If we could paint a picture of the discourse and papers heard at the 1998 ARNOVA conference held on November 5 through 7 in Seattle, Washington, it might look like three, interlocking circles; one very large circle, representing the nonprofit sector, would overlap with the two smaller, intersecting circles, representing the public and for-profit sectors. We see such a picture as both highlighting ARNOVA’s historical focus on nonprofit organizations and voluntary action, as well as reflecting an intensified public conversation on the place and relationships of nonprofits vis-à-vis other sectors and activities in society. Moreover, the nearly 500 participants and the papers at the conference indicated that this conversation is one in which many countries around the globe are currently involved. Indeed, it is one that transcends national boundaries, as we witness the growing emergence and study of regional, international, and global networks of nonprofit organizations and voluntary action.

We have sought to capture some of the conference’s breadth and depth in this special, conference issue of NVSQ in both traditional and new ways. Per tradition, we selected what we thought were the best papers submitted from the conference for inclusion herein, and they are discussed below in detail. However, the editorial team decided to include and highlight some of the other contributions to the conference in Seattle that made it special. Some of the noteworthy contributions were the luncheon speeches to the participants by Paul Brainerd, one of Seattle’s best known high-tech entrepreneurs and philanthropists, and by John G. Simon, the Augustus E. Lines Professor of Law at Yale University and recipient of this year’s ARNOVA Award for Distinguished Lifetime Achievement. Brainerd’s presentation brought to the participants some of the most current approaches to philanthropy in the high-tech areas of the West Coast. Small groups of young, successful entrepreneurs have taken renewed interest in the social fabric and quality of life issues facing the communities where they live and work. However, their participation in such endeavors goes beyond the transfer of financial resources to include their ongoing involvement in the development and implementation of such projects. To capture this latest development in philanthropy, we have included Brainerd’s speech in this issue (with an introduction by Putnam Barber of the Evergreen State Society) for further reflection by attendees and for others who could not be at the conference. (The major ideas of Simon’s address have already been published in another venue and thus could not be included herein.)
Another special feature of the conference was the awarding of the Distinguished Book Award to Kathryn Kish Sklar, distinguished professor of history at State University of New York–Binghamton, for her book, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830-1900*, published by Yale University Press. The protagonist in this bibliography was politically active in the latter part of the 19th century; yet, she too was active in all three sectors, through her own writings and translations, the public positions that she held, and her work with social worker and human rights activist Jane Adams at Hull House in Chicago. We felt that it would be particularly fitting for a review of this book, which was provided by historian David C. Hammack, to appear in this issue. Moreover, given the many years and monumental effort that professor Kish Sklar devoted to this work, the editorial team felt that *NVSQ*’s readers could gain from having a better understanding of her scholarly voyage into the life of this remarkable woman and reformer. Thus, professor Kish Sklar kindly agreed to contribute an article that presents her personal reflections on writing her book.

In addition, this issue includes an exchange and reply between two noted scholars in the study of philanthropy, Peter Dobkin Hall and Stanley N. Katz, that typifies the lively discussion—formal and informal—that characterized the conference. Finally, we have specifically included a list of all the 1998 ARNOVA Conference Awards presented to recognize the contributions of both veteran and emergent scholars to the field.

Of the conference papers that were submitted for review and that were ultimately selected for inclusion in this special issue, we discerned two main themes. The first concentrates on civil society, and the second concentrates on new, comparative empirical data on nonprofits’ climate and financial performance.

First, the theme of the development of civil society, community, and volunteer capacity is represented by two articles. In “Volunteering and the Long Civic Generation,” Kristin Goss presents some very intriguing data on volunteering. Using a proprietary archive of national household surveys dating back to 1975, Goss found that the frequency of volunteering has increased by 20% since the mid-1970s, qualifying the argument that civic participation has declined in America. What is most interesting, however, is that almost the entire increase is concentrated among older Americans, who are currently volunteering at twice the rate of their counterparts in the mid-1970s. This is in sharp contrast to the middle-aged group, in which volunteering is down. This pattern could have important implications for the nonprofit sector. The data are then analyzed to test a number of hypotheses that might explain the increase in senior volunteering; for example, seniors now have better health, more money, more time, more civic engagement, and so forth. These factors do not completely account for the increase. We are left with several important challenges. Researchers need to use other data sources to verify that seniors are, indeed, volunteering more and, if they are, to determine the reasons for
this. Practitioners need to consider this information in their efforts to recruit and use volunteers.

In a second article related to civil society, Jennifer Alexander, Renee Nank, and Camilla Stivers address civil society and welfare reform, an issue that is on everyone’s mind these days. In “Implications of Welfare Reform: Do Non-profit Survival Strategies Threaten Civil Society?” they look at the potential for longer term negative impacts resulting from what many would call successful devolution efforts. The authors examine the dynamics of the new welfare reform that was established and the contractual climate between county government and neighborhood social service groups in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. One important aspect of this climate is that nonprofits need to have or develop features consistent with the new public management approach that is part and parcel of welfare reform. This includes business-like procedures and orientations, and many organizations reported that this placed severe strains on resources and missions. Nonprofits reported that their dependence on local and state government agencies had increased and that their public service orientations had decreased. The latter is of major concern to the authors. They conclude that marketization and devolution have resulted in organizations that have a diminished capacity for providing public goods such as citizen involvement or advocacy. Because the provision of these goods has traditionally been a major function of American nonprofits, we could be witnessing a potentially significant weakening of the sector. This should be an important topic for future research as welfare reform proceeds.

Two articles also represent the second theme of the growth of empirical tools and comparative data to help substantiate the development and dynamics of nonprofit organizations and voluntary activity. In “Who Do You Trust? Comparing Data on Skilled Nursing Facilities From the Internal Revenue Service and the Health Care Financing Administration,” Marie Gantz compares two different data sets to examine the degree of inconsistency in financial data on the same nonprofit institutions collected by two different federal sources in the United States. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS), responsible for reviewing tax-exempted entities, uses IRS Form 990; and the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA), responsible for administering the nation’s Medicare and Medicaid programs and reimbursing care providers, uses the HCFA cost reports. Gantz systematically compares the consistency of the reported data at increasing levels of detail. She found that, when comparisons are possible, both sources are quite reliable for bottom-line financial variables. However, many more inconsistencies were found at more detailed levels of reporting. This study helps to guide and caution researchers seeking to use such data sets.

In the second article on this theme, “The Philanthropic Giving Index: A New Indicator of the Climate for Raising Funds,” Kathryn Keirouz, Robert Grimm, and Richard Steinberg report on the development of a new type of indicator of philanthropy. Developed at the Indiana University Center on
Philanthropy, the index will be based on semiannual surveys of experienced development officials in a representative sample of nonprofit organizations. These fundraising experts will report on their perceptions of current and future donor behaviors, thereby offering a real-time assessment of philanthropy. Results are reported for the initial 1998 survey. They show that giving officials had a positive attitude about the current as well as future climate for fund-raising. As the authors point out, there are a number of potentially useful applications of the index for researchers and practitioners. The degree to which these can be realized will depend, in large measure, on the alignment between the perceptions of giving officials and subsequent actual giving. Interesting research should follow.

Finally, we selected two emerging issues in nonprofit scholarship. One applies a particular management-organizational theory to illuminate intersectoral-interorganizational relations. The other explores nonprofits’ use of the new electronic media to fulfill the traditional activity of advocacy and social change.

Rikki Abzug and Natalie Webb discuss the first emerging issue, the relationship between organizations in different sectors in their article, “Relationship Between Nonprofit and For-Profit Organizations: A Stakeholder Perspective.” Drawing on economic and management theories of organizations, the authors present a new and useful way of conceptualizing the relationship between organizational types. Basic to this discussion is the notion that organizations depend on the support of others (stakeholders). The article describes the variety of ways that a nonprofit can be a stakeholder for a for-profit and the implications of these relationships. Included are cooperative linkages, such as the exchange of tangible resources, as well as competitive or oppositional relations, in which the for-profit would view the nonprofit as a threat. This notion is extended to the entire array of nonprofit stakeholders that a for-profit may have (employee groups, shareholders, community groups, etc.). The approach is useful because it can give us a way to comprehend how management may or may not understand the organization’s environment and the tradeoffs that they may try to balance in reaching organizational decisions and setting strategies. In this article, the for-profit is the focus of investigation, but the approach could be used to look at nonprofits and their various stakeholders or at entire networks of organizations of mixed types.

The other emerging issue deals with a new topic of research: using electronic communication systems in nonprofit organizations and voluntary action to advocate policy change. “Electronic Advocacy by Nonprofit Organizations in Social Welfare Policy” by John McNutt and Katherine M. Boland focuses on the use of technologically intensive media to influence stakeholders vis-à-vis policy change. Data are presented from their exploratory study of affiliates of a national social work professional organization. The findings summarize the types of electronic or online advocacy techniques used and their salient characteristics and innovation attributes; the type of issues such methods seek to address; the perceived barriers to the use of electronic
advocacy; and factors explaining variation in their use among affiliates, including larger memberships, use of a consultant, and prior and convincing experience with electronic advocacy.

In sum, we reviewed many fine, revised conference presentations for inclusion in this special issue. Several that we were not able to include herein may well appear in future issues of NVSQ. We appreciate the opportunity to have worked with our ARNOVA colleagues in this endeavor. In this vein, we thank Steven Rathgeb Smith, NVSQ editor, for his support and encouragement of our work, and the interesting discussions and correspondence that we had together, and Stephanie Hoffman, NVSQ managing editor, for providing competent and gracious technical support. Finally, we thank the 1998 program committee and the local hosts for exposing us all to the dynamic activities and many resources on the University of Washington campus where the conference was held, and for introducing many of us to the great natural beauty and people of Seattle.

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