

Book Review

Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly
2023, Vol. 52(4) 1134–1137
© The Author(s) 2023
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
journals.sagepub.com/home/nvs



Gitterman, D. P., & Britto, N. (Eds.). (2021). *The intersector: How the public, nonprofit, and private sectors can address America's challenges*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press. 283 pp., \$34.99. ISBN: 978-0815739029

Reviewed by: Tiana Marrese , School of Social Policy & Practice, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA

DOI: 10.1177/08997640231158587

The Intersector: How the Public, Nonprofit, and Private Sectors Can Address America's Challenges compiles interdisciplinary perspectives from more than 40 contributors to highlight the importance of cross-sector collaboration in tackling today's societal issues. From hyper-local to cross-national challenges, editors Daniel P. Gitterman and Neil Britto recognize that modern problems are intrinsically connected across sectors. The multidimensional nature of these challenges implies a need for robust solutions that are necessarily conditioned on teamwork between the public, private, and nonprofit spheres. Gitterman and Britto acknowledge the imprecise nature of this collaboration and broadly define it as the existence of partnership between more than one sector for public action (p. 2). The authors additionally coin the term *intersector* in which knowledge, resources, and authority are shared across all three spheres to address complex problems (p. 2). Contributors throughout the book build on this foundation with terminology and characterizations that elucidate specific facets or instances of this phenomenon. Operating at both the micro- and macro-level, *The Intersector* provides a compilation of chapters that showcase novel ideas about the theoretical framework of cross-sector work and present real-world cases of this collaboration.

The premise of the book is simple yet cannot be understated: as societies increasingly face complex and multidimensional issues, it is a necessity rather than a choice to engage in cross-sector thinking and action. Much of the foundational literature in intersectoral research is couched in public administration and management scholarship (p. 3). This literature situates knowledge formation along two dimensions: process implementation and outcome assessment. Gitterman and Britto add to this conversation by pooling insights from other fields and centering the voices of practitioners. They organize these contributions into two parts: Part I communicates new knowledge about *intersector* work with a focus on policy areas, including public

health and education, and Part II relays successes and failures from the field. *The Intersector* highlights cross-sector collaboration at various societal levels (i.e., local, state, international) and elucidates emergent focus areas.

Part I of *The Intersector* advances new knowledge about cross-sector collaboration with theory development and its relation to substantive practice areas. In Chapter 1, Peter G. Klein and Anita McGahan assert that goal congruence, resource alignment, and outcome measurements serve as the paramount dimensions of partnership success. Rob van Tulder complements this work in the second chapter with the reiteration that today's most urgent problems are those requiring collective action, and these issues necessitate adequate collaboration across spheres. Authors in subsequent chapters of Part I focus on more specialized facets of *intersector* work. Mary Margaret Frank and Kathryn Babineau highlight the importance of risk management in cross-sector projects and look to examples derived from corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices to illuminate the power and influence held by the private sector. Kirk Emerson and Min Woo Ahn then abstract from CSR to highlight the more general collaborative governance regimes in which multiple forms of autonomous organizations work together to achieve a collective purpose. They survey the current literature and summarize key findings along dimensions of system context and drivers, performance metrics, and developmental trajectories. An essential conclusion from their analysis is the importance of leadership and team development across institutional structures. Lisa Blomgren Amsler provides a macro lens for the dimensions touched on by previous chapters by emphasizing public law's impact on the capacity to collaborate across sectors. Considering a project's legal environment, in conjunction with its actors and tasks, is necessary to understand the full scope of actions available to solve public problems. The information in the first five chapters develops the theoretical scaffolding required to appreciate the real-world examples throughout the remainder of the book.

In addition to theoretical development, *The Intersector* presents accounts from relevant practice areas and specific projects. While each piece is a valuable contribution, the knowledge derived from these works is best understood through the emphasis of several overarching themes. Analogous to William B. Eimicke's assertion in Chapter 18 that management is "a craft and not a science," the practice of cross-sector collaboration is more a skill than a calculated equation (p. 215). Collaboration in addressing a single problem involves acknowledging structural and systemic drivers implicitly connected to the issue and the necessity for site- and community-specific solutions (Chandra, p. 91; Brody, p. 179). A natural corollary that arises is the idea that social capital and trust between and within parties are significant contributors to successful projects (Turley & Holzman, p. 117; Graves & Higgins, p. 187), while politics and identity groups such as religious-affiliate organizations can aid or hinder desired outcomes (Henig, p. 105; Rogers, p. 146). Various chapters presented in *The Intersector* bolster their relevancy by including recent events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and emphasizing the importance of data when addressing societal issues. Safe data practices with ties to local context and rigorous analysis are pertinent to future cross-sector collaboration (Pettit & Hendey, p. 222). With ideas drawn from this book, one

can begin to develop robust and multi-level approaches predicated on cross-sector collaboration to address society's most pressing issues.

The motivation for the book and several key chapters provide novel and nuanced ideas that contribute meaningfully to *intersector* research, yet, the entire work serves only as one piece to a necessarily larger body of research that must occur for robust analysis of cross-sector collaboration. *The Intersector* benefits from a broad range of vantage points, but this breadth comes at the cost of depth. This book is best suited for practitioners or early scholars who want to understand the broad strokes of intersectional collaboration. Future research should extend this foundation by further developing the underlying theoretical framework, deploying meta-analyses of case studies, and utilizing large-sample analytics. The field is ripe for consistent terminology (a point largely omitted by the book) and meticulous findings encapsulating the unique experiences between governments, private entities, and nonprofits.

One way *The Intersector* remains anemic to serving as a full body of literature is its lack of focus on attributes of individual actors that contribute to the formation and growth of intersector work. While several chapters acknowledge the importance of leadership and team cohesion, the book remains silent around individuals' influence over a project's success (or failure). Emerson and Ahn cite leadership as "the most frequently analyzed construct among system-level factors" but fail to provide a robust review of these findings (p. 72). This is coupled with the omission of actor buy-in as a salient determinant of a project's achievements. In today's interconnected and highly visible world, it is essential to acknowledge the opaque boundaries between personal actions and institutional outcomes. Cross-sector collaboration depends simultaneously on large-scale cooperation and people-level teamwork. Gitterman and Britto's inclusion of real-world examples provides illustrations around context- and people-specific conclusions, but the book fails to synthesize these patterns into theoretical elements. The "craft" of intersectional work implies a social component that is heavily dependent on understanding how individuals shape the larger institutions in which they are situated. *The Intersector* leaves room for future scholarship to explore the importance of micro-level components that contribute to the macro-level trends of *intersector* work and their implications for stakeholders.

Daniel P. Gitterman and Neil Britto compile valuable insights from academics and practitioners that adds to the conversation around cross-sector collaboration and its effects on future work. The book serves as a reference for those wanting a broad, brief understanding of the field. *The Intersector's* most notable contribution is its inclusion of real-world examples in conjunction with the voices of practitioners. These pieces suggest that the book is best utilized as a tool within classrooms to aid in applied lessons of solving social policy issues, including site-specific solutions and good data practices. Gitterman and Britto focus on the nuances that arise when fundamentally different sectors choose to engage in collaboration and call for further development in the "art form" that is *intersector* work. Future literature can add to this conversation with richer empirical testing of theoretical frameworks, more robust systematic analyses, and a focus on how individuals shape the larger context of institutional collaboration. Various fields are poised to make meaningful contributions to this growing body

of knowledge. With this understanding, *The Intersector: How the Public, Nonprofit, and Private Sectors Can Address America's Challenges* serves as an essential building block in the conversation of successful cross-sector cooperation necessary in solving the world's most pressing issues.

ORCID iD

Tiana Marrese  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9911-9404>

Reviewer Biography

Tiana Marrese is a PhD student studying volunteerism and nonprofit organizations at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research specializes in using a data-driven approach to understand communities' prosocial behaviors across space and time. She is particularly interested in analyzing the implications of this behavior on market structures.