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## Does municipal funding of organizations reflect communities of need? Exploring trends in Halifax, 1996-2016

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### ABSTRACT

Recent policy shifts and budget cuts have led to a reduction in government support for NGOs. While studies examine funding at the federal level, few analyze municipalities. Using a socio-spatial approach, we compare municipal funding and tax relief with Census data to analyze how fiscal support coincides with social needs in Halifax, Canada. Our analysis shows that funding declines while the need remains high. We contend this has implications for the ability of organizations to provide services to vulnerable populations and communities as cities shift social support responsibilities to the private sector and municipal governments adopt austerity policies.

### KEYWORDS

Funding; NGOs; nonprofits; municipal; Halifax; social support

Non-government organizations (NGOs) and nonprofits increasingly rely on state funding to pursue their mandates. It helps organizations pay for office space, compensate staff members, purchase equipment and supplies, and carry out day-to-day tasks (Corrigan-Brown 2016). Funding is particularly important for organizations providing human services given their low revenue and high demand (Lee 2017; Lu 2015). A significant proportion of their funding has historically come from federal, provincial, and/or municipal levels of the state (Saidel 1991). Many organizations in the voluntary and nonprofit sector are still heavily reliant on government funding (Phillips, Laforest, and Graham 2010), much of which derive from government grants (Clément 2008, 2019). As of 2004, nonprofits and voluntary organizations received 36% percent of their funding from governments, 43% from non-government earned income such as charitable gaming or membership fees, 17% from donations and 4% from other sources (Statistics Canada 2004). However, in recent years austerity measures adopted by national and sub-national governments have pushed the responsibility for social services to lower municipal-level governments, community groups, private corporations and individuals. Many argue that such decoupling of state funding from organizations is integral to creating an independent, vibrant civil society (Brodie 2007). Yet, reductions in government support pressure social service organizations to scramble in mobilizing funds to meet the needs of their communities.

A number of researchers argue that funding cuts have hit social justice groups particularly hard over the last few decades (e.g. Brodie and Bakker 2007; Rodger and

Knight 2011; Ramos and Rogers 2015). Research on Canada has examined such funding at the national (e.g. Clément 2009; Brown and Troutt 2004; Laforest 2013; Rodgers and Knight 2011) and provincial levels (e.g. Kay and Ramos 2018; Masson 2009; Ramos and Young 2018) but there is a considerable lack of scholarship analyzing state funding of organizations at the municipal level and the effects of such funding on the communities they serve. With an increasing proportion of people living in urban areas, there is a growing need to assess the extent to which municipal governments support frontline organizations on the ground.

For these reasons, this paper analyzes the funding of social service organizations in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), Canada, between 1996 and 2016. Halifax is the capital of the province of Nova Scotia and is a hub of the country's Atlantic region. In this paper we aim to understand what role municipalities play in funding organizations and whether they step in when federal and provincial governments step out during periods of austerity. This research fills a gap in the literature on state funding and NGOs as the role of municipalities in state funding is largely overlooked. We also assess how local funding is correlated with the social needs of residents to determine whether funding varies in response to contextual improvements or changes in the needs of communities. To meet these objectives, we first investigate funding patterns by examining all reported municipal funding in the city including tax exemptions awarded to organizations. Next, we use a socio-spatial approach to map the geographic location of funded organizations and examine the allocation of funding to social support organizations located in communities of high need.

We begin our analysis with an overview of literature on state funding to NGOs and nonprofits; introduce the socio-political, and economic landscape of Halifax; and offer an outline of our research methods and analysis. We present overall trends in amounts of funding offered by the city and the number of organizations funded as well as the proportion of tax exemptions given to social support organizations over a 20-year period from 1996–2016. We also discuss the relationships between municipal funding patterns and national and provincial trends, and how these trends coincide with the distribution of social needs across the city. Last, we offer a conclusion on shifts in municipal funding for social support organizations over this period and discuss implications of funding declines for organizations attempting to meet community needs.

## **Government funding and organizations**

Numerous studies document the role and importance of NGOs and nonprofits in advocating for rights and providing social welfare for populations across the U.S. (Bratt 2017), Latin America (Bebbington 1993), China (Jianxi, 2006), and Europe (Sloat 2005). Literature also shows that many NGOs receive their project and core funding from states (Corrigall-Borwn 2016; Kay and Ramos 2018). The Canadian government also has a long history of supporting NGOs, beginning with minor funding to charities in the early 1900s (Clément 2017; Corrigall-Brown and Ho 2017). In the 1960s Canada began a large-scale initiative to fund NGOs, serving a variety of purposes, including, but not limited to, promoting women's rights, improving aboriginal communities, supporting environmentalism, and providing social assistance for individuals and families (Pal 1993). In many cases, this funding contributed to the founding of key

social justice and movement organizations nationwide (Clément 2008). In turn, these organizations have had profound impact on Canadian life, influencing national and provincial laws, settling adjudication issues for indigenous claims to land, facilitating urban renewal, and providing countless services to those in need.

A growing body of research is dedicated to the documentation of state funding of organizations and the effects such organizations have on society. NGOs and nonprofits are key vehicles for political and social change and are emblematic of the power of the people to raise issues important to them and combat those they disagree with. They provide mechanisms for change and justice through activism and engagement of those disempowered and disenfranchised, targeting sectors of society that may not have access to formal political resources. With the increasing privatization of social services, many non-profit social support organizations replace crucial services governments are unable or unwilling to provide (Phillips 2000). As such, they offer invaluable assistance and resources to those in need in Canada and internationally (Anthony et al. 2007; Garrow 2010; Smith 2005), and some argue are more accountable and efficient than privatized services (West 2015). Support to women, assistance to immigrants, distribution of food, clothing, and other goods to low-income individuals, and care for seniors and children are a few examples of what countless NGOs and nonprofits provide in the social support sector. But to pursue their mandates most organizations depend on government grants for their sustainability (Clément 2008; Phillips, Laforest, and Graham 2010). Reductions in funding threaten the capacity to act and deliver services, endangering their very survival.

Driven by a budget deficit, Canadian governments adopted austerity measures stifling the funding of Canadian NGOs (Ramos and Rodgers 2015; Krawchenko and Stoney 2015). Although federal state funding to organizations faced cutbacks as early as the 1980s, cutbacks were accelerated in the 1990s, with an extensive withdrawal of funding to organizations between 2004 and 2015 (Corrigall-Brown and Mabel 2017). More specifically, the federal government shifted its focus from ongoing operational grants to selective funding for services and projects (Clément 2019; Elson 2009). From 1994–5 to 1997–8 the federal government reduced funding to social programs by 23.3%; and, in broader scope, 1995–6 to 2002–3 saw social welfare expenditures decline from 29.7 billion to 24.7 billion (Elson 2011). This trend continued in 2006 as non-profit organizations fell victim to significant budget cuts with a nearly \$1 billion reduction in federal support to NGOs nationwide (Department of Finance Canada 2006). Cuts included those to the Court Challenges Program, important for establishing a mandate in support of official language minority communities and as a funding source for social justice groups (Court Challenges Program 2016); and Indigenous, environmental, and women's organizations (Goldenberg 2012; Rogers and Knight 2011). These federal level cuts aligned with then Prime Minister Stephen Harper's stance that the federal government not be involved in social policy (Brodie 2007). In sum, since the 1990s, governments changed, curtailed or eliminated funding programs to the voluntary sector even while the need for services increased (Elson 2011).

The ebbs and flows of federal funding are demonstrated in Corrigall-Brown and Ho's (2019) examination of the relationship between parliamentary debate and federal funding to NGOs, elucidating the association of political climate with fluctuates in funding magnitudes. Many organizations persisting through these vicissitudes struggled

to secure stable funding, navigating precarious short-term project-based funding (Scott 2003). Limited project-based, short-term funding also undermined the ability of organizations to conduct future planning (Elson 2009). In the case of social service NGOs, many suffered, attempting to provide the same services with fewer resources (Krawchenko and Stoney 2015; Phillips, Laforest, and Graham 2010). Women's organizations in New Brunswick, for example, cited government cutbacks as a significant barrier to the delivery of services (NBACSW 2007). In 2014 Nova Scotia's community services minister acknowledged how organizations struggle when funding is only guaranteed on an annual basis (Nova Scotia 2014).

Coupled with scholarship on state funding to NGOs is a parallel debate regarding the encroachment of state influence in public domains. Some believe state financing may contribute to cooption, ceding power to state actors and funders who influence the motives and procedures of organizations – impinging the scope and intent of their political advocacy (Piven and Cloward 2012; Gronbjerg 1993; Smith and Lipsky 1993; Stasiulis 1980). Others, however, note that state funding is a vital component of organizations (Beres, Crow, and Gotell 2009; Chaves, Stephens, and Galaskiewicz 2004; Knight and Rodgers 2012; Beer and Tremblay 2014; Masson 2012). Further complicating this issue is the potential of government funding leading to resource dependence (Corrigall-Brown 2016) and intra-organizational conflict over resources (Stasiulis 1980). Overall, it is a delicate balancing act between the need for support on one hand, and the imperative to resist coercion or cooptation on the other.

The literature on state funding of NGOs primarily examines national-level funding, largely overlooking subnational polities. This is surprising considering most nonprofit funding comes from provincial governments, followed by municipalities and then federal sources (Statistics Canada 2004). Subnational funding is vital to the sustainable operation of NGOs, especially when federal funding is cut. A few studies show that provincial funding fills funding gaps left by federal cuts (see Masson 2015; Kay and Ramos 2018; Ramos and Young 2018). Kay and Ramos (2018) show that over the 1990s and 2000s there was an overall increase in the number of Nova Scotia women's organizations receiving funding, and in the amount each organization received. Ramos and Young (2018) provide similar results, albeit for indigenous organizations in Nova Scotia. They find that during federal cuts the number of provincial grants to these organizations and amounts of total funding increased. Similarly, Clément (2019) finds overall, yet nuanced, increases in provincial state funding in British Columbia. He found increases to the environmental and aboriginal organizations with declines for human rights and women's organizations. However, there is a gap in the research, missing local or municipal-level polities (Andrews and Caren 2010; Stoddart and Ramos 2013). The focus on the national level distorts the understanding of social movements (McAdam et al. 2005; Tremblay and Mévellec 2013) and we contend it also distorts understandings of NGOs more broadly.

One reason for the gap in research on local or municipal polities is because of a general lack of readily available datasets. For many municipalities even within the same province, funding records are dispersed throughout council minutes that are, in many cases, inconsistently and erratically organized, making obtaining this information a particularly arduous task. This difficulty is compounded as many government records are inaccessible under freedom of information laws. Researchers must hurdle this

barrier by submitting freedom of information requests, subject to delays and additional costs (Dickson 2012). By overlooking municipal government support, however, researchers miss a critical component that obscures the overall landscape of state funding and misses the importance of local modes of fiscal support. Municipal governments potentially play an important role in the funding of organizations and their role will likely expand as cities grow and become increasingly important arenas of political power.

## Why Halifax?

We focus on the city of Halifax for several reasons. Geographically positioned in central in Nova Scotia, Halifax is a mid-sized city with a population of over 400 thousand people (Statistics Canada 2014), it is the hub of the Atlantic region in Canada, and it is in a province that has been dependent on federal transfer payments for years (Clancy 2015). It is also host to half of the provinces' universities, a significant volume of government services, and private sector companies; and is crucial to the region's economy, including home to the largest auto port in North America (Grant and Kronstal 2010; Grant et al. 2019; McCarthy 2018). Yet despite this, most urban research in Canada focuses on the country's biggest cities – Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal – often overlooking vital regional centers. The same can be seen internationally as well with a focus on major cities over the mid- and small-sized cities that make up the vast majority of urban areas around the world. We also look at Halifax because of the many demographic, social, and economic changes it has faced since the 1990s.

Founded in 1749, Halifax is one of the oldest cities in Canada. Even so, it did not become the Halifax Regional Municipality until 1996 when the neighboring city of Dartmouth, the town of Bedford, and Halifax County were amalgamated with Halifax (Grant, Vissers, and Haney 2012). The city's population is concentrated in the Halifax Peninsula, Dartmouth – located north of the peninsula across the harbor – and in nearby surrounding suburban areas. Most other areas of greater metro are rural and sparsely populated.

Over the past few decades Atlantic Canada experienced rapid socio-economic change. The region's economy was historically resource-based but shifted in recent years to a more service-oriented and technologically advanced economy. These regional changes were initially sparked by the decline of the fishing industry in the 1990s, contributing to a period of economic stagnation (Baum 1999; George and Reid 2005) and high unemployment rates (Nova Scotia 1984). In fact, the region's economic history draws comparisons to American rustbelt cities such as Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Buffalo and Detroit (Kaida et al. 2019b). However, in that broader context, Halifax was largely spared the worst of the brunt (Grant and Kronstal 2013) and transitioned to a creative economy. Regardless, with economic downturn came large-scale out-migration as young and middle-aged people moved westward for enhanced employment opportunity. Rural areas and small towns in Nova Scotia, in particular, experienced deleterious effects to their economies, families, communities and support structures, with outmigration detrimentally impacting volunteer organizations (Harling Stalker and Phyne 2014). Moreover, Nova Scotia has the highest senior to child ratio in Canada (CBC News 2015), and Halifax, with a median age of 39, is a rapidly aging city (Gosse et al. 2016; SHS Consulting 2015). To stem population loss and

aging, the provincial government turned to immigration, increasing the immigrant (Ramos and Yoshida 2011) and international student populations (Chira and Belhodja 2012). Similarly, increasingly refugees have settled in the city and other cities in the region (Kaida, Hou, and Stick 2019a). Sufficient social services have long been lauded as necessary to facilitate successful resettlement, and to securing the retention of immigrants and refugees in their initial destination (Simich, Beiser, and Mawani 2003; Nakhaie 2018).

Compounding these trends, the city has a history of injustice towards its long-standing and deep-rooted African-Canadian population that has faced adversity. In the 1960s, for example, Africville, a well-established African Nova Scotian neighborhood, was demolished (Clairmont 2014). Many of the residents were uprooted and relocated to public housing (Smardon 2011; Africville Genealogy Society 1992) or pushed out to rural parts of the city. This led to many pockets of racialized neighborhoods, many now economically precarious. In recent years, several of these areas, such as the city's North End and parts of Dartmouth (area across the harbor), have faced issues of gentrification and rapid change (Grant and Gregory 2016).

Overall, Halifax is a dynamic and fast changing city facing problems common to cities across North America. Given that Halifax is the only mid-sized municipality in the province, centrally located in a region wrestling with a transitioning economy, aging populations, racialization, and gentrification, the presence of adequately funded organizations delivering social support services to residents is imperative. Cuts in federal funding to the provinces and nonprofits have made it increasingly difficult to fulfill this mission (Grant et al. 2019). In this paper, we set out to see how the municipal government supports these organizations and how that looks on the ground through a socio-spatial analysis of need in times of cutbacks at higher levels of government.

## **How we analyze municipal funding and need**

The amalgamation of HRM was accompanied by the 1996 service exchange agreement, outlining provincial and municipal responsibilities pertaining to social service delivery. In exchange for the municipality's responsibility over local police services and the maintenance of streets and roads, the province assumed responsibility for the financing and delivery of social services. This agreement, however, did not prevent HRM from funding social supports (Halifax 2019d). Currently, most of this funding comes from the Halifax Regional Municipality Community Grants Program, which provides funding for non-profits and registered charities (Halifax 2019c). While this program does not provide funding for operating expenses because of the 1996 service exchange agreement (Vojnovic 1999), it does provide capital and project grants to non-profit community groups in the delivery of volunteer and community programs and activities, including assistance to seniors, the homeless, battered women and other vulnerable groups (Halifax 2011, 2019a). Our analysis draws upon municipal archival material on the Halifax Regional Municipality Community Grants Program and tax exemptions awarded to NGOs in Halifax as well as Canadian Census data on the city. It is important to examine tax exemptions as it is a common practice for nonprofits and NGOs to seek resource diversification by securing support through a variety of channels (Lu 2015). In addition to providing grants, governments often provide tax exemptions to NGOs and nonprofits to help reduce their operating costs (Dehne et al. 2008). In

Canada, tax relief is commonly used at the federal level as an alternative channel of state support to provide indirect funding to registered charities (Corrigall-Brown 2016). However, few studies examine the extent to which municipalities offer tax exemptions or the degree to which exemptions offset funding reductions.

We examined government records from the Halifax Municipal Archival online database to assess which organizations received municipal grants in 1996, 2006, 2011, and 2016. These intervals were selected because they correlate with the most recent publicly available census data, providing the most accurate information available of the municipality's deprived areas. City data for 1996 and 2006 were mined from Halifax Regional Municipality council minutes. They were scanned and analyzed for all motions related to grants awarded to NGOs in the city. The majority of motions for these years referred to various appendices and attachments outlining each recipient organization and the amount received. Individual grant awards and amounts were then identified and extracted from council minutes and compiled into lists. The data for 2011 and 2016 were obtained through the Community Grants Program online annual report (see Halifax 2019a). This resource, which was only available for years 2007-present at the time of writing, outlines all recipient organizations receiving funding for a given year. Unlike the documentation on grants, detailed information on tax exemptions to NGOs are contained in municipal bylaws. Because these bylaws are continuously updated, we contacted the office of the municipal clerk to obtain the 1996, 2006, 2011, and 2016 versions of the appropriate bylaws to evaluate fluctuations in the number of tax exemptions provided to non-profit organizations in Halifax. While other cities record the exact dollar amount of tax exemptions, the HRM does not maintain information on the specific amounts offered. When we contacted the office of the municipal clerk to obtain information on tax relief to non-profits, we were informed that the city only stores records of the percentage of tax exemptions and conversions from commercial to residential rates.

Organizations receiving grants and tax exemptions were then categorized based on their mandates and/or the type of service they provided, including environment, arts, recreation, history, health, diversity, social support, or 'other' organizations. We then probed 'social support' organizations further by coding them into adult education, family needs, offenders, poverty, seniors, women, and 'other' types of organizations. This allowed us to analyze the total amount of funding and total number of tax exemptions the city offered to NGOs, as well as which sectors received the most and/or the least municipal support in 1996, 2006, 2011, and 2016. Both the funding data and tax exemptions were analyzed using basic graphical analysis.

Research emphasizes the importance of accounting for the severity of need in areas where the organization is located in determining the influence and extent of funding received (Garrow 2010; Lee 2017). We believe an understanding of the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of Halifax communities is essential to assessing the wider impacts of state funding on organizations, residents, and neighborhoods; and to discerning how fluctuations in funding relate to the efficacy of NGO's delivery of services and their engagement of citizens. In addition to examining overall funding trends, an objective of the study is to determine whether the geographic location of funded organizations corresponds with the area's need for social support services. That



is, whether neighborhoods undergoing the greatest transition – as well as those most in need – are linked to organizations receiving municipal support.

This is an important consideration as non-profits are often strategically placed to meet the needs of those in their community (Bielefeld and Murdoch 2004). People are also more likely to use services close to home (Yan, Guo, and Paarlberg 2014), notwithstanding that the service scope of some large organizations may transcend locale. For most small or mid-size organizations, however, most service is tied to location. Limited access to services signals a failure of access to resources with consequences for generations' opportunities and social capital (Lee 2017).

We used telephone directories to locate the addresses of NGOs aimed at providing social services. In some cases where directories proved inconclusive, we contacted the organizations' administrators or directors of defunct organizations listed in the Nova Scotia Registry of Joint Stocks Database. This exacting detail allowed us to delve into a more comprehensive analysis and understanding of NGO sectors that received funding and correlate funded organizations to specific locales of need.

To gauge the Halifax neighborhoods most in-need of social services we used Statistics Canada Census data on Census tracts (CTs), commonly used geographic units in studies of urban contexts (Prouse, Ramos, Grant, and Radice 2014). We then examined organizations serving communities across five distinct dimensions of need, including: adults with low levels of education; families; those with low incomes; the elderly; and women. To measure education, we examined the percentage of people with less than a high school degree. For families, we used the percentage of single-parent census families. To measure low income, we looked at the percentage of people classified as low-income earners. For the elderly, the percentage of people aged 65 and over was analyzed. We also looked at the percentage of women in given census tracts. We believe that the individuals and groups captured by these variables best reflect the service populations for the social service organizations in our analysis. Additionally, social support organizations and researchers use most of the same census measures used in our study when evaluating inequality in Halifax (see Ramos and MacNabb 2018).

Using these variables as representing dimensions of need, we created an index as a measure of overall need for CTs across Halifax for the years 1996, 2006, 2011, and 2016 by first ranking CTs based on each variable, from highest percentage to lowest percentage. We then summed the ranks for each variable to produce a single number as a measure of overall need for each CT. Census tracts with lower index scores equate to having higher degrees of need for services provided by social support organizations. These rankings were then sorted into quintiles with the first quintile denoting more need.

This allowed the mapping of both funded organizations and locales in need across the city, graphically illustrating organizational funding correlation to on-the-ground need for 1996, 2006, 2011, and 2016. All maps and data were modified to be consistent with 1996 CT boundaries to offer comparison across years. We excluded CTs from our 2006, 2011, and 2016 analyses that were redrawn or contained missing data, making it unfeasible to conduct cross comparison between years. It is noteworthy that the most highly populated CTs in Halifax remained relatively stable over our target years.

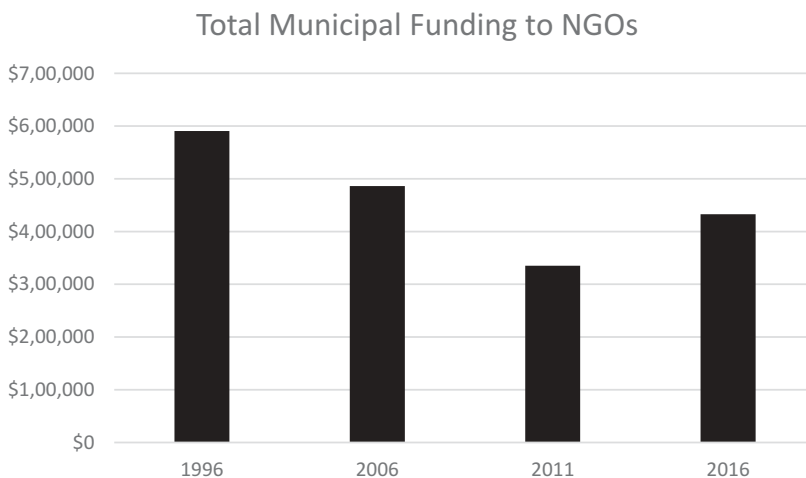
## Findings

### *Municipal funding*

We begin our analysis in [Figure 1](#) by examining the total amounts of municipal funding allotted to NGOs for 1996, 2006, 2011, and 2016. It shows that in 1996, Halifax granted \$590,051 to organizations; by 2006, total funding declined to \$486,141, further reduced to \$335,221 in 2011. In 2016, however, total funding to NGOs rebounded to \$432,751 – still less than what was offered in 1996.

To examine whether cuts were experienced equally across civil society sectors, [Figure 2](#) analyzes the type of organizations receiving funding. Especially notable is the reduction of funding to the social support sector. In 1996, Halifax granted \$260,061 to social support organizations. By 2006, this was reduced to \$104,238, \$59,266 in 2011, and \$39,800 in 2016. When considering the impact of inflation, the extent of reductions in funding is even greater when factored over years. Over the four periods we examined, the smallest grant to social support organizations was \$500, the largest was \$26,000, and the average grant size was \$7,128.69. For a complete listing of all social support grant values and recipients please refer the article's appendix, found on the project website (<http://perceptionsofchange.ca/municipalfundingandneed.html>). Similar declines occurred in the health field, with a total funding of \$121,100 in 1996, \$41,497 in 2006, \$3,854 in 2011, with no funding in 2016. The arts sector experienced the most unstable funding over the three years analyzed. Arts organizations received \$129,000 in 1996, increasing to \$145,550 in 2006 – the most of any sector that year – and then received \$61,100 and \$66,275 in 2011 and 2016, respectively.

Despite these cuts, there was an increase in funding to organizations promoting diversity. The diversity sector received \$6,000 in 1996, \$23,439 in 2006 and \$41,500 in 2011. However, this dropped to \$10,650 in 2016. Despite the decrease in 2016, the increase of immigrants and international students to Halifax after the introduction of a Provincial Nominee Program in the province in 2003 likely drove the earlier increase of funding to organizations promoting diversity and resettlement. Environmental



**Figure 1.** Total municipal funding to NGOs.

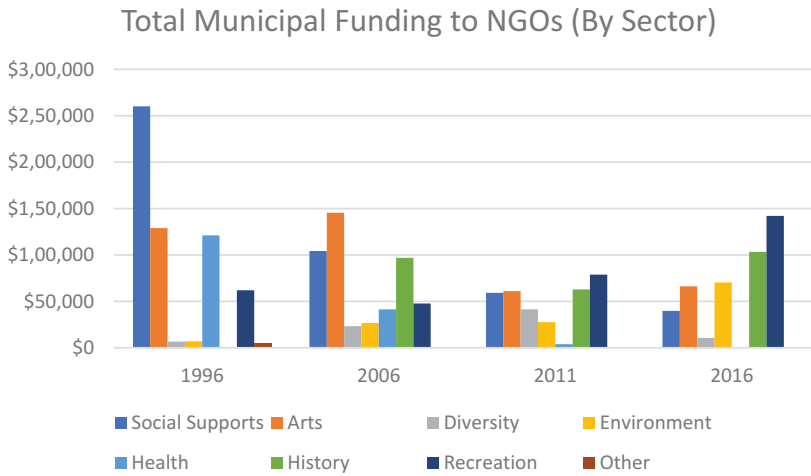
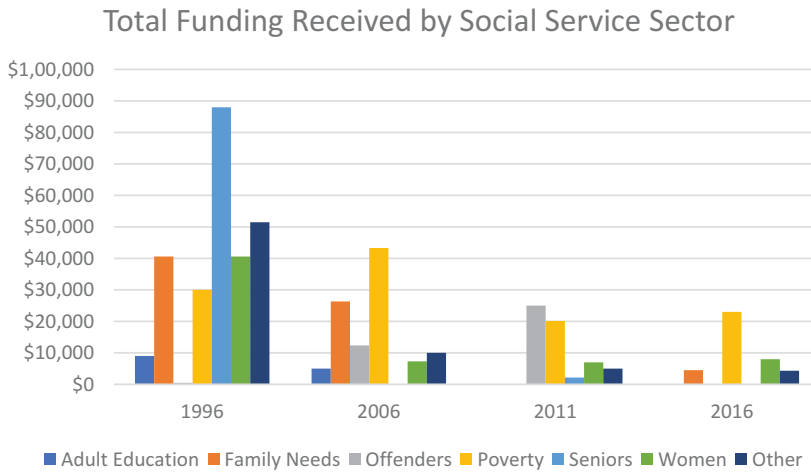


Figure 2. Total municipal funding to NGOs (by sector).

organizations also received a boost in funding from just \$7,000 in 1996 to \$26,815 in 2006, increasing to \$27,670 in 2011, then to \$70,427 in 2016. Grants in support of recreation totaled \$62,200 in 1996, dipped to \$47,727 in 2006, but then increased to \$78,871 in 2011 and \$142,199 in 2016. A substantial portion of funding was offered to local historical organizations during this period. After receiving no municipal support in 1996, funding for those organizations jumped to \$96,875 in 2006, \$62,960 in 2011, and \$103,400 in 2016.

Figure 2 shows that three sectors – social supports, health, and arts – were most affected by fluctuations and declines in municipal funding. Organizations aimed at providing support for individuals and neighborhoods most under stress and in need were the ones most negatively impacted by cuts, whereas funding to more nonessential groups increased.

In Figure 3 we drill down further to probe how organizations across the social support sector were affected by a decrease in municipal funding. We found that as federal budget cuts occurred, the city also defunded organizations and shifted its funding priorities away from social support services, specifically during the 1990s and 2000s. Organizations targeting the improvement and reintegration of criminal offenders received increases from \$500, to \$12,350, then \$25,000 in 1996, 2006 and 2011, respectively. However, these organizations received no funding in 2016. All other social support organizations experienced a reduction in municipal grants from 1996 to 2016. Adult education received \$9,000 in 1996, \$5,000 in 2006, and no municipal support in 2011 and 2016. Family needs organizations were recipients of \$40,570 in 1996, \$26,307 in 2011, no aid in 2011, and only \$4,500 in 2016. Funding for women’s organizations totaled \$40,580 in 1996, \$7,280 in 2006, \$7,000 in 2011, and \$8,000 in 2016. Aid to senior’s organizations was \$87,950 in 1996 – the most for any social support sector that year; however, no funding followed in 2006, with only a minimal increase to \$2,150 in 2011, and no support in 2016. NGOs targeting issues of poverty received \$30,000 in 1996, a moderate increase to \$43,301 in 2006, a reduction in 2011 to \$20,116, followed



**Figure 3.** Total funding received by social service sector.

by an increase to \$23,000 in 2016. Lastly, organizations classified as ‘other’ received \$51,461 in 1996, \$10,000 in 2006, \$5,000 in 2011, and \$4,300 in 2016.

The 1996 service exchange agreement, which transferred much of the income assistance and social housing responsibilities from the municipality to the province, may have contributed to these declines (Hobson, Cameron, and Locke 2005). Likewise, stringent criteria for social assistance led to declines in the number of individuals receiving funding and the amounts that they received (Grant et al. 2019). Organizations’ funding requests to HRM were determined based on urgency of need, inability to acquire funding from alternative sources, and potential public benefit (Halifax 2019a). The need of organizations and communities was not fully met as evidenced in the volume of applications the municipality received compared to how many it funded. For instance, in 2016 the city received 102 applications for \$1,086,996.62 but only funded 55 for \$432,751 (Halifax 2019b).

### **Tax exemptions**

In [Figure 4](#) we look at tax exemptions offered to organizations in Halifax in 1996, 2006, 2011, and 2016. As discussed earlier, HRM’s records do not allow us to examine specific amounts offered. Only the percentage of reduction in municipal taxes to organizations, and conversions from commercial to residential rates are recorded. Due to this limitation, we look at the number of organizations receiving any exemption or conversion. Our findings show that the proportion of tax exemptions to social support organizations remained relatively stable from 1996–2011 but increased in 2016. We find that in 1996, just 19% of exemptions were offered to social support organizations. This improved to 23% in 2006 but returned to 19% in 2011. In 2016, it increased to 32%. Similar to studies showing provinces have stepped in to help fund NGOs when federal funding is cut (see Kay and Ramos 2018; Masson 2015; Ramos and Young 2018), our results evidence that in the case of HRM, the municipal government stepped in by increasing indirect support to social support organizations through tax exemptions.

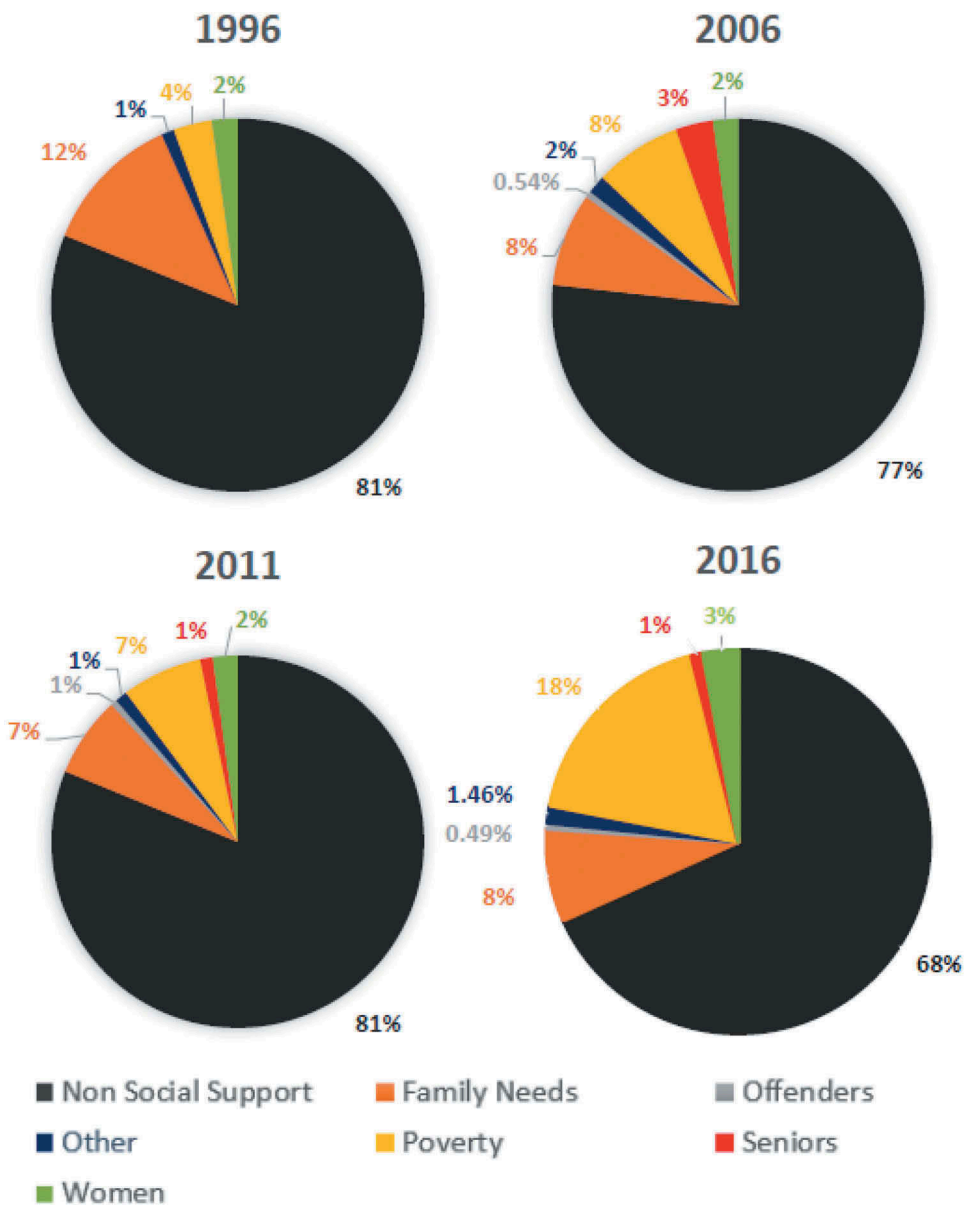


Figure 4. Tax exemptions 1996–2016.

However, funding through tax exemptions tends to benefit larger capitalized organizations owning property over smaller and emerging organizations. This means that such benefits tend to accrue to larger organizations but are of limited benefit to smaller and/or newer organizations. It also pushes organizations to seek funding from higher levels of government or other sources such as foundations. This can lead to problems as organizations compete for smaller slices of a shrinking pie; and as higher levels of government lack the requisite on-the-ground knowledge of communities to target funding effectively.

### ***Do declines in funding correspond with levels of need?***

Considering that reductions in funding to social support organizations may be warranted as communities develop and improve and as resident's demand for support declines, we also aimed to see how municipal funding aligns with the needs of communities, focusing specifically on those with the most pressing social service needs. To understand how reductions in funding to social service organizations are related to conditions of need and geospatial distribution, we plot quintiles of our index of 'need' based on Census data in 1996, 2006, 2011, and 2016 on a map of CTs across Halifax in [Figure 5–8](#). The darkest shade corresponds to the quintiles of need with the highest percentage of adults with low levels of education, single-parent families, those with low incomes, seniors, and women. The callout box in the lower right-hand corner depicts the greater HRM area. In our analysis, we focus on the most densely populated areas and the city's urban core. The peninsula positioned at the center of the map is the Halifax Peninsula. Due south from the Halifax peninsula across the Northwest Arm is Spryfield, due west is Fairview, and the northern area across the harbor is Dartmouth. With the exception of the water, the maps show that CTs in the northern part of the city's peninsula (the North End) and sections of Dartmouth, Fairview, and Spryfield, together forming a U-shape around the southern areas of the peninsula have higher percentages of individuals that may need the support of social service organizations. Many of these areas that compose the U-shape are historically low income, with older public housing stock in need of repair (Prouse et al. 2014a). At the same time, the city's 'North End' exhibits some signs of decreasing need between 2006 and 2016; we take this as a sign of gentrification of the area. During this period, many of the CTs in the area transitioned from the highest quintile of need into the third or fourth highest.

In [Figure 5–8](#) we also plot the locations of social service organizations on CTs and quintiles of need. In [Figure 5](#), we see that in 1996, most municipally funded social service organizations are located on the Halifax Peninsula. With a few exceptions, they tend to be either in or near CTs in the first quintile of need on our index. Similarly, most NGOs located off-peninsula are also in CTs of higher need or adjacent to them. It is noteworthy that in 1996, the year with the most municipal funding, there is only limited support to organizations off-peninsula. In [Figure 6](#), which looks at 2006, we begin to see the disappearance of funding to off-peninsula social service organizations. Family support organizations in Spryfield – characterized by low income and public housing (located south of the peninsula across the Northwest Arm) – no longer receive funding. Downtown Dartmouth (north of the peninsula, across the harbor) also witnesses a similar trend. Likewise, the number of municipally funded social service organizations located on the Halifax Peninsula is also reduced. Looking at [Figure 7](#), in 2011 there are far fewer organizations funded in the social support sector. In [Figure 8](#) we see only three social support organizations. (It should be noted that we omitted the location for a woman's shelter that is in the dataset, for safety reasons). With the exception of Halifax's North End, the distribution of need across the city remains fairly consistent with what was seen in 1996 despite the reductions in municipally funded organizations.

The reduction in the number of social support organizations funded coincides with overall budget cuts to municipal organization funding in the city for 2006 and 2011. While there is a relative abundance of municipally funded organizations in 1996, by 2006, the number of funded organizations is drastically reduced, and in 2016 only a fraction of those funded in 1996 continue to be funded. Because the spatial proximity of nonprofits and NGOs to the populations they serve is important for these organizations to achieve their mandate, our results,

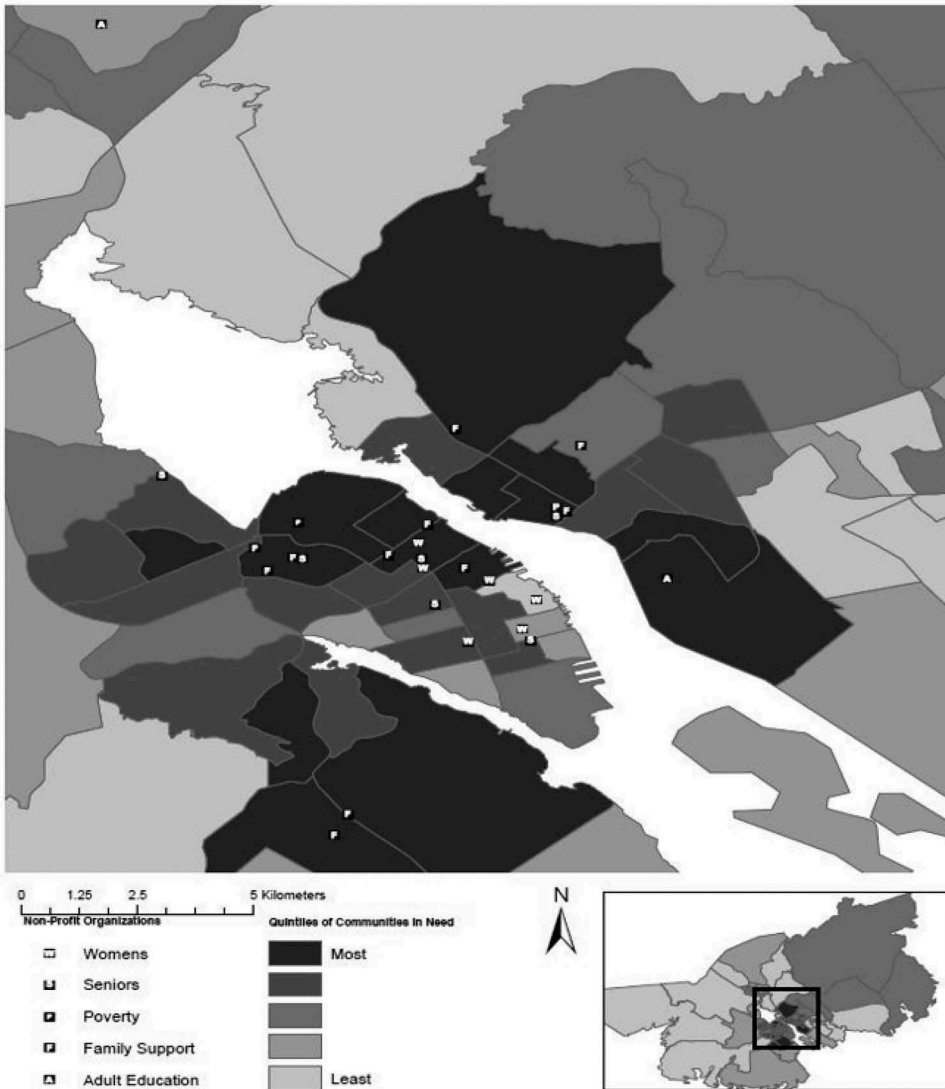
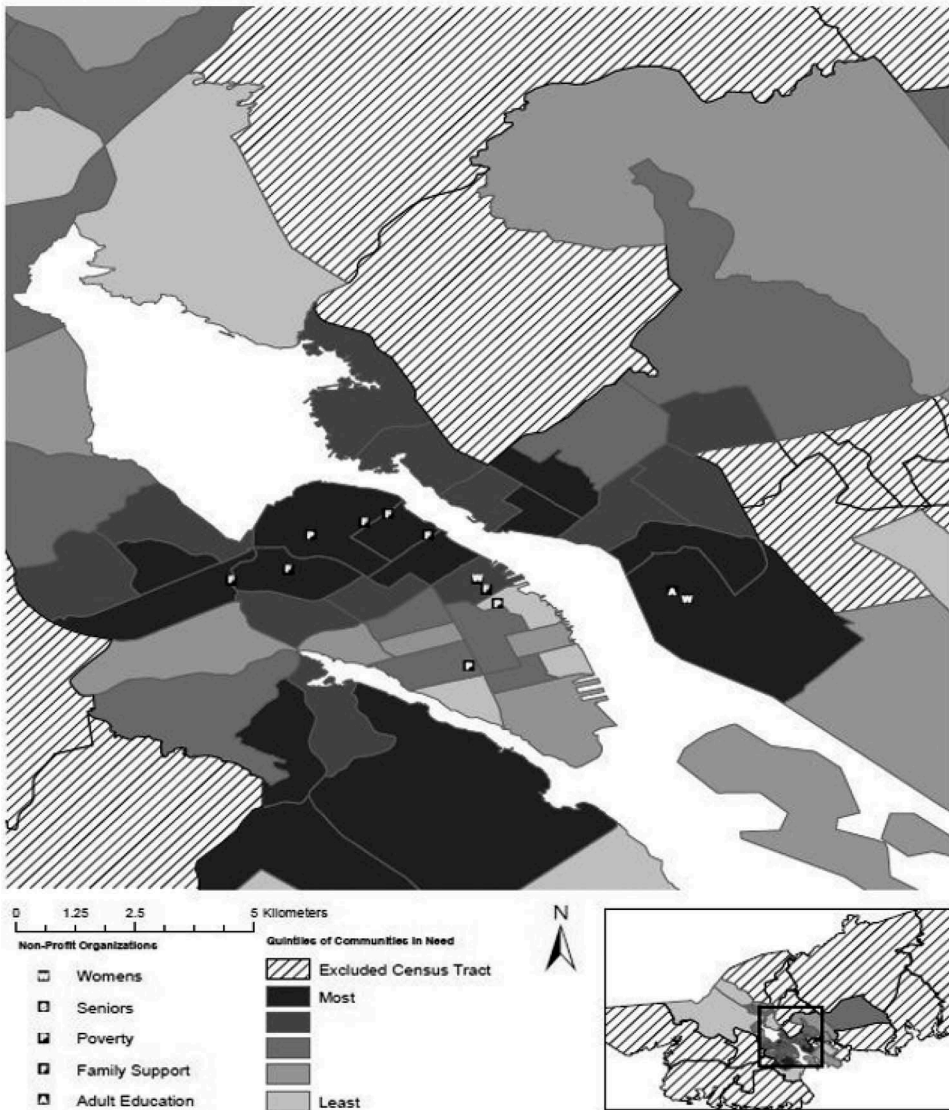


Figure 5. Distribution of non-profit organizations and communities of need (1996).

indicating a distancing of nonprofits from their clients, suggest that reductions in municipal funding may have a deleterious impact on the efficacy of organizations and vulnerable communities.

## Conclusion

Research shows that NGOs and nonprofits play important roles in promoting social justice, addressing public issues, and providing resources to those in need. However, because many NGOs and nonprofits rely on state funding to meet these goals, reductions in governmental support threaten their ability to effectively serve and advocate for the public (Lu 2013). To explore these issues and to understand municipal funding



**Figure 6.** Distribution of non-profit organizations and communities of need (2006).

trends we analyzed reports, council minutes, bylaws and other documentation on grants and tax exemptions. We also compiled complete lists of total amounts of funding and proportions of tax exemptions for NGOs in HRM and then analyzed the type of organizations subsidized and their mandates. We did this to see if specific types of organizations and general social need were correlated to funding decisions.

The findings from our analysis help to build on literature on state funding in two ways. First, the data we generated adds another dimension to the understanding of state funding of NGOs and nonprofits by looking at the role of municipalities, offering information on the relationship between municipal and national, and municipal and provincial, funding trends. Our analysis shows that on one hand, the



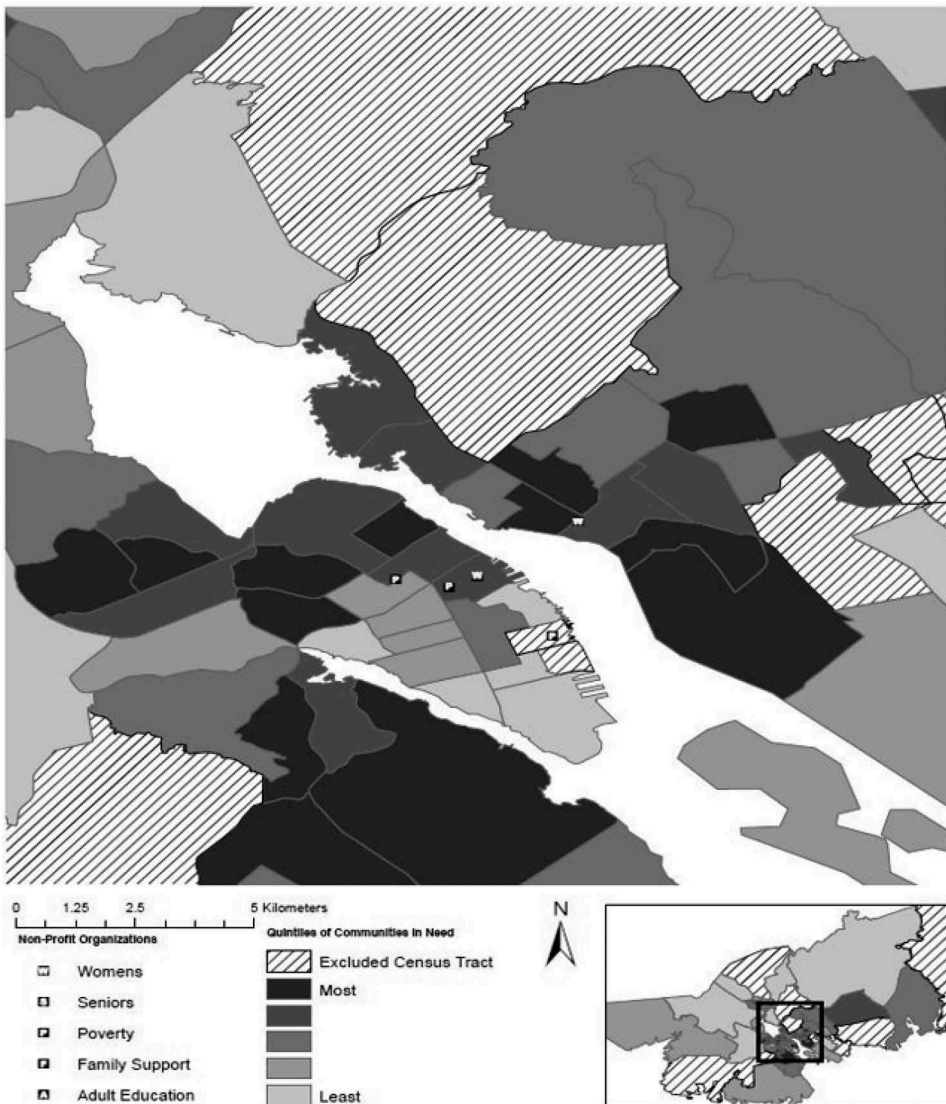


Figure 7. Distribution of non-profit organizations and communities of need (2011).

amount of direct municipal funding declined over our study period and this aligns with national trends. On the other hand, the amount of indirect funding through tax exemptions increased and this is consistent with developments occurring at the provincial level of government, with studies showing provincial governments' attempts to fill voids left by national cutbacks. This finding contributes to literature on state funding and the role that subnational governments play by evidencing municipal impacts paralleling those of provinces as shown by other researchers (see Kay and Ramos 2018; Masson 2009; Ramos and Young 2018). Second, the use of a socio-spatial approach reveals declines in municipal funding to social service organizations has little correlation with community need. We found that in addition



Figure 8. Distribution of non-profit organizations and communities of need (2016).

to a reduction in the number of funded organizations, those receiving funding were not located in the areas most in need. Because the spatial proximity of nonprofits and NGOs to the populations they serve is important for these organizations to achieve their mandate, our results suggest that reductions in municipal funding may have a deleterious impact on the efficacy of organizations and vulnerable communities.

Overall, our findings show that cutbacks to funding are not a response to improvements on the ground, nor a decrease in demand. They are a byproduct of austerity policies at various levels of government. In the attempt to address budgetary concerns,

these mandates have exacerbated hardship for nonprofits – an example of how social policy can both create problems but can also solve them (Grant et al. 2019). Our findings highlight the importance of organizations diversifying their funding channels to weather times of cutback. Civil society and social justice could be threatened unless organizations insulate themselves from multiple scales of austerity. As governments continue to pursue austerity policies while transferring human service responsibilities to non-governmental agencies, vulnerable communities and populations may be at greater risk and impoverished communities can spiral increasingly behind while revitalization opportunities evaporate.

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## Geolocation Information

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