explore the impact IT resources have on driving organizational performance and competitive advantage. Turel and Bart implied that for NPOs, the level of IT governance exercised by the board could be a means to obtain strategic advantage and superior organizational performance. Chen et al. postulated that IT capability had a positive effect on organizational performance when mediated by business process agility. IT capability helped to shorten the time for responding to change, processing information, and implementing strategies (Chen et al., 2014). Martello et al. (2016) described the internal business process of BSC as the strategic priorities for various business processes that create customer and shareholder satisfaction. Iranzadeh, Nojehdeh, and Emami (2018)

postulated that once leaders have determined the objectives and measurements for the customer and internal business perspectives, they realize a gap between the required skills and capabilities of the employees and the current level of skills and capabilities. Within a short period, leaders also recognize the gap between the required information technology and the present IT level of the organization (Iranzadeh et al., 2018).

**Innovation, learning, and growth.** Martello et al. (2016) described learning and growth as the priorities to create a climate that supports organizational change, innovation, and growth in NPOs. The BSC perspective that closely related to employees is learning and growth (Kaplan & Norton, 1992). Implementing the BSC can help to clarify and simplify tasks to improve the relations between employees and their supervisors, reduce stress factors, and increase staff motivation within the organization (Calderón Molina, Palacios Florencio, Hurtado González, & Galán González, 2016). The BSC may serve as the focal point for an organization's efforts, defining and communicating priorities to managers, employees, investors, and even customers (Kaplan & Norton, 1998). Managers may use BSCs to communicate clear and precise organization objectives, reducing ambiguity and improving employee relations. Implementations of the BSC help employees to work together towards a common goal, improve the organizational climate, and levels of commitment and employee satisfaction (Calderón Molina et al., 2016). Use of the BSC may improve success factors related to employee behavior and motivation, as well as outcomes relevant to both human resources and business management in organizations of any type (Calderón Molina et al., 2016).

The BSC's innovation and growth perspective brings into focus lifelong learning and the need for adapting information technologies to the needs of NPOs (Chelariu et al., 2017). The use of the BSC provides an innovative alternative for many NPO leaders who do not find private sector strategic planning models applicable to their unique planning needs. Use of the BSC may supplement an existing strategic planning model as an option for NPOs seeking the precision of a private sector firm as well as committed to meeting the unique needs of their community-focused organizations (Chelariu et al., 2017).

### **Governance and Stakeholder Relationships**

Chelliah, Boersma, and Klettner (2016) explored what some NPO leaders believe are, crucial governance challenges, and their effects on theory and practice of NPO governance. A common NPO governance challenge is a need to balance different stakeholders' interests (Chelliah et al., 2016). Chelliah et al. surveyed leaders of NPOs involved in governance to demonstrate the distinct internal and external contingencies faced in determining the most effective governance systems. Government is the largest funder for many NPOs, which may greatly affect the governance model of a NPO (Chelliah et al., 2016). Eisenberg (2018) proposed using the BSC to improve corporate governance as well as help improve director competence and director behavior. Many NPOs are historically traditional regarding governance and stakeholder involvement. Jaskyte (2015): and Desai and Yetman's (2015) relationship with NPOs mirrors stakeholder engagement, as defined best in Manetti and Toccafondi's (2014) stakeholder theory. Manetti and Toccafondi investigated the role of stakeholder involvement in

NPOs' sustainability based on stakeholder relationships with NPOs and described stakeholder engagement as a model of mutual responsibility, inclusive of management and governance activities. Understanding governance and stakeholder relationships were relevant to this study in exploring strategies for leaders to achieve NPOs financial stability. Desai and Yetman; as well as Jaskyte emphasized how engagement of governance stakeholder relationships may influence innovation in NPOs, critical to an effective response to changing environmental conditions. An organization's capacity for continuous innovation is reflective of board attributes and process variables (Desai & Yetman, 2015). Jaskyte also acknowledged that literature on topic of board of directors and innovation in NPOs has received increasing attention.

Daub, Scherrer, and Verkuil (2014); Maier, Meyer, and Steinbereithner (2016); and Bucher, Jäger, and Cardoza (2016) contributed to the body of knowledge of NPOs mindfulness to business aspects necessary for organizational sustainability. Mindful nonprofit leaders employ principles and strategic practices that protect the fulfillment of the organizational mission by having access to financial and other resources when faced with the unexpected (Bucher et al., 2016). Daub et al. stressed that stakeholder integration and sustainable leadership must form the foundation before sustainable management could achieve success. Bucher et al. concluded that NPO leaders must practice reluctance in simplifying and relying too heavily on the social or the economic side for organizational sustainability and deal with increasing complexity of context by complementing an original mission orientation with a business orientation. In

complement, Maier et al. provided literature for NPOs to achieve such an orientation. Maier et al. posited that the question central to NPO leaders is whether use of business aspects better serves the public good. Some researchers find conflicts between managers and volunteers, between departments within NPOs, and between NPOs and external stakeholders such as funders or collaborating business enterprises (Maier et al., 2016). Maier et al. aimed to address these challenges through literature focused on causes and effects, and organizational structures and processes of NPOs seeking social-business orientation.

### **Social Innovation, Enterprise, and Entrepreneurship**

Phillips, Lee, Ghobadian, O'Regan, and James (2015) defined social innovation as an interactive process shaped by the collective sharing of knowledge between a wide range of organizations and institutions that influence developments in certain areas to meet a social need or to promote social development. Cajaiba-Santana (2014) argued that idea of social innovation remains to date underdeveloped. Additionally, social innovation was a source of social change but not every process of social change is necessarily a social innovation. Building on the systems of innovation approach, Phillips et al. suggested that social entrepreneurs exist within a social innovation system. In doing so, social innovation systems are reflective of a set of interrelated subsystems that may act independently but, by means of interactive and collective learning, contribute toward addressing social needs and concerns. Shier and Handy (2015) explored the role funding and collaborations had in shaping social innovations and investigated the characteristics

of the direct social service NPOs. Camisón and Villar-López (2014) confirmed that organizational innovation favors the development of technological innovation capabilities. Organizational innovation and technological capabilities for products and processes could result in superior organization performance (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014).

Lisetchi and Brancu (2014) stressed that social entrepreneurship links with innovative activities and services goals of meeting a social need, and predominantly diffused through organizations whose primary purposes are social. Entrepreneurship is integral to business development and not an easy goal to sustain (Haugh & Talwar, 2014). Leutner, Ahmetoglu, Akhtar, and Chamorro-Premuzic (2014) noted that entrepreneurship is a major source of employment, economic growth, and technological progress. The role of an entrepreneur in business development is that of innovator, marketer, and risk taker (Leutner et al., 2014). Cardon et al. (2017) determined that entrepreneurial passion has illuminated essential relationships between the passion of individual entrepreneurs, their entrepreneurial experience, and venture outcomes. No consensus on how to define entrepreneurial success exist; however, Leutner et al. postulated that entrepreneurial success encompassed any behavior that contributes to business, innovation and growth, or social welfare, scholarly stated as corporate entrepreneurship, innovation entrepreneurship, or social entrepreneurship respectively.

Stecker (2014) postulated that the application of social entrepreneurial principles and social enterprise activities could improve the sustainability of nonprofit business



models while bolstering management capacity and enhancing mission. Reilly (2016) explored social enterprises as viable models for funding NPOs. Social enterprises can offer a sense of meaning along with success, allowing social entrepreneurs to be creative in making a social impact, while simultaneously earning a decent living (Stecker, 2014). Ang, Jacob, Lam, and Zhang (2016) supported Stecker in that a for-profit microfinance institution social enterprise approach may be sustainable in its ability to generate financial resources and social good concurrently within a microfinance institution. Ang et al. emphasized that the relationship between financial and social performance varied according to context given that the good in which microfinance institutions achieve is evident in clients' satisfaction.

Since the late 1990s, entrepreneurial finance literature has emphasized the importance of venture capital investors and business angels (Bellavitis, Filatotchev, Kamuriwo, & Vanacker, 2017). Entrepreneurial finance deals with investment and financing decisions that stakeholders might confront in an entrepreneurial venture (Bertoni, Meoli, & Vismara, 2014). Entrepreneurial firms are the mainstay of economies and drivers of economic development and employment yet these firms often need considerable amounts of financial capital to sustain their growth. Entrepreneurship promotes new businesses, creates jobs, and increases economic growth. Bjornskov and Foss (2016) stated that entrepreneurs are the prime movers of progress in creating new jobs and contributing to economic growth.

The importance of venture capital and related forms of financing in fostering new firms has grown tremendously, not only in the United States but also internationally in both developed and emerging economies (Chemmanur & Fulghieri, 2013). Globalization and technological innovation are two important trends that have affected entrepreneurial finance and the venture capital industry (Chemmanur & Fulghieri, 2013). Kumar (2015) noted that the role of venture capital in innovation and creativity is very significant because venture capitalists promote entrepreneurs' innovative and creative business plans by providing seed finance. Although the ability to obtain follow-on funding is emerging, entrepreneurs lack the support that other types of investors may provide (Fraser, Bhaumik, & Wright, 2015).

### **NPO Sustainable Funding**

The three categories for resources of U.S. NPOs are private contributions, government funding, and commercial income (Sacristán López de los Mozos et al., 2016). The relationship between diversification of revenues and fundraising efficiency varies across different sectors or industries. Reliance on a certain funding source that fits with the organizational goals increases fundraising efficiency by reducing non-programmatic expenses (Sacristán López de los Mozos et al., 2016). Organizations, whether nonprofit or for-profit, are in environments of innovation, social responsibility, and constant change. Talpalaru (2014) postulated that NPOs' survival is a multidimensional and evolving cycle, dependent upon the organization's top leadership ability to secure sustainable resources. For a NPO to be efficient, the leader must

incorporate, and secure self-sustaining funding resources in the financial management practices (King, 2017). Carolan and Hale (2016) postulated strengthening leadership skills can impact financial capital as those leaders employ their newly acquired skills to obtain new funds and better manage existing funds. Talpalaru (2014) argued that the visibility of giving both elicits obligatory participation from the public, as well as fulfills a vital function for a segment of postrecessionary corporate capitalism that still demands growth before profit as its primary engine. Finally, Stecker (2014) argued to disrupt the current funding model of the nonprofit sector in order to achieve a greater level of financial sustainability and mission-driven success.

Bruton, Khavul, Siegel, and Wright (2015); Lehner and Nicholls (2014); and Zhao and Lounsbury (2016) discussed different alternatives or approaches to funding entrepreneurial and social ventures and in turn a strategic option for funding NPOs. Bruton et al. discussed all three financing alternatives of microfinancing, crowdfunding, and peer to peer lending. Zhao and Lounsbury focused on how patterns of commercial and public capital flows led to microfinance organizations across developing nations. Zhao and Lounsbury reminded researchers that social ventures needing to balance their social missions and financial performance, tend to double bottom lines, and constantly wrestle between financial and social outcomes. Lehner and Nicholls identified inefficiencies in the social finance market and suggested crowdfunding as an integrated solution to provide new means of funding for social enterprises.

Financing alternatives such as crowdfunding and microfinancing have expanded rapidly (Bruton et al., 2015). Chemmanur and Fulghieri (2013) stated crowdfunding involves raising private funds via the Internet in relatively small amounts from a relatively large number of investors. Microfinance is increasingly being considered as one of the most effective tools of reducing poverty and has a significant role in bridging the gap between the formal financial institutions and the rural poor (Verma & Aggarwal, 2014). By considering legal structures, microfinance institutions may classify as nonprofit, for profit, and mutual benefit organizations (Verma & Aggarwal, 2014).

Mollick (2014) argued that crowdfunding referred to the efforts by entrepreneurial individuals and groups, cultural, social, and for profit, to fund their ventures by drawing on relatively small contributions from a relatively large number of individuals using the Internet, without standard financial intermediaries. Koch and Siering (2015) extended previous research in the field of crowdfunding success factors and provided a comprehensive view on factors influencing crowdfunding success by both focusing on project specific as well as founder specific aspects. Valanciene and Jegeleviciute (2013) postulated that the crowdfunding approach is attractive to entrepreneurs because it not only allows raising capital for small businesses and NPOs, but also serves as a tool for testing marketability. Crowdfunding is an emerging source of funding to connect entrepreneurs to supporters and investors, and a means for ordinary people to invest small amounts (Valanciene & Jegeleviciute, 2013). GoFundMe and YouCaring are two highly marketed examples of donation crowdfunding. Crowdfunding may not ultimately prove

very beneficial to the long-term success of organizations, because such funds may not come with the advice and monitoring that one associates with various forms of venture capital or even angel financing (Chemmanur & Fulghieri, 2013). Thanks to technological innovation, the costs of monitoring investments over long distances decreased by delivering new avenues for investing venture capital, and subsequent monitoring activity (Cumming & Vismara, 2017). Valanciene and Jegeleviciute noted that crowdfunding success is the result of employing social networks and crowdsourcing. Additionally, that as technology advanced, usage of the Internet triggered various social networks, and projects based on crowdsourcing increased (Valanciene & Jegeleviciute, 2013).

Fonseka, Yang, and Tian (2013) emphasized that organizational leaders must have access to financial resources if they are to modernize their operations; therefore, policymakers must continue developing relevant institutions and relaxing regulations to make the market more transparent and reduce costs. Individuals enjoy the possibility to contribute to the ideas they believe in, even if they can invest only small amounts (Valanciene & Jegeleviciute, 2013). Financial resources such as microfinancing and crowdfunding can have positive effects on economies worldwide by creating jobs; and fostering economic recovery and innovations.

### **NPO Financial Stability**

According to Kaplan and Norton (2001), NPO leaders focus on achieving their mission rather than their financial sustainability. AL-Tabbaa, Leach, and March (2014); Desai and Yetman (2015); and Michaelidou, Micevski, and Cadogan (2015) provided

selective perspectives to necessitate strategies for NPOs to achieve financial sustainability. Michaelidou et al. examined the impact NPO brand image had toward shaping consumer's charitable donations and therefore the awareness of consumers' perceptions. Desai and Yetman stressed the importance of an organization's capacity for continuous innovation; and emphasized that considering cultural contexts might be paramount when assessing usefulness of established models. AL-Tabbaa et al. argued that NPO leaders, being strategically proactive to what businesses might offer, could increase the scale of their cross-sector collaborations, and thus enhance sustainability.

Entrepreneurial orientation, organizational effectiveness, and organization performance are significant to some NPO leaders' strategies for financial stability. In the face of increased accountability pressures, NPO leaders continue to search for ways to demonstrate organizational effectiveness (Liket & Maas, 2015). Liket and Maas (2015) noted that academic research in the for-profit, nonprofit, and public sectors attempted to identify relevant organizational and managerial strategies to influence organizational effectiveness. Gamble and Moroz (2014) noted that little known information exists regarding the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance within NPOs; however, postulated that NPO executives who possess a combination of organizational effectiveness, a social mission orientation, and financial sustainability orientation are significant predictors of high growth organizational performance. Tevel et al. (2015) determined that criteria for organizational effectiveness and organizational

performance were similar to criteria for validity and determining the Tuckman and Chang model as the best predictor of financial vulnerability for NPOs.

### **Transition**

In Section 1, I provided the details for the foundation of this study. I outlined a qualitative case study to explore strategies that address a specific business problem for executives of NPOs. Section 1 included the background for the study, the purpose, the nature of the study, a conceptual framework, the research question, interview questions, and the significance of the study for business and social implications.

In Section 2, I provide a lens to understanding the criteria and processes for conducting this case study. In Section 2, I outline the proposal details for the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethics, and data collection and design techniques. I conclude Section 2 by highlighting the reliability and validity of this case study.

In Section 3, I present the findings from the case study. Section 3 also contains suggested applications to professional practice, implications for social change, and my reflections and recommendations for further research. Section 3 ends this study with my conclusion and final message to the reader.

## Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I outlined the details of this study. The study details include the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethics, and data collection and design techniques. I concluded Section 2 by highlighting the means to ensure the dependability of the data as well as the credibility of the findings.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some NPOs executive leaders use to secure sustainable funding for financial stability. The target population consisted of executive leaders of five NPOs in Ohio who had implemented strategies to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability. The implications for social change include the potential for NPO leaders to meet their organization mission, improve the lives of those receiving their services, and improve economic conditions in the communities served.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the qualitative researcher is that of the primary data collection instrument for exploring aspects of social phenomena through open discourse to generate thematic data (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). As the primary data collection instrument for this qualitative case study, I collected data from multiple sources to gather in-depth and detailed knowledge of strategies implemented by NPO executive leaders for assurance of sustainability and financial stability. An important principle to data collection efforts in conducting case study research is to use multiple sources of evidence



converging on the same findings (Yin, 2018). I used case study analysis and collected and analyzed data from multiple sources, including semistructured interviews, member checking, and review of company documents relevant to the study, to verify the accuracy of participants' responses. Multiple cases add confidence to findings and strengthen the quality, dependability, and credibility of case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Shekhar Singh, 2014; Yin, 2018).

I am on the board of two NPOs and provide technical consulting to a third NPO. My personal lens of community-based and social service NPOs led me to this topic of research perplexed by business models with over 90% of funding dependent on government drawdowns and private donations. Fusch and Ness (2015) stressed the importance of researchers recognizing their own personal role in the study and mitigating concerns during data collection. The better a researcher is able to recognize their personal view of the world and discern the presence of a personal lens, the better they are able to hear and interpret the behavior and reflections of others (Dibley, 2011; Fields & Kafai, 2009; Fusch & Ness, 2015). I avoided researching through a personal lens by using an interview protocol and active listening to hear and understand perspectives of participants, then representing their perspectives in the data collected.

*The Belmont Report* is a statement of ethical principles that guides the resolution of ethical problems arising from the conduct of research involving human subjects (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Human Research Protections, 1979). *The Belmont Report* was a preliminary, protective ethical framework with three principles

suggesting that respect for persons should be the guiding principle behind informed consent, beneficence should underlie risk benefit analyses, and justice should be the central principle behind subject selection (Friesen, Kearns, Redman, & Caplan, 2017). I adhered to these principles when collecting data for my research by treating all participants with respect, being truthful and courteous, protecting them from risk, and ensuring fairness.

I considered personal and professional biases throughout the research process. Fusch and Ness (2015) stated that researchers operate between the cultural world of the study participants and the world of the researcher's own perspective. My worldview closely aligned with the social constructivist worldview as described by Svensson and Hambrick (2016). Social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work (Svensson & Hambrick, 2016). Reflexivity is a strategy of critical self-reflection to make researchers more self-aware to monitor and attempt to control their biases (Johnson & Schoonenboom, 2016). Similar to elements of my personal worldview, constructivist researchers often address the processes of interaction among individuals and focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand (see Svensson & Hambrick). As researcher, I relied as much as possible on the participants' views of the phenomenon under study. Researchers use open-ended questions to solicit the most data from participants during the interviewing process (Svensson & Hambrick).

An interview protocol is a guide designed for the researcher to collect relevant information using open-ended questions to highlight new data (O’Keeffe, Buytaert, Mijic, Brozović, & Sinha, 2016). The interview protocol allows interviewees to shape the interview with their own understandings, the interests of the researcher, and any unexpected themes that emerge (O’Keeffe et al., 2016). The interview protocol has two important components: (a) your introduction as interviewer to establish rapport with the interviewee, explain the background to the study, and communicate confidentiality of the data; and (b) the interview questions (Pandey & Chawla, 2016).

In addition to using interviewing techniques, such as asking open-ended questions, the interview protocol extends to the procedural level of interviewing. The interview protocol includes a script of what you will say before the interview, script for what you will say at the conclusion of the interview, prompts for the interviewer to collect informed consent, and prompts to remind the interviewer the information that she or he is interested in collecting (O’Keeffe et al., 2016; Pandey & Chawla, 2016). Kearns, Bell, Deem, and McShane (2014) emphasized that innovative interview protocols become not only a set of questions but also a procedural guide to uncover underlying assumptions and beliefs about resource management and strategy in NPOs. I used an interview protocol for procedural guidance throughout each interview with participant (see Appendix A). I also used an interview protocol to assure consistency in the interview process and as a prompt for the information necessary and relevant to my topic of study as expressed through the lens of the participant.

## **Participants**

In order to respond to changes in the marketplace of NPOs, executive directors need to be innovative and adaptive when adjusting to their diverse funding sources, changing needs and services for the clients, and increased governmental accountability (Taylor, Cornelius, & Colvin, 2014). The research question for my study was what strategies do some executive leaders of NPOs use to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability? Criteria for participant eligibility were (a) to be an executive leader of a NPO in Ohio and (b) to have implemented successful strategies to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability. Taylor et al. (2014) perceived nonprofit executives as effective leaders of their agencies, employing transformational leadership skills as well as transactional skills to produce results.

The target population consisted of executive leaders of five NPOs in Ohio who had implemented strategies to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability. These executive leaders typically hold a title of executive director, director, or chief executive officer. The criteria for participation was to be the targeted population involved with strategic planning and implementing strategies that secured sustainable funding to achieve financial stability. I relied on professional networks of NPO leaders and Guidestar.org data to gain access to potential participants that met these criteria based on filings of IRS Form 990 for the state of Ohio. In determining participants that aligned with the research question, I made contact via telephone calls and e-mails, as referenced

in the interview protocol (see Appendix A), to introduce myself and the study, allowing me to establish basic rapport and determine their interest in participation.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) noted the three research methods as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method. Use of qualitative methodology can be helpful in ruling out alternative explanations and enabling stronger causal inferences (Yin, 2018). The use of qualitative research was appropriate for this study because I explored a contemporary phenomenon through open discourse. Qualitative research is appropriate for capturing people's views, feelings, and practice as well as their experience and the kind of atmosphere and context in which they act and respond (Warwick-Booth, 2013). Chelliah et al. (2016) used the qualitative approach to explore what NPO leaders believed were key governance challenges and their effects on theory and practice of NPO governance. The qualitative method was most appropriate for this study since the purpose was to explore the phenomenon that NPO executive leaders lack strategies for sustainability to achieve financial stability. Qualitative research is often descriptive in nature and deemed highly suitable for studies in which the researcher aims at investigating specific issues in depth and detail (Shekhar Singh, 2014).

Researchers using quantitative and qualitative methods pose different views of the phenomenon under study. Quantitative researchers focus on predictions, generalization of findings, and relationships among variables to answer questions of *how much* or *how*

*many* (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). In a quantitative methodological study, the researcher develops hypotheses, collects numeric data, and subjects the data to statistical analysis to test hypotheses (Jervis & Drake, 2014).

Mixed methodology is a theory-driven model framing the integration of the qualitative and quantitative components (Hussein, 2015; Lisle, 2013). Researchers may utilize mixed methods to investigate the characteristics of interorganizational context that are particularly supportive of social change efforts (Shier & Handy, 2015). My focus was not on the generalization of findings, predictions, or relationships among variables; therefore, neither quantitative nor mixed-method research was suitable for this study.

### **Research Design**

Shekhar Singh (2014) outlined four approaches to qualitative inquiry: narrative research, phenomenological research, ethnographic research, and case study research, and I considered each of these qualitative designs for use in this study.. I used in-depth interview data to explore strategies for NPO executive leaders to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability. Much of case study analysis depends on a researcher's own style of rigorous empirical thinking, along with the sufficient presentation of evidence and careful consideration of alternative interpretations (Yin, 2018).

As a strategic qualitative research methodology, case study may be useful in answering exploratory and supportive questions posed. Case study researchers take an interpretive approach, often collecting data using flexible methods and applying

qualitative analysis techniques to provide insights into important concepts (Krishnasamy et al., 2016). A case study design was the most suitable choice for this study because I collected data from multiple sources to conduct an in-depth and detailed exploration of phenomena.

Phenomenological researchers focus on a person's lived experiences and perceptions (Bevan, 2014). Many of the phenomena this approach tackles include attitudes, beliefs, opinions, feelings, and the like (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). An assumption of phenomenology is that the researcher is a part of the experience under study and the researcher's values play a role in the research (Grossoehme, 2014). A phenomenological design was not suitable for this study because I did not collect data based on the participants' lived experiences or perceptions.

Business researchers use ethnographic research to understand social factors that affect organizational culture (Jervis & Drake, 2014). Ethnographical researchers seek to understand the lived experiences of an individual from their perspective and present a given group's conceptual world, seen and experienced from the inside (Grossoehme, 2014). As a research design, ethnography is passive and involves observation of behaviors in natural settings, while the observed is unaware that they are being watched (Jervis & Drake, 2014). I did not focus on organizational culture, participants' personal experiences, or nonconsensual observations of behaviors because these elements of ethnographic design would not provide in-depth and detailed exploration of phenomena.

Narrative inquirers collect data based on the life stories of participants (Lewis, 2015). Narrative inquiry researchers view participants as storytellers, and their stories as primary source of data for determining meaning and aiding understanding of life experiences (Bruner et al., 2017). Narrative as a method is an interpretive approach of sharing individual experiences and beliefs that facilitates knowledge and generates human responses (Sahni & Sinha, 2016). A narrative inquiry was not a suitable design because I did not collect data regarding the life stories of participants because I was seeking data regarding the strategies NPO leader use, not their life stories.

### **Data Saturation**

Saturation is the point at which no new relevant information is forthcoming, even if more people are interviewed (Galvin, 2015). Common features among data analysis procedures are coding, developing themes, and providing a visual diagram of the data. Data saturation has been reached if responses indicate no new data, no new themes, and no new coding and there is enough information to replicate the study (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014; Fusch & Ness, 2015; van Rijnsoever, 2017).

To attain data saturation, I structured my interview questions to facilitate asking multiple participants the same questions and ensured that I was asking an appropriate quantity and quality of questions to gain enough information to replicate the study. Researchers who design a qualitative research study seek to achieve data saturation. Specifically, when interviewing study participants, researchers remain concerned about how many people to interview and how to be confident that no more important ideas will



emerge from additional data collection efforts (Cleary et al., 2014; Fusch & Ness, 2015; van Rijnsoever, 2017). If the researcher obtains new information in final interview, he or she should conduct additional interviews until achieving data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Additionally, some researchers may use a saturation grid of major topics as a measure for achieving data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I also utilized a saturation grid to discover themes from interviews conducted and to be confident of achieving data saturation.

## **Population and Sampling**

### **Sampling Method**

The researcher sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information needed to answer the research question by virtue of knowledge or experience (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Purposeful sampling is an in-depth search for participants who are information rich in the purpose of the research (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling is the deliberate choice of participants based on the qualities possessed by the participant matched with the criteria for participation set forth by the researcher (Grossoehme, 2014). I used purposeful sampling in this study to draw participants from the population of NPO executive leaders in Ohio with qualities that align with the research question and that meet the criteria for participation.

### **Population**

The population and sample for this multiple case study consisted of five executive leaders of NPOs in Ohio who have implemented strategies to secure sustainable funding

to achieve financial stability. After obtaining informed consent, I conducted semistructured interviews with five NPO leaders in Ohio meeting the criteria for participation in this study. Informed consent is written or oral, and witnessed consent provided freely by the participant (Harriss & Atkinson, 2015).

### **Sample Size**

With informed consent, I interviewed a sample of five executive leaders from five NPOs in Ohio who have implemented strategies to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability. Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2016) proposed the concept *information power* to justify sample size for a qualitative study. Information power indicates that the more information the sample holds, relevant for the actual study, the lower amount of participants is needed (Malterud et al., 2016). Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) suggested three methods to justify sample size of interviews in qualitative research: (a) cite recommendations by qualitative methodologists, (b) act on precedent by citing sample sizes used in studies with similar research problems and designs, and (c) statistical demonstration of saturation within a data set. Tran, Porcher, Falissard, and Ravaud (2016) stated that target sample size is generally determined according to studies with similar subject of interest, empirical recommendations, and researcher's experience. Greenwell (2017) conducted qualitative case study research for sustaining financial stability within an Ohio university, using a sample size of four participants. Holland (2017) conducted a multiple case study with three NPO leaders seeking committed, large donors. Williams (2017) studied the phenomenon of motivating

volunteer workforce within a Midwest NPO using three participants as the sample size. Because my study has similarities to the research conducted by Greenwell, Holland, and Williams, five participants was the appropriate sample size for this study.

### **Interview Setting**

I conducted interviews in a private meeting room at the participants' place of business. The onsite meeting room was free from noise and interruptions. Dikko (2016) suggested that face-to-face interviews be in a location most comfortable to the participant as long as the location is quiet, with minimal noise and distractions for the estimated time set aside for the interview.

### **Data Saturation**

Data saturation is difficult to define because study designs are not universal (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Purposeful sampling may ensure data saturation by interviewing individuals that one may not normally consider, and by asking an appropriate quantity and quality of questions to gain enough information to replicate the study. In completing the five interviews, I reached data saturation and justified the sample size of five participants.

### **Ethical Research**

Researchers face ethical challenges throughout all stages of the study. Clear protocols will be in place so that parties involved in research can use them if necessary. Researchers use the informed consent form to clearly and precisely describe steps taken to ensure the protection that people who participate in research from physical, emotional,

or financial harm (Bernard, 2017). These steps include confidentiality, informed consent, and researchers' potential influence on the participants and vice versa (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). Blake et al. (2015) noted that for Skype, face-to-face, and online interviews, researchers obtain informed consent by online, e-mail, or posted forms. Upon approval of the Walden University Institutional Review Board, I contacted participants to obtain informed consent. I e-mailed each participant a copy of the informed consent form 5 days in advance of the scheduled interview. The participants replied to the e-mail with *I consent* just prior to the start of the interview. If necessary, participants could withdraw from the study at any time and by any form of communication provided by me. In appreciation for participation, each participant received a copy of the completed study; however, no other form of compensation applied.

Whether a given action is ethical rests not only with its consequences, but also with whether the action itself is good. Telling the truth, keeping promises, being fair, and respecting others are inherently good and reflective of the principles of *The Belmont Report* (Bromley, Mikesell, Jones, & Khodyakov, 2015). As researcher, I adhered to principles of *The Belmont Report* by treating all participants with respect, be truthful and courteous, protective from risk, and ensure fairness. I will maintain data in a safe place for 5 years to protect rights of participants. For secure data storage, electronic files will be password protected and physical files locked in my home office. A number of processes may be useful when dealing with a small sample, such as using pseudonyms or

codes, providing the participants with sovereignty over their data, and intentionally concealing information that may compromise their identities in the research report (Petrova, Dewing, & Camilleri, 2014). I removed all identifiers to protect the confidentiality of participants by coding the names of the participants as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5. I also withheld demographic details and site descriptions that might permit a reader to deduce the identity of a participant. The Walden University Institutional Review Board approval number for this study was 11-16-18-0646208.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

As the primary data collection instrument for this qualitative case study, I collected data from multiple sources to gather in-depth and detailed knowledge of strategies implemented by executive leaders of NPOs to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability. Data collection is a series of interrelated activities designed to gather information in order to answer emerging research questions (Lewis, 2015). Evidentiary sources for case study research are participant observation and physical artifacts, direct observations, interviews, and documentation, archival records (Yazan, 2015). Interviews are targeted, insightful, and highly efficient means by which to collect rich, empirical data (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014).

### **Semistructured Interviews**

Researchers use semistructured interviews as a flexible medium of communicating freely with respondents about the topics of interest in the study (Anyan, 2013). Conducting individual semistructured interviews with the participating board of

directors, the executive director, and primary benefactors of the organization provides an opportunity to gain a level of intimacy and depth (Aulgur, 2016). I conducted semistructured interviews with executive leaders of five NPOs in Ohio that met the criteria for participation in this study. Participants who meet or exceed specific criteria possess greater knowledge of the phenomenon of interest by virtue of their experiences (Palinkas et al., 2015). Researchers should collect data in the same way, with the same tools used, the same format and introductions used in interviews, and the same format applied to documents (Cronin, 2014). I followed an interview protocol to ensure consistency of the data collection process (see Appendix A). I used in-person meetings with each participant to gain consent to conduct an audio recorded interview and set actual interview locations or video conference medium. I began scheduled interviews with rapport and gratitude, and the reassurance to take no more than 60-minutes of the participants' time. I restated the purpose of my study in the form of a question to introduce my research and begin data collection with the first interview question. In addition to the stated interview questions, I probed with follow-up questions for more in-depth responses. I closed the interview by thanking my participant and scheduling an appointment for member checking.

### **Documentation Review**

Documents are useful for tracing the history of the organizations and statements made by key people in the organizations, as well as in counteracting the biases of respondents (Shekhar Singh, 2014). I obtained organization documentation that included

strategic plans for fundraising, succession, a business model, and success measures for strategies. I obtained organization documents that are distinctive and capable of providing substantive information that can be themed and coded. This documentation is evidentiary for their successful strategies to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability. Access to organization documents is subject to permissions granted from participants providing informed consent.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking is a means for research participants to provide feedback on the accuracy of the interpreted interview data (Widodo, 2014). During the 30-minute appointment for member checking, I provided the participant with a one- to two-page summarized interpretation of the transcript. I allowed participants to review the summary and confirm if I interpreted their responses correctly. Finally, I asked what other information they can add. Data or results returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences is a technique of member checking for exploring the credibility of results (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). I used recorded interviews to ensure accuracy of the transcription and creating an interpreted summary of the interview data.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Four techniques of collecting data include (a) participating in the environment, (b) direct observation, (c) in-depth interviews, or (d) analyzing documents (Yazan, 2015). Researchers conducting a case study often integrate both semistructured interviews and

document analysis (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). I conducted face-to-face, semistructured interviews and collected evidentiary documentation for analysis as a second source of data collection. I exercised informed consent to record interviews with a digital recorder for transcription using the Dragon dictation application. I took notes throughout my data collection meeting. I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure consistency in asking all interview questions that support the research question of this study. During the interview process, I watched for nonverbal cues and paraphrase when necessary. Following each interview question, I asked probing questions to get more in-depth rich data. My final interview question asked what other information the participants can offer to help understand the strategies and processes employed to obtain sustainable funding that result in financial stability. I concluded each interview by thanking the participants for their time. I scheduled a 30-minute appointment for member checking after transcribing, coding, and analyzing the interview data. I reviewed documentation, obtained prior to the date of interview, with participant for accuracy and relevance. Sources of evidentiary documentation for data collection may include reviewing board meeting agendas, annual reports, and strategic plans prior to conducting the interviews to generate implicit workings of an organization's operations (Jeter, 2017).

Although semistructured interviews combined with other data collection instruments is plausible, structured questionnaires, participant observation, or analysis of the literature are not techniques for rich data derived from semistructured interviews (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Doody and Noonan (2013) pointed out that one drawback to



semistructured interviews is that novice researchers are often unable to identify where to ask prompt questions or probe responses, so some relevant data may not be gathered. My use of the interview protocol mitigated this drawback.

The purpose of conducting a pilot study is to check the feasibility of conducting a large-scale study or to make a predetermination of a specific data collection instrument. Doody and Doody (2015) defined a pilot study as a small-scale version of a planned study conducted with a small group of participants similar to those recruited later for the larger scale. Pilot studies are miniature versions of the main study (O’Cathain et al., 2015). My research was a case study limited by scope, NPOs in Ohio, and a sample size of five. For this reason, a researcher conducting a case study seldom needs to perform a pilot study.

Researchers use the member checking follow up interview to help reach data saturation through obtaining in-depth information and enhance the academic rigor (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Member checking is a process researchers use to improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of the information resulting from the qualitative data analysis, and to reach research closure (de Souza Santos, da Silva, & de Magalhaes, 2017). I used the 30-minute member checking follow up interviews as a source for triangulation to ensure data saturation, and enhance the reliability and credibility of the data collection process. If during member checking, a participant reveals a contradiction between participant and researcher interpretations, the researcher must modify his or her analyses to bring them in line with the participant’s analyses or pragmatically reach a point at

which participants agree that the reconstructions are fair even if they are not in complete agreement (Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017). If a participant revealed a contradiction with my interpretations, I modified my analyses to align with the participant's analyses or pragmatically reach a point at which the participant agrees that the postulates are fair even if they are not in complete agreement.

### **Data Organization Techniques**

Researchers conducting a qualitative method study must use a systematic process to organize data in preparation for data analysis (Vaughn & Turner, 2016). Transcribing verbal data is a useful starting point for data organization and analysis (Widodo, 2014). Qualitative researchers should assume the responsibility of exhibiting transferability in research through data and analysis (El Hussein, Jakubec, & Osuji, 2016). I created Microsoft (MS) Word and Excel files to categorize and label the transcribed data based on the topic of each interview question. I organized the data by using codes to identify themes for data analysis and interpretation. I maintained a research log and a reflective journal for notes taken during the interviews. I maintained an audit trail that a future researcher could follow.

Researchers use computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to allow for quick and easy retrieval of data and provide a comprehensive approach to data management (Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, & Casey, 2015). NVivo, MAXQDA, and Atlas.ti are computer assisted qualitative data analysis software researchers use for analysis of data gathered through interviews, focus groups, documents, field notes, and

open-ended survey questions (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). I used NVivo 12 for organization and storage of data collected for analysis. I secured electronic data collected for this study with password-protected storage in Google cloud technology, and data on a USB flash drive as well as paper documents. All data collected for this study will be stored securely for 5 years in a locked, fireproof file cabinet in my home office, after which I will delete all electronic files and mechanically shred all paper files.

### **Data Analysis**

No systematic rules exist for analyzing qualitative data (Houghton et al., 2015). Researchers use methodological triangulation to ensure the dependability of the analyzed data (Heale & Forbes, 2013). I used methodological triangulation to compare the interview data with the documentation data to ensure the dependability of the data. Heale and Forbes (2013) noted that the researcher must include two or more sets of data collection using qualitative data sources to achieve triangulation. I used pattern matching for the emerging themes, item classification and coding, and NVivo 12 software during data analysis. Yin's (2018) five-step data analysis process is to compile the data, disassemble the data, reassemble the data, interpret the meaning of the data, and conclude the data. After subjecting the data to methodological triangulation, I used Yin's five-step process to analyze the data for emergent themes and patterns.

### **Compiling Data**

Data compilation includes rereading the transcribed notes repeatedly to refresh ones' memory about the field interviews and the focus group discussions (Durodola,

Fusch, & Tippins, 2017). Transcription is a way to reconstruct talking data created by the collaborative dialogue between participants and researcher (Widodo, 2014). I transcribed recorded interviews to unformatted text using the NVivo Transcription application, then copy text to a MS Word document to edit to a narrative format between each interviewee and myself. I organized my data by interview question and arrange interviewees' responses accordingly. I compiled the responses to follow-up questions, written notes taken during the interview, and interpretations of the responses grouped by each interview question. Mayer (2015) suggested that the researcher collect and underline relevant information by taking notes and identifying crucial information as well as specifying missing information and data.

### **Disassembling Data**

Researchers divide compiled textual data into smaller fragments and assign labels to each fragment to disassemble the data (Durodola et al., 2017). I divided the compiled data for each interview question, into smaller fragments with responses from each participant. Researchers frequently use coding to disassemble by taking data apart and creating meaningful groupings (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Similarly, Arantes do Amaral and Hess (2018) described that researchers disassemble data by grouping fragments of sentences into themes, or groups of sentences with similar meaning. I assigned each interview question (Q1–Q10) with an abbreviated label. Additionally, I used the highlighter feature in MS Word to assign each participant a color and color code responses for each question.

### **Reassembling Data**

During reassembly, researchers take care to tell the story of the data and not arrange the data to support the researchers' theory (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I reassembled data by grouping responses to each interview question from each participant as responses. I grouped responses to follow up questions as subcategories for each interview question. Reassembly of the data entails the use of substantive themes to combine fragmented items into different groups such that the new formation was different from the original note (Durodola et al., 2017). Mayer (2015) stated that researchers also reassemble data by means of graphs, charts, or different forms of diagrams to provide information about the status of the research and to build the basis for further research.

### **Interpreting Data**

Yin (2015) explained that there is no checklist to constitute good interpretation. Interpreting data is a review of reassembled data to bring out salient points and look for a close alliance of the data with the research questions (Durodola et al., 2017). I used coded data to identify parallels in questions and responses between interviewees. I used the colors of highlighted questions and coded interviewee responses to look for commonalities and differences of themes for interpreting data. I also used these themes to link key ideas to recent literature and key elements of the BSC framework. The researcher communicates a summary of the themes that emerge and requests feedback or

member check from the participants (Cope, 2014). Data analysis is the basis for interpretation of the data and finally for the generation of new knowledge (Mayer, 2015).

### **Key Themes**

Coding along themes and topics can help to highlight priorities and provide focus to the process of analyzing qualitative data (Vaughn & Turner, 2016). I analyzed the interview data to identify key themes through pattern analysis. I also looked for similar themes to emerge while coding participants' interviews using NVivo 12. In reporting qualitative research, researchers demonstrate confirmability by providing rich quotes from the participants that depict each emerging theme (Cope, 2014). Themes that highlight emerging situations may overrule the knowledge of a person making a decision (Durodola et al., 2017). I compared key theme findings of participants as well from NVivo 12 with themes identified during pattern analysis to confirm or refute ideas from recent literature. Where I found inconsistencies, I sought clarification from participants. Inconsistencies typically stem from miscommunication or differences in the interpretation of questions (Chang, Seetoo, Yu, & Cheng, 2015).

### **Software Plan**

Low, Chien, Lam, and Wong (2017) used data analysis software to code, organize, and manage the data to facilitate data interpretations. Data analysis software are tools that provide technological support to qualitative researchers to streamline the data analysis process and allow for more complex, deeper analysis of the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I used NVivo 12 data analysis software to code, organize and manage the

data and facilitate data interpretations for this study. I gathered data through semistructured interviews with open-ended questions, field notes, and other approved organizational documents. Zamawe (2015) credited NVivo with advantages for researchers to manage data and ideas, query data, and reporting. A new researcher may benefit from NVivo 12's updated user interface and start screen, and new auto-coding functions, including coding for themes, sentiments, and patterns. Researchers use NVivo 12 to group subcategories according to word similarities in codified references using cluster analysis (Saura, Muñoz Moreno, Luengo Navas, & Martos Ortega, 2017).

### **Reliability and Validity**

Research reliability and validity are vital to a successful research study given that the nature of the study, conduct of interviews, analysis of interview transcripts and research notes are subjective in nature (Kong, 2015). Quantitative researchers seek reliability and validity, while qualitative researchers strive for dependability, credibility, confirmability, and trustworthiness of the findings (Cope, 2014). Trustworthiness relates to the degree of trust, or confidence, readers have in the results of a study (Cypress, 2017). When establishing trustworthiness of data and rigor, researchers take steps to confirm that the findings accurately reflect the experiences and perceptions of participants rather than the viewpoints of researchers (Cypress, 2015). Lincoln and Guba (1985) established credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability as benchmark criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research.

**Dependability**

Cope (2014) specified dependability as one of the four criteria used to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research. Dependability refers to constancy of the data over similar conditions (Cope, 2014). Strategies of an audit trail, a code-recode strategy, stepwise replication, triangulation and peer examination or iterator comparisons, may establish dependability (Anney, 2014). Researchers must keep track of coding decisions, and use memos to track changes in the development because recoding and relabeling are often necessary during the process (Bengtsson, 2016). I used audit trails, coding and recoding, as well as replication in my data collection and analysis to establish dependability. I detailed the steps of the data collection process so that other researchers may apply the process to achieve similar results. I also used methodological triangulation to compare the interview data with documentation data to ensure dependable data. Dependability is to qualitative research as reliability is to quantitative research (Bengtsson, 2016).

**Credibility**

Credibility, similar to internal validity in quantitative research, refers to the overall believability of a study or the degree to which research outcomes seem accurate based on the research process (Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk-Jenkins, 2016). Prion and Adamson (2014) defined credibility as the truthfulness of the data and its subsequent interpretation. Methods used to ensure credibility include validating the data, validating the results, and confirming the interpretations by asking the participants and other experts



to review the data coding and conclusions about meaning based on those codes (Prion & Adamson, 2014). Sarma (2015) pointed out that overlapping data collection methods, such as interviews and field visits, ensures credibility of findings, which in turn applies to ensuring the dependability of the study. Triangulation of data, through various sources of data collection, is crucial for credibility of qualitative research (Sarma, 2015). I asked probing questions, used member checking, engaged in methodological triangulation, and reached data saturation in my study.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability ensures that the findings and interpretations reflect the views of the participants and not overly persuaded by the researcher's preferences or personal agenda (Tong & Dew, 2016). Hays et al. (2016) conveyed that confirmability relates to the accuracy or genuine reflections and perspectives of participants without the views of researchers interfering with findings. Trustworthiness strategies used to ensure confirmability are prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, reflexivity, rich in-depth description, and member checking (Hays et al., 2016). Researchers ensure trustworthiness and confirmability in qualitative studies by involving multiple investigators in the analysis, member checking with participants, and linking the findings to raw data (Tong & Dew, 2016). Following the example of Mikkonen, Kyngäs, and Kääriäinen (2015), I ensured confirmability by maintaining objectivity when asking questions during an interview and having a nondirective approach when listening to personal experiences. I ensured confirmability by keeping names confidential when

reading and analyzing data, as well as reading through the transcripts repeatedly to categorize data into themes. The final act of ensuring confirmability was member checking the interpretation of the data.

### **Transferability**

Transferability relies on the reasoning that the findings of a study transfer to another case study, setting, or group (Elo et al., 2014). A qualitative study has met transferability when individuals and readers not involved in the study can associate the meaning of the results of the study to meaning with their own experiences (Cope, 2014). Qualitative researchers do not have the responsibility to provide transferability of findings; however, they should assume the responsibility of exhibiting transferability through data and analysis (El Hussein et al., 2016). Following an interview protocol, reaching data saturation in data collection, objective data analysis, and methodological triangulation are my processes to influence transferability. I meticulously documented the research process, striving for dependable data and credible findings so that future researchers can rely on my findings for transferability. Future researchers will determine the transferability of findings in my study.

### **Data Saturation**

Saturation is the point at which no new relevant information is forthcoming from participant interviews (Galvin, 2015). Researchers who design a qualitative research study strive for data saturation. Data saturation is a necessity to enhance the validity of qualitative study results (Fusch & Ness, 2015). When interviewing study participants,

researchers' concerns are how many people to interview, and confidence that no more important ideas will emerge (Cleary et al., 2014; Fusch & Ness, 2015; van Rijnsoever, 2017). If researchers receive new information in the final interview, they should conduct additional interviews until achieving data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

I collected all data relevant to answering the research question for my study. I followed my interview protocol and asked probing questions, engaged in member checking, and used methodological triangulation to reach data saturation. After completing the five interviews, I obtained no new information and reached data saturation with the sample size of five participants.

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I documented the details of the case study. I described the role of the researcher and the guidelines for engaging with and interviewing participants. I provided participants criteria; and population and sampling. I provided details on data collection instruments, techniques, and designs; as well as details for ensuring reliability and validity of the data. In Section 3, I present the findings from the case study, discuss their applications to NPOs and implications for social change, and provide suggestions for future research.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some NPO executive leaders use to secure sustainable funding for financial stability. With multiple sources of data, I used methodological triangulation to ensure data saturation for the accuracy and dependability of findings. Data were collected from organizational documents and interviews with executive leaders of five NPOs in Ohio. The five NPOs varied in mission, size, age of organization, and executive leader's tenure in position. I used member checking with each participant to confirm interview interpretations and credibility to the data collected. Using Yin's (2018) five-step process of data analysis, themes and patterns emerged as indicators of strategies that participants used to secure sustainable funding as well as address the research question of this study.

I linked the findings to Kaplan and Norton's (1992) BSC. Some NPO leaders use the BSC to achieve an integrated and aligned balanced focus to measure organizational performance across the four linked perspectives of financial; customer; internal business process; and innovation, learning and growth (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). The BSC may serve as a model for NPO leaders to execute continuous focus on the NPO's vision and as a communication and performance management tool to minimize barriers to sustainable funding.

The three themes that emerged as key strategies used by participants were sustainable programming, relationship collaboration, and donor commitment. Each of the

five participants in this study agreed that these strategies were imperative to a NPO's funding and financial stability. The findings of this study indicated that executive leaders successfully secured sustainable funding for financial stability by using a (a) sustainable programming strategy as the basis for driving NPO success measures; (b) relationship collaboration strategy to expand the visibility of organizations and develop individual and business partnerships into sustainable funding sources; and (c) donor commitment strategy to increase individual, corporate, and endowment giving.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question for this qualitative multiple case study was: What strategies do some NPO executive leaders use to secure sustainable funding for financial stability? Individuals, corporations, government, and other organizational grants are the traditional funding sources that provide income toward the survivability of NPOs. Although each of the five participants in this study used some of these funding sources, all agreed that sustainable programming, relationship collaboration, and donor commitment were imperative to a NPO's sustainable funding strategy for financial stability.

#### **Theme 1: Sustainable Programming Strategy**

NPO executive leaders depend on a sustainable programming strategy to secure funding resources in support of an organization's mission and vision and to drive organization success factors. Talpalaru (2014) postulated that NPOs' survival is a multidimensional and evolving cycle dependent upon the organization's executive

leaders' ability to secure sustainable resources. Taylor et al. (2014) stressed that executive leaders need to be innovative and adaptive when adjusting to diverse funding sources, changing needs of the organization, and services for the clients.

The participants discussed programming goals inclusive of conscious efforts for opportunities for social impact. NPOs increasingly implement socially responsible programs to address their responsibilities toward society (Zeimers, Anagnostopoulos, Zintz, & Willem, 2019). NPO1 is dedicated to educating, entertaining, and inspiring audiences by presenting performances, school tours, and community programs for adults and children that meet the highest standards of artistic excellence. In P1's opinion, NPO1 sustained funding by meeting the requirements for any nonprofit to survive, which is to be relevant, contributing, and make a difference in people's lives. P1 stated that creating new works gains new audiences to experience the stories of traditional works. NPO1 continues to create programming that tell stories of social impact and create community dialogue and conversation about very charged subjects in ways that may not be able to happen otherwise. I reviewed NPO1's vision document to validate P1's response regarding the focus on inspirational and diversified programming to meet their goals.

NPO2 is the regional humanitarian services division of a global organization that prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies. NPO2 provides disaster relief and prevention program services to armed forces and international services. Resources donated to NPO2 support 27 counties in Ohio and an average of 91 cents of every dollar spent is an investment in the programming of the organization. I reviewed

NPO2's impact report and their regional map to validate P2's response regarding the programs, support, and services provided within its region in pursuit of their mission.

NPO3 leaders recognized that essential programs were missing in the community. P3 led the development of programs dedicated to promoting personal growth; self-expression; and appreciation of the visual, healing, literary, and performing arts. P3 stated that NPO3 has quality programming, a clear vision, and the ability to communicate to people what the organization is doing.

The vision of NPO4 is to help build a community free of the abuse of alcohol, other drugs, and the disease of addiction through sustainable programming for professional and community education, prevention, counseling, and advocacy. NPO4 strives to be their city's leading advocate for recovery with programs that decrease the incidence of alcoholism and other drug dependence and eliminate the stigma associated with alcoholism and other drug dependence. NPO4 provides services and support to people effected by alcoholism and other drug dependence, raises community awareness of the risks associated with the use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs, and promotes public policy to support effective solutions to problems related to alcohol and other drug use and abuse.

NPO5's mission focuses on youth, family, and economic development services with a vision of developing a family supportive neighborhood. NPO5 provides services to remove inhibitors to positive family and community experiences. In doing so, P5 stressed

that making programs and services available to residents in their neighborhood removes barriers to accessing education, healthcare, and other means to economic growth.

Sustainable programming has continuing relevance to clients and the communities that benefit. All participants in this study used a sustainable programming strategy with additional emphasis on NPO success measures, management skills of leaders, and programming value as subthemes for securing sustainable funding for financial stability. All participants mentioned success measures, management skills of leaders, and programming value as sustainable programming strategies.

**Success measures.** All participants agreed successful NPO programs are measurable. This finding aligns with the research of Strang (2018) in that NPO success factors, in part, mean obtaining funding and spending the funding to help target segment clients along with collecting evidence to show the accomplishment of intended outcome. P1 stated that the NPO1 executive team is very conscious of the bottom line and responsible for financial success. P2 stated that during regular budget meetings with staff, they check their alignment to national organization success factors and other measures based on successfully meeting demands of unexpected disasters and emergencies. P3 stated that NPO3 executive team has leveraged \$56,000.00 to over \$300,000.00 through dedication to programming support and emphasis on establishing a larger presence in the community. P4 and P5 noted the importance of defining, recognizing, and measuring their level of success. The success measures include services provided as well as the financial means to provide the services.



**Management skills of leaders.** NPO governance and leaders with the business acumen to understand financial and nonfinancial impacts of programming decisions favor a sustainable programming strategy. McMullin and Skelcher (2018) noted that intentionally tracking nonprofit employees for their leadership potential is an appropriate tactic for fostering and sustaining a leadership cadre for the nonprofit sector. P1 commented that she, the managing directors, and many of their 56 voting trustees had corporate and business experience. P3 shared how her experiences in corporate and nonprofit leadership roles provided the tools to recognize a need within the community and develop programming to meet those needs. Based on the participants' biographies in organization documents and organization websites, business management and leadership skills were consistent with their executive leader appointments.

In an era of constant technological change and instant communication, Lincoln, Partner, and Edwards (2019) agreed that being strategic thinkers and passionate about the mission are required elements to fulfill fiduciary duties in governance. As a probing question, I asked each participant how technology has affected a sustainable funding strategy within their organization. P1 highlighted the use of technology to enhance programming experiences. P2 described how NPO2 responded to crowdfunding technology's effect on traditional methods of individual and corporate giving. P3, P4, and P5 use technology for social media presence as well as organization and mission awareness.

**Programming value.** Successful NPO programs may have perceived and actual value for fee-based programs. Stecker (2014) argued to disrupt the current funding model of the nonprofit sector in order to achieve a greater level of financial sustainability and mission-driven success. Fee-for-service programs are a means for earned income to NPOs and indicated in financial documentation as program service revenue. All five organizations employ social enterprise concepts with at least one fee-based program contributing as a funding source within the organization.

As with many NPO leaders, the participants in this study agree with Von Schnurbein and Fritz's (2017) reasoning of using social enterprise to create greater predictability in revenue and reduce financial vulnerability. NPO2, NPO4, and NPO5 had higher percentages of programming that qualified for government grants. Stecker (2014) postulated that the application of social entrepreneurial principles and social enterprise activities could improve the sustainability of nonprofit business models while bolstering management capacity and enhancing mission. P1 stated that about 80% of NPO1's earned income went to programming; yet, only 2% of income came from government grants. NPO3 has similar levels income committed to programming. NPO3's fee and free programs and events focus on areas of art at work, play, home, and in the community. P3 stated that local grants are available, but they tend to be small for first time applicants or of specific nature and limited scope. Revenue generating programs and services can contribute to a sustainable programming strategy that NPO executive leaders use for financial stability.

The sustainable programming strategy aligns with the BSC framework as a strategy-enabling tool senior managers use to improve organizational performance (Yahanpath, Pacheco, & Burns, 2018). Ndevu and Muller (2018) suggested the use of the BSC for executive NPO leaders to translate vision and strategy into a coherent and linked series of objectives and performance indicators. Yahanpath et al. (2018) noted the BSC as a standardized set of metrics that collectively provided updates on progress in completing tasks and outcomes of planned actions. The four perspectives of the BSC align business activities to organizational objectives to improve internal and external communications and monitor the organization's performance against strategic goals.

## **Theme 2: Relationship Collaboration Strategy**

Individuals and business leaders in and outside of an NPO's community may realize positive business and social impacts to supporting a NPO's mission financially and through collaborative programming. A relationship collaboration strategy may expand the visibility of organizations and develop individual and business partnerships into sustainable funding sources. Organizational leaders should invest in their brand image and use the brand to improve their fundraising outcomes (Katz, 2018).

Sustainable funding for NPOs is dependent on building strong relationships and collaborations to support an organization's mission and vision. McMullin and Skelcher (2018) found that NPO directors describing their organizations as becoming more professionalized realized increases in funding, driving some to adapt or abandon their informal community-based processes of collaboration. Although collaborations are a

valuable means to tackle complex social issues, Zeimers et al. (2019) agreed that NPOs similarly collaborate with other NPOs for delivering socially responsible programs. All participants used leadership networking and the cultivation of partnerships to build relationships.

**Leadership networking.** NPO executive leaders must network with individuals, businesses, and other NPOs to continuously tell the story of organizational success as well as the inhibitors for continued growth. P1 had a nurtured, symbiotic relationship with a local family foundation that resulted in funding in perpetuity. NPO2 counts on their board to identify new prospects and their grant writer to apply for funds from local foundations. P2 said the fund development team is responsible for raising funds through a channel-designed system of individual and corporate portfolios in addition to making phone calls to reliable donors. NPO3 is comprised of volunteer staff and board members for daily operation, programming, and support. P3 said networking with business leaders, owners, and individuals who are external to the community is just as important as within the community to build their brand.

NPO executive leaders' networking to understand philanthropic interests of individuals and businesses supports a relationship collaboration strategy to secure sustainable funding for financial stability. P4 discussed the longevity of the organization providing services for 70 years. P4 pointed out that interorganizational leadership networking was a means for the executive team to obtain mission focused, programming ideas from the staff. P4 stated that the new partnerships are developing with other

counties based on the successes of the NPO4. P5 stated that networking with leaders in healthcare and education helped bring services to neighborhoods without the means to otherwise receive their services. I reviewed a project summary document that listed partner organizations that will co-occupy NPO5's new center. I also validated that NPO5 leaders' active involvement in the community has built a unique level of trust and familiarity with thousands of local residents and numerous community organizations.

**Cultivate partnerships to build relationships.** P1 stated that they frequently cross share and cross cultivate mutually beneficial partnerships. NPO1 is highly regarded in its industry and has longstanding partnerships with complementary organizations that support NPO1. P1 stated community outreach, education, and mainstay programming would not achieve the level of success without their numerous volunteer partners. I reviewed the volunteer opportunities requested to validate P1's statement regarding the impact volunteers have on successful programming. NPO2 and a nonprofit funding organization continue a partnership cultivated for over 60 years. P2 stated that this funding organization experienced a decline in earnings and in turn a substantial decline in financial support to NPO2. P2 saw opportunities for regional executives to build relationships at the individual and corporate levels and convert them to a portfolio as funding partners demonstrating the significance of incorporating relationship collaboration in a sustainable funding strategy. NPO staffs and volunteers must have a passion for the mission of the organization and a dedication to the mission work for organizational success.

NPO2 has a strong network of volunteers, donors, and partners that are critical to the organization's mission. In 2018, NPO2's impact document reported that 1,994 volunteers carried out over 90% of the humanitarian work of NPO2. P3 stated that building corporate, city government, and individual relationships were key to developing strong support from community leaders. P3 also stated that the relationships and collaborations they built kept them moving and so they kept building relationships, careful not to strain by over asking. P3 shared that a corporate community partner made a 3-year financial commitment to NPO3 because they trusted the leadership and believed in the vision of the organization. I reviewed flyers and other marketing documents of past and scheduled programming events to validate P3's statements of sponsors and collaborations. P5 led NPO5's collaboration with hospitals, a community college, and other NPOs to raise funding for the capital campaign projects. These projects will place senior housing, developmental programs, and services directly in NPO5's neighborhood as needed. I reviewed the executive summary, project revenue and expense budget, and sustainability plan of the capital campaign projects to validate P5's response for use of collaborative partnerships as a funding strategy.

The relationship collaboration strategy can align with the BSC framework to measure the financial and nonfinancial performance for NPO sustainable funding. The BSC has the flexibility and adaptability for leaders to provide a clearer and shared vision of the organizational goals and the means used to achieve the goals (Quesado, Aibar Guzmán, & Lima Rodrigues, 2018). An NPO with a relationship collaboration strategy

will develop goals and objectives for each of the BSC perspectives. By placing partner relationships at the core of the strategy, organizations can find success indicators and adjust their internal processes accordingly (Quesado et al., 2018).

### **Theme 3: Donor Commitment Strategy**

Sustainable funding for NPOs is dependent on committed donors in support of an organization's mission and vision. Individual donors are the most common sources of charitable giving (Farrokhvar, Ansari, & Kamali, 2018). A substantial percentage of NPO funding is from donations and contributions. IRS Form 990s provided by participants and Guidestar.org validated the significance of contributions, reporting contributions and grants accounting for up to 92% of NPO total revenue. However, high donor participation of any kind begins with exceptional programming and services. There is growing competition over time, money, and resources among nonprofit organizations, so there is a need to predict donations (Farrokhvar et al., 2018). Donors tend to give regularly and continuously to NPOs with successful and relevant programming and services. P1 stated that people give based on the value they attach to the product created. NPO executive leaders must give focused effort to ask for donations and on-going giving. This finding confirms the research of Katz (2018) that while the *ask* was a powerful influence on donations, the brand image of NPOs was imperative in soliciting donations. The *ask* is often the result of personal relationships, marketing campaigns, mailers, crowdfunding methods, phone calls, and fundraising events in support of a donor commitment strategy NPO executive leaders use to secure sustainable funding for financial stability. P2 stated

NPO2 has a list of reliable donors that contribute regularly for disaster relief but only if they are asked. GoFundMe and YouCaring are two methods of donation crowdfunding NPOs use to reach large number of donors for raising private funds via the Internet. I was able to verify on GoFundMe that all of the participating NPOs in this study received funds through this method. Salido-Andres, Rey-Garcia, Alvarez-Gonzalez, and Vazquez-Casielles (2018) agreed with this finding that digital transformation seems to have affected not only fundraising tools and the nature of the fundraising campaign itself, but also the emergence of a new type of donor with whom the promoting NPO will need to establish effective relationships. NPO2 fundraiser teams receive online and face-to-face professional fundraising development training. P2 stated that crowdfunding methods reflect the changing demographic and the prospecting opportunities for individual donations. P3 expressed that personal donations contribute to sustaining work, programming success, and organizational success. Trustworthiness and influence of the organization are important factors that increase donors' willingness to support an organization (Katz, 2018).

The donor commitment strategy can align with the BSC framework as a metric of value to donors' long term and repeat giving. The BSC can communicate NPO goals and objectives for a donor commitment strategy's financial perspective as well as interest in stakeholders. Yahanpath et al. (2018) stated that businesses thrive when they have a non-money focus, or a transcendental point of service or product that meets the needs of others. Additionally, Yahanpath et al. suggested using the BSC as the tool for NPOs to



measure their performance in terms of financial as well as nonfinancial metrics, in order to be sustainable, while pursuing goals and objectives of the vision.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

Executive leaders of NPOs confront competitive pressures derived from complex economic and societal challenges (Alvarez-Gonzalez, García-Rodríguez, Rey-García, & Sanzo-Perez, 2017). By applying the findings of this study, executive leaders may address challenges and enhance organizational capacity for sustainable funding and financial stability of the organization and its mission. NPO executive leaders rely on numerous sources to generate multiple streams of income to secure funding for financial stability. Sustainable programming, relationship collaboration, and committed donors are the strategies from the findings of this study. Executive leaders of existing, or new NPOs may apply findings of this research to implement an effective strategy for improving sustainable funding, expanding funding sources, and retaining existing sources. Additionally, NPO executive leaders may apply findings toward building a strategy of funding sustainability to secure financial stability.

Executive leaders might use a sustainable programming strategy as the basis for driving NPO success measures toward sustainable funding. A sustainable programming strategy is a means for NPO executive directors to give priority to success measures, develop the business skills of their staff, and assign value to programs and activities that support the vision and mission of the organization. An executive leaders' ability to

quantify outcomes and impacts can demonstrate sustainable programming as a successful strategy for sustainable funding and NPO survivability.

Executive leaders of NPOs might use a relationship collaboration strategy to develop partnerships into sustainable funding sources. Participants in this study considered building relationships and collaborative partnerships in part as a role and responsibility of position. NPO leaders' capacity to fulfill their mission increasingly depends on developing successful alliances with key external and internal stakeholders (Alvarez-Gonzalez et al., 2017). Similar to executive roles in many industries, executive leaders of NPOs market, or share, organization programs and successful social impacts to generate interest and financial support from all possible funding sources.

Executive leaders' NPOs might use a donor commitment strategy to increase individual, corporate, and endowment giving. A focus on donor commitment enables leaders to build budgets for programs, support, and growth of the organization. Donors have an affinity and empathy for causes they choose for committed support and seek trustworthiness in organization leadership. Donors are expected to (a) set clearly defined goals, (b) explore and pursue evidence-based strategies, and (c) monitor progress and assess success along with grantees (Chatterjee & Rai, 2018).

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for social change include a tangible means for NPO leaders to meet their organizational mission, improve the lives of recipients benefiting from their services, and improve economic conditions in the communities served. Executive leaders

of financially stable NPOs can focus on and grow the mission work of the organization. The mission of many NPOs focuses on programming to serve and educate a diverse population of people based on cultural needs and experiences. Wilburn and Wilburn (2016) postulated that the potential risk for some leaders of organizations considering integrating business strategies with emphasis on positive social change, is not considering the surrounding efforts in making the change. NPO executive leaders may use findings from this study for social change by developing existing and new programming to maximize social impact relevant to the communities served. Stephan et al. (2016) highlighted the growing interest of how NPO leaders can drive positive social change through meeting the needs of clients. Socially responsible programs are the catalyst of collaborations (Zeimers et al., 2019). As the needs and demographics of communities served vary, NPO executive leaders implementing strategies from the findings of this study may lead to sustainable funding that meet the mission of their organizations.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies that some NPOs executive leaders use to secure sustainable funding for financial stability. NPO leaders might use the findings of this study to improve their financial stability by implementing strategies to secure sustainable funding. I recommend NPO executive directors implement a sustainable programming strategy to improve their ability to fulfill their mission and obtain reliable sources of funding. NPO leaders who are passionate about fulfilling their mission improve the prospects for sustainable programming as well

as sustainable funding (Lincoln et al., 2019). When NPO executive directors use a sustainable programming strategy, the competency of their staff improves, the value of their services increases, and their ability to secure reliable funding improves.

I suggest NPO leaders develop and use a relationship collaboration strategy to increase local, regional, and national partnerships with stakeholders with access to available NPO funding sources. Developing collaborative partnerships with internal and external stakeholders is a vital function of NPO leaders seeking sustained funding (Alvarez-Gonzalez et al., 2017). I recommend NPO leaders use relationship networking with existing stakeholders and prospective sponsors and donors to build the relationships needed to secure sustainable funding.

I recommend leaders of NPOs implement a donor commitment strategy to improve their financial stability through repetitive donations and endowment sources. NPO leaders should recognize that effective strategy implementation for sustainable funding is a holistic activity. Leaders should understand that donor commitment improves when the NPO meets or exceeds its mission through effective programming. NPO leaders will likely be more successful in implementing a donor commitment strategy in conjunction with a relationship collaboration strategy and a sustainable programming strategy.

Researchers should seek venues to publish the finding of their study, such as scholarly, peer-reviewed journal and professional, practitioner journals (Hangel & Schmidt-Pfister, 2017). I plan to condense this study in preparation of submitting articles

for publication in scholarly journals to accommodate their submission guidelines. I intend to disseminate the finding of this study by submitting articles for publication in the *Nonprofit Management and Leadership Journal* as well as the *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*. I also plan to share the findings with NPO executive leaders through presentations and professional consultations.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

A limitation of this study was the accuracy of interview data collected relied on the experience, knowledge, opinions of leaders in five NPOs; therefore, did not reflect the views of the broader population of leaders in nonprofit community-based organizations. Future researchers may use a quantitative correlational study to overcome this limitation by surveying a broader population of NPO executive leaders with successful strategies for sustainable funding. Using a broader population will also address the small sample population of this study which was restricted to five NPOs located in Ohio. Because of the limited scope of the study, as well as various organizational structures, organizational governance, and organizational mission, future researchers could conduct comparative analysis on NPOs with similar focus to determine the effectiveness of the strategies outlined in this study. A final limitation that I relied on was the honesty of participants as well as the accuracy of supporting documentation to identify leaders of five NPOs who implemented successful strategies to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability. Results based on data of NPOs are not confirmable for all organization types and sizes and future researchers should carefully consider the transferability of findings.

### **Reflections**

As expected, my doctoral journey was the greatest academic experience I have inflicted on myself. Processes are guides to provide anticipated levels of outcomes, and the DBA doctoral study process was no different. The DBA doctoral study process was a challenging yet gratifying learning experience that I highly recommend. I did not consider a topic of passion but more of familiarity and an opportunity to consult based on my conceptual framework. I feel I have developed a scholarly approach to discussing and solving business problems that others deem credible and associate value. What I have learned is an approach to solving business problems based on scholarly research and successful strategies of other leaders. The participants in my study are looking forward to me sharing my findings, which will be a moment of stress and reward. I am looking forward to the expanded opportunities that my doctoral accomplishment presents and my continued growth in the field of business and education.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore strategies that some NPO executive leaders use to secure sustainable funding for financial stability. I collected data from five NPO leaders using semistructured interviews and reviewing their relevant organizational documents. I engaged the participants in member checking, used methodological triangulation, and reached data saturation. The findings of this study indicated that sustainable programming, relationship collaboration, and donor commitment are strategies executive leaders of NPOs use to secure sustainable funding

for financial stability. A strong business acumen was common among all participants amenable to leadership, processing, and financial management decisions. The findings indicated an interdependency among the three strategies discussed in this study. Sustainable programming remains dependent on sustainable funding from collaborative partnerships and donor commitments. In turn, relationship collaboration and donor commitments remain dependent on relevant programming and services and the financial stability provided by the business minded leaders in management. The vision and mission of an NPO are the focus of programming and services. The BSC is a model for continuous focus on the NPO's vision, and as a communication and performance management tool to minimize barriers to sustainable funding. NPO leaders use the BSC framework to execute a strategic plan for financial stability and positive social change in communities served. NPO leaders may use the findings of this study to improve the lives of recipients receiving their services because of implementing strategies for sustainable funding to meet the missions of the organizations.

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

### **Interview preparation.**

To prepare for participant interviews, I obtained contact information for each participant, and extend invitations via phone and email, to participate in my study. I used email to obtain permission and consent to conduct an interview for data collection from each participant. I also confirmed the location for the interview convenient for the participants.

### **Opening the interview.**

Hello *Mr./Mrs./Ms. P1/P2/P3/P4/P5*, I want to thank you for taking this time to speak with me. I realize your time is valuable and I will adhere to 45–60 minutes as promised. Is that timeframe still okay with you? As mentioned previously, I am a doctoral student conducting a case study exploring strategies for executive leaders of NPOs to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability. Executive leaders of NPOs may realize value in the findings of this study toward building a strategy of sustainability to secure financial stability, and continued contributions to the communities they serve.

### **Informed consent.**

I reviewed the process of obtaining informed consent prior to beginning the interview, reminding the participant that I was recording the interview for transcription purposes.

### **Conducting the interview.**

This is a semistructured interview. I will ask you open-ended questions and then follow up with probing questions for clarification. Your perspective and in-depth response will contribute to addressing the research question for this study.



### Research Question

What strategies do some NPO executive leaders use to secure sustainable funding for financial stability?

### Interview Questions

1. What successful strategies do you use to secure sustainable funding to achieve financial stability?
2. How do you use the strategies to secure private funding from local community members to achieve financial stability?
3. What strategies do you use to secure philanthropic endowment funding to achieve financial stability?
4. How do you secure local government funding that helps you achieve financial stability?
5. How do you secure state or federal government annual appropriation funding to facilitate achieving financial stability?
6. What strategies do you use to secure grant monies?
7. What strategies to secure sustainable funding to achieving financial stability were most effective?
8. How do you convince donors to provide ongoing, year-after-year funding?
9. What other sources of funding have helped provide financial stability?

10. What other information can you offer to help understand the strategies and processes you employ to obtain sustainable funding that result in financial stability?

**Follow up with probing questions.**

Once a primary interview question was answered, I asked follow-up questions for additional information and clarity. Such questions probed for additional information related to my headings in the literature review for this study (such as use of technology, process management, and leadership development).

**Theme verification.**

During the interview, I asked about major themes discussed to ensure my understanding matched the intent of the expressed information.

**Coding.**

In the transcription of our recording, I used identifiers to protect the confidentiality of participants and anyone they speak of by coding the names of the participants as P1, P2, and P3. I also withheld demographic details or site descriptions that might permit a reader to deduce the identity of a participant. Is that okay with you?

**Recording reflexive notes.**

In addition to recording the interview, I took notes to document any reflexive thoughts I may had while the interview was proceeding.

**Ending the interview.**

Again, I want to thank you for your time and the valuable information and insights you have provided. Next, I will contact you within 2 weeks to schedule the 30-minute appointment to engage in member checking and obtain any additional information they might offer.