

Aaron Horvath

Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society

ahorvath@stanford.edu
aaronhorvath.org
+1(404)398-7723

CURRENT POSITION

2024– Research Scholar & Associate Director of Research, Stanford University Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society (PACS)

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Stanford University, Sociology (2021)
Dissertation: *From the Socialism of Intelligence to the Aristocracy of Knowledge: Administrative Practice and Political Authority in American Democracy, 1905–1921*
Committee: Walter W. Powell, Sarah A. Soule, John W. Meyer, Barbara Kiviat, Rob Reich

A.B. Princeton University, Sociology, *Magna Cum Laude* (2010)
Thesis: *The Charitable Imagination*
Advisors: Viviana Zelizer, Philip Kasinitz, Mitchell Duneier

RESEARCH INTERESTS

I am an economic and organizational sociologist using a mix of historical, qualitative, and quantitative methods to examine the democratic contradictions of American philanthropy, the formalization of the public sphere, and the digital intermediation of community life.

PUBLICATIONS

- 2023 Horvath, Aaron. “Organizational supererogation and the transformation of nonprofit accountability.” *American Journal of Sociology* 128(4):1031–1036 ([pdf](#))
• Burt Award, Economic Sociology Section of the American Sociological Association (2020)
• Shils–Coleman Award, Theory Section of American Sociological Association (2020)
- 2023 Brandtner, Christof, Walter W. Powell, and A. Horvath. “From iron cage to glass house: Repurposing of bureaucratic management and the turn to openness.” Forthcoming in *Organization Studies*.
- 2020 Horvath, Aaron and Walter W. Powell. “Seeing Like a Philanthropist: From the Business of Benevolence to the Benevolence of Business.” pp 81–122 in *The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook, 3rd Edition*, eds. W.W. Powell and P. Bromley. Stanford University Press ([pdf](#))
- 2018 Horvath, Aaron “The Transformative Potential of Experience: Learning, group dynamics, and the development of civic virtue in a mobile soup kitchen.” *Voluntas* 31(5): 981–994 ([pdf](#))
- 2018 Horvath, Aaron, Christof Brandtner, and Walter W. Powell. “Serve or Conserve: Mission, Strategy, and Multi-Level Nonprofit Change During the Great Recession.” *Voluntas* 29(5): 976–993 ([pdf](#))
- 2016 Horvath, Aaron and Walter W. Powell. “Contributory or Disruptive: Do New forms of Philanthropy Erode Democracy?” pp 87–122 in *Philanthropy in Democratic Societies*, edited by R. Reich, L. Bernholz, and C. Cordelli. University of Chicago Press ([pdf](#))
- 2016 Powell, Walter W., Aaron Horvath, and Christof Brandtner. “Click and Mortar: Organizations on the Web.” *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 36: 101–120 ([pdf](#))

GENERAL AUDIENCE PUBLICATIONS (AND OTHER WRITING)

- 2023 *The Measure of Everyday Life* (WNCU Public Radio), “Encouraging Organizations to Go Above and Beyond,” interview with host Brian Southwell ([link](#))
- 2023 *Philanthropisms Podcast*, “Aaron Horvath: Civil Society & the Limits of Measurement,” interview with host Rhodri Davies ([link](#))
- 2023 Horvath, Aaron. “Civil Society By The Numbers? Nonprofits, Accountability, And The Creative Politics Of Quantitative Discipline.” *HistPhil.org* ([link](#))
- 2023 Horvath, Aaron and Micah McElroy. “Good Apples from a Rotten Tree.” *Alliance Magazine* (June): 52–55 ([link](#))
- 2023 Horvath, Aaron. “Your Package Has Been Delivered.” *Current Affairs* 8(2): 32–36 ([link](#))
- 2022 Horvath, Aaron. “Counting Alone?” pp 26–30 in Lucy Bernholz (ed.) *Philanthropy and Digital Civil Society: Blueprint 2023* ([link](#))
- 2022 Horvath, Aaron, and Jean Lin. “Statement for the Record,” U.S. Senate Committee on Finance, Hearing on Examining Charitable Giving and Trends in the Nonprofit Sector, March 17, 2022 ([link](#))
- 2021 Horvath, Aaron, and Jean Lin. “Innovative Inclusion or Civic Exclusion? The Response of Nonprofit Organizations to the COVID-19 Pandemic” Final report to the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. ([link](#))
- 2020 Horvath, Aaron and Jean Lin. “How Civic Organizations Are Helping to Fight COVID-19.” *Boston Review* ([link](#))
- 2020 Horvath, Aaron. “History and Challenges of American Philanthropy: A Primer.” James Irvine Foundation ([pdf](#))
- 2020 Horvath, Aaron and Walter W. Powell. “Seeing Like a Philanthropist: An organizational sociology of philanthropic history.” Blog on HistPhil.org ([link](#))
- 2019 Horvath, Aaron. “Common Measures and the Common Good.” Invited essay for Network for European Foundations, *Redefining the Pursuit of the Common Good* ([link](#))
- 2019 Horvath, Aaron. “Democracy’s Org Chart (Or, How did public administration lose its public?).” Blog on Baruch College’s *Adventures in Democracy* ([link](#))
- 2017 Horvath, Aaron. “Contributory or Disruptive: Do New Forms of Philanthropy Erode Democracy?” Excerpt and introduction featured in *Stanford Social Innovation Review* ([link](#))
- 2016 Horvath, Aaron. “Disruptive Philanthropy?” Blog on HistPhil.org ([link](#))
- 2015 Young, Cristobal and Aaron Horvath. “Do Sociologists Release Their Data and Code? Disappointing Results from a Field Experiment on Replication.” Blog on *orgtheory.net* ([link](#))
- 2013 Horvath, Aaron. “Deterring Gang Violence by Building Connections Across Crews.” Urban Institute. ([link](#))
- 2011–2013 Evaluations and reports for the Urban Institute ([author profile link](#))

GRANT AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

- 2020–2021 Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR), Population Health & Well-being Grant Program, “Innovative Inclusion or Civic Exclusion? The Response of Nonprofit Organizations to the COVID-19 Pandemic” Collaborators: Jean Lin (Cal State East Bay), Irene Bloemraad (UC Berkeley), and Walter W. Powell (Stanford), (\$50,000) ([link](#))
- 2020 Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics Early Career Workshop
- 2018 NSF Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Award, Sociology, SES #1801678 (\$11,540) ([link](#))
- 2015–2017 PhD Fellowship, Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society
- 2014 NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program, Honorable Mention
- 2010 Isidore Brown Senior Thesis Award for best Senior Thesis in Sociology at Princeton University for “The Charitable Imagination” (\$1,000)

ONGOING PROJECTS & DATA COLLECTION

- 2020– *Civic organizations’ responses to COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter activism*. Collaboration with Jean Lin (CSU East Bay), Irene Bloemraad (UC Berkeley), Walter W. Powell (Stanford). Funded by CIFAR. ([link](#))
- 2019–2020 *Digital Repository of Philanthropic Annual Reports*. Supported by Stanford PACS and Rockefeller Archive Center. ([link](#))
- 2017– *Ideals of Order: Administrative Science and the Dream of Rational Democracy*. Supported by NSF DDRI grant. ([link](#))
- 2013– *Civic Life of Cities* (formerly, *Stanford Project on the Evolution of Nonprofits*). Supported by Stanford PACS ([link](#))

PRESS COVERAGE (General audience outlets where my research has been referenced)

The Atlantic, BuzzFeed, Christian Science Monitor, Forbes, The Cut, The Guardian, The Independent, Inside Philanthropy, Insider, Nonprofit Quarterly, Palo Alto Daily Post, Stanford Social Innovation Review, The Wall Street Journal, WIRED, Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World (Anand Giridharadas)

PRESENTATIONS AND INVITED TALKS

- 2023 “How impact evaluation turned ‘community’ into a KPI and what it means for civil society.” Invited talk at London School of Economics, Accounting, Organizations, and Institutions Seminar (Department of Accounting). London.
- 2022 “Organizational supererogation and the transformation of nonprofit accountability.” Invited talk, Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, Philanthropy Research Workshop Series. Virtual.
- 2022 “Philanthropy and the transformation of mainstream economic narratives.” Invited talk, Institute for the Future, Palo Alto.
- 2022 “The impact of ‘impact,’ or, what the rise of impact evaluation tells us about the decline of civil society.” Invited talk, Institute for the Future. Palo Alto.
- 2021 “American Philanthropy: Contemporary Criticisms in Historical Perspective.” Effective Philanthropy Learning Initiative. Education for Philanthropy Professionals. Virtual.

- 2021 “From the Socialism of Intelligence to the Aristocracy of Knowledge: Administrative Practice and Political Authority in American Democracy, 1905–1921.” Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics Annual Conference, Network on Finance and Society. Virtual.
- 2021 “Seeing Like a Philanthropist: From the Business of Benevolence to the Benevolence of Business.” Cornell University Center for the Study of Economy & Society Colloquium Series.
- 2021 “Contemporary and Historical Trends in American Philanthropy.” Effective Philanthropy Learning Initiative, Education for Philanthropy Professionals. Virtual.
- 2020 “From Accounting to Accountability: Organizational supererogation and the transformation of nonprofit disclosure.” Carnegie Mellon University Economic Sociology Conference. Virtual.
- 2020 “Differential Receptivity to Institutional Change: Organizational Adoption as Encounters and Enactment.” Section on Organizations, Occupations, and Work/Organizational and Institutional Change. American Sociological Association Annual Meeting. Virtual.
- 2020 “From Accounting to Accountability: Organizational supererogation and the transformation of nonprofit disclosure.” Organizations, Occupations, and Work: Refereed Roundtables. American Sociological Association Annual Meeting. Virtual.
- 2020 “From Accounting to Accountability: Organizational supererogation and the transformation of charitable disclosure.” Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics Annual Conference, Network on Finance and Society. Virtual.
- 2020 “Lessons from the history of American Philanthropy.” Remarks delivered at meeting of James Irvine Foundation Board. Virtual sessions in May and July.
- 2019 “By the Numbers? The Transformation of Nonprofit Accountability.” ARNOVA Annual Conference. San Diego.
- 2019 “Seeing Like a Philanthropist.” Philanthropy & Social Impact, A Research Symposium, University of Southern California, Sol Price School of Public Policy. Los Angeles.
- 2018 “Activists, Academics, Administrators and the Ideal of Good Government in the U.S.” Regular Session. Order and Disorder in Comparative Historical Research, American Sociological Association Annual Meeting. Philadelphia.
- 2018 “Ideals of Order” Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, Junior Scholars Forum. Stanford.
- 2017 “Serve or Conserve?” ARNOVA Annual Conference. Grand Rapids, MI.
- 2017 “Science’s Billionaire Backers: Philanthropy’s Role in Research.” Panelist at annual World Conference of Science Journalists. San Francisco.
- 2017 “Serve or Conserve?” Organizations, Occupations, and Work Section Conference, American Sociological Association Annual Meeting. Montreal, Canada.
- 2017 “Click and Mortar: Organizations on the Web.” Opening panel at West Coast Nonprofit Data Conference, University of Washington, Evans School of Public Policy & Governance. Seattle.
- 2016 “How the Iron Cage Evolves.” Workshop on Social Movements, Economic Innovation, and Institutional Change, UCLA, Los Angeles.

- 2016 “Click and Mortar: Organizations on the Web.” Visuality, Materiality, and Multimodality, 2nd International Workshop, Copenhagen Business School, Copenhagen, Denmark.
- 2016 “How the Iron Cage Evolves.” American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Regular session on Economic Sociology. Seattle.
- 2016 “How the Iron Cage Evolves.” Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics Annual Conference, Network on Professions and Professionals in a Globalizing World. Berkeley.
- 2014 “Contributory vs. Disruptive: Are New Forms of Philanthropy Eroding Democracy?” American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Thematic Session on Philanthropy and Inequality. San Francisco.

TEACHING

- 2023 Stanford University Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society Research Seminar (Instructor)
- 2023 Stanford University Networks and Organizations Research Workshop (Organizer/convener)
- 2023 Organizations and social movements – Breaking the Iron Law? (Directed reading for Katie Eder, Stanford University undergraduate)
- 2021 “What happened when diverse nonprofits were required to abide by reductive metrics and what it means for civil society” (Lecture; Prof. Eva Meyersson Milgrom, Stanford University)
- 2020 “Organizations Online: What can we learn from organizations’ websites and Facebook pages?” (Guest Lecture; Prof. Jean Lin, Cal State East Bay Sociology)
- 2016 Organizational Design (TA for Prof. Sarah Soule, Stanford Graduate School of Business, Organizational Behavior)
- 2016 Introduction to Social Networks (Guest Lecture; Prof. Tomás Jiménez, Stanford Sociology)
- 2016 Introduction to Sociology (TA for Prof. Tomás Jiménez, Stanford Sociology)
- 2015 Sociology of Invention and Innovation (TA for Prof. Walter Powell, Stanford STS)

WORK EXPERIENCE

- 2022– Institute for the Future, Affiliate
- 2021–2024 Postdoctoral Fellow, Stanford University Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society (PACS)
- 2020 Aspen Institute, Consultant
- 2020 James Irvine Foundation, Consultant
- 2018 Laura Arrillaga-Andreessen Foundation, Program Evaluation Consultant
- 2011–2013 Urban Institute (Justice Policy Center), Research Assistant
- 2010–2011 Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., Research Assistant/Programmer
- 2009 Vera Institute of Justice, Cost-Benefit Analysis Unit
- 2008 United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, Strategic Resources Department

OTHER

- Member American Sociological Association (ASA), Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE), Social Science History Association (SSHA), Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA)
- Service Award Committee (Burt Award in Economic Sociology, ASA); Session Moderator (SASE)
- Reviewer American Journal of Sociology (AJS), American Sociological Review (ASR), Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory (JPART), Nonprofit Management & Leadership (NML), Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly (NVSQ), *Voluntas*
- Interests Competitive cycling, woodworking, coffee roasting (*Boom! Roasted Coffee Co.*), backpacking, affordable housing, the utopian stirrings of 1980s DC-area punk rock

REFERENCES

Walter W. Powell

Jacks Family Professor of Education and (by courtesy) Sociology, Organizational Behavior, Management Science and Engineering, Communication, and Public Policy
Stanford University Graduate School of Education
Stanford University
+1 (650) 725-7391
woodyp@stanford.edu

John W. Meyer

Professor of Sociology and (by courtesy), Education, Emeritus
Stanford University
+1 (650) 723-1868
meyer@stanford.edu

Rob Reich

Professor of Political Science and (by courtesy) Professor of Education
Stanford University
+1 (650) 723-2608
reich@stanford.edu

Sarah A. Soule

The Morgridge Professor of Organizational Behavior, Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and (by courtesy) Professor of Sociology
Stanford University Graduate School of Business
Stanford University
+1 (650) 721-1291
soule@stanford.edu

Barbara Kiviat

Assistant Professor of Sociology
Stanford University
+1 (650) 723-3956
bkiviat@stanford.edu

Viviana A. Zelizer

Lloyd Cotsen '50 Professor of Sociology
Princeton University
+1 (609) 258-4557
vzelizer@princeton.edu