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Strategies Head Start Program Managers Use to Acquire External Funding During Economic Downturns

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Judith Maxwell

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Strategies Head Start Program Managers Use to Acquire External Funding During

Economic Downturns

by

Judith A. Maxwell

MA, Rutgers University, 2017

BS, Rutgers University, 2007

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

March 2025

Abstract

Head Start programs risk limited external funding due to economic downturns, leading to difficulty managing programs effectively and competitively. Head Start program managers will continue to struggle if they do not develop strategies to acquire external financial support in response to economic downturns, like the COVID-19 pandemic, while enhancing staff and student experiences. Grounded in the resource-based view theory, the purpose of this qualitative single case study research project was to explore the strategies employed by Head Start program managers to effectively acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants were six Head Start program managers in New Jersey who implemented strategies to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and secondary data, including document analysis. Three themes emerged from thematic analysis: (a) managers leverage resource optimization and strategic planning to secure financial sustainability, (b) managers enhance workforce stability and adaptability to navigate operational challenges, and (c) managers rely on community collaboration and communication to attract external financial support. A key recommendation for Head Start program managers is to develop forward-thinking strategies that diversify funding sources and reduce dependency on limited or traditional resources. The implications for positive social change include the potential to enhance the sustainability of Head Start programs, thereby ensuring the continued provision of essential services to disadvantaged children and families in the community.

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Dedication

I am dedicating this research project to my husband, Donovan, who has been my constant source of support, encouragement, and inspiration throughout my journey. Your level of understanding gave me a peace of mind to complete my study. My sons, Jayden and Dylan, for their unwavering patience and understanding to help me pursue my dreams which I hope will inspire them to achieve their dreams someday.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

Head Start is a federal program that addresses child development for disadvantaged children (S. Y. Lee et al., 2022). Children who grow up in economically disadvantaged households must deal with several issues (e.g., food insecurity, poor housing, and a lack of emotional support from family) that can negatively impact their future school performance (Bayly et al., 2022). Launched in 1965 as a part of President Johnson's War on Poverty, Head Start has provided educational, health, and social services for over 37 million children and is one of those rare federal programs that can depend on the unanimous support of Congress, with a budget of \$10.61 billion as of 2020 (S. Y. Lee et al., 2022). The Head Start program supports students with economic, health, and social needs.

Organizations must be prepared to navigate the necessary channels to identify appropriate funding sources for Head Start programs. While individual Head Start programs receive most of their money from the overarching federal Head Start program, most rely on other funding sources. After the principal federal funding, the most common sources of funding for Head Start are state and local sources; the Childcare and Development Fund; other federal sources, such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program, tuition, and private fundraising (Bernstein et al., 2022). Each funding source has different requirements and uses and is susceptible to economic changes, such as economic downturns or recessions. The nuances of navigating funding can be a challenge for many educational staff.

The allocation of funding requires extensive preparedness among professional educational staff. The most common use for funding outside the federal Head Start program is to provide materials, followed by staff professional development and improving current services (Bernstein et al., 2022). In addition to teachers and directors, Head Start programs require dedicated financial staff to develop organizational strategies to manage external financial support, especially now that they are dealing with the economic downturn that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the multiple funding streams often create a complex system of compliance, which takes a great deal of energy to manage, including the need to host multiple physical site inspections and deal with paperwork (Bernstein et al., 2022). More information is needed to provide a nuanced understanding of effective external funding strategies employed by Head Start project managers.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem was that some Head Start program managers lack effective strategies to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative single case study research project was to explore effective strategies Head Start program managers used to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The targeted population consisted of six purposefully sampled Head Start program directors and financial staff in leadership positions of a regional Head Start program in New Jersey who had successfully used strategies to acquire external financial support. Data were collected for this project

through semistructured participant interviews and document analysis of audited financial statements, memos, and the program's 5-year strategic plan. I used the resource-based view (RBV) theory developed in 1959 by Penrose as the conceptual framework. The reviewed methods form the foundation of the study, which was designed to address the problem statement and the purpose of the study.

Research Question

What effective organizational strategies do Head Start program managers use to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

An assumption refers to the factors of research that are assumed to be true but cannot be verified through qualitative means (Beck, 2009). As such, the first assumption of this research project was that participants would be honest in their answers and not relay false information. If participants were not honest, it could have affected the results of this research project. I also assumed that organizational strategies were used to gain financial support. These assumptions were important to this research project's purpose because participants were required to conduct the research project. The stated assumptions were critical to providing an appropriately aligned research study with prior background knowledge and information pertinent to the reasoning for exploring the financial support and strategies leaders employed in an economic downturn.

Limitations

Limitations are elements of research outside of a researcher's control that must be addressed due to their effect on research findings (Stahl & King, 2020). One limitation of the study was the small sample size required due to the qualitative nature of the research project. This limitation must be acknowledged as a constraining factor of a qualitative study. To mitigate this limitation, I compared the empirical literature in Section 4 with the research findings of the current study. Transparent data collection and analysis methods were employed to further the transferability of the research project.

Transition

In Section 1, I provided background information about Head Start and described the study components (i.e., problem, gap, and purpose) and key assumptions and limitations. Head Start is a federal program that addresses child development for disadvantaged children. While individual Head Start programs receive most of their money from the overarching federal Head Start program, most rely on other funding sources; however, some Head Start program managers lack effective strategies to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, I explored what effective organizational strategies Head Start program managers used to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The subsequent sections of this study will include three sections presenting the review of literature, study design, results, and implications of the study. In Section 2, I will present a review of the relevant literature on the study topic and the conceptual

framework. Section 3 will contain a discussion of the methodology. Details regarding the population, sample, participant recruitment, and data collection and analysis processes will be presented in Section 3. In Section 4, I will present the findings and conclusions of the study. Each of the findings will be discussed regarding the conceptual framework, related empirical literature, and implications for practice and research.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies for the Head Start program managers to obtain external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. I began by reviewing the extensive research on financial strategies to help develop an understanding of Head Start program managers' strategies to acquire external funding. Information exists on financial strategies necessary for any nonprofit organization's success (Strassberger, 2022); however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and consequential financial downturns marked an era of significant impact and shifts in many nonprofits' financial experiences (Santos & Laureano, 2021). Notwithstanding that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Head Start program in various ways, including localized, limited ability to distribute and support needy families physically (Callie Silver & Coba-Rodriguez, 2022; Strassberger, 2022), few researchers have focused on how the economic downturn caused by COVID-19 affected the Head Start program managers' funding strategies (Bernstein et al., 2022). The focus of the current study was to address this gap in the literature by exploring how the Head Start program managers implement external funding strategies in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To obtain literature for this review, I used a centralized search strategy focused on the key components of the study. The search strategy included thoroughly assessing pertinent and contemporary literature via a series of central databases and key terms. The literature reviewed was primarily based on the exploration of the following topics:

components of the general nonprofit strategies for acquiring external financial support, the roles of program managers and financial staff in implementing financial support strategies, and how COVID-19 restrictions influenced nonprofit financial support strategies. To find relevant literature, I searched the Walden University Library. The databases used included business and management databases, such as Business Source Complete, EBSCO Host and Database, JSTOR, Web of Science, and PubMed. In addition, I used a collection of peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and textbooks to strengthen the literature review. The following keywords and phrases were used in the searches: *Head Start program, financial resources, the impact of COVID-19 on nonprofit organizations, financial strategies for nonprofit organizations, external financial support, role and responsibilities, program managers, financial staff, implementing financial support strategies, nonprofit organizations, and nonprofit organizational strategies*. This case study contains 96 references from peer-reviewed journals, articles, books, and dissertations. Eighty-five percent (85%) of these referenced sources were published within 5 years (2020–2024) from the expected completion date of the current study.

Conceptual Framework: RBV Theory

I used the RBV theory as the conceptual framework guiding this study because it provided an original theoretical template that could be used to describe how a firm's resources may generate productive opportunities and diversify organizational strategy. Penrose (1959) developed the RBV theory to focus on strategy diversification. The RBV theory relates to my exploration of Head Start managers' pivots in financial strategies in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in this study. In

this subsection, I detail the theoretical foundation, historical components, and modern applications of the theory.

Prior theoretical models regarding financial strategy development and resource allocation supported the RBV theory. Penrose's (1959) original theoretical insights contributed to the development of many modern business concepts. Penrose's RBV theory has been validated by considerable empirical research demonstrating causal links between resources firms acquired and applied and the consequential or predicted creation of productive growth opportunities, with theorists, such as Barney (1991), Day and Wensley (1988), and Prahalad and Hamel (2009), expanding on Penrose's original theory, creating functionality as organizations modernized and grew. These scholars developed what is currently known as an RBV of the firm, a way of evaluating and conceptualizing a firm's performance based on its resources and the application of its resources (Barney, 1991; Day & Wensley, 1988; Prahalad & Hamel, 2009). These theorists recognized that organizations using resources to serve consumer interests in ways that cannot be substituted produced a significant competitive advantage. The economic and theoretical knowledge of RBV development supports understanding how to use resources effectively for an organization.

An organization needs to configure and use resources to maximize performance to maintain a competitive edge. The RBV theory is based on the premise that any organization's performance is determined explicitly by, or a function of, the resources the firm or organization has access to (Dionysus & Arifin, 2020). Dionysus and Arifin (2020) argued that organizations able to use resources innovatively can attain a more significant

and sustained competitive advantage by accumulating those resources in a way that explicitly serves consumer interests. This theory encompasses a process used to establish a competitive advantage, such as that of a nonprofit entity focused on finding funding.

Most organizations are diverse, which is critical to resource use and application. Competitive advantage most often increases in correlation with increased diversification of resource sourcing (Hamdoun, 2020; Simarmata et al., 2022). The more innovative path dependencies become, the more sustained the organization will be, and the more entrepreneurial culture is developed. Such successful innovations are determined by a combination of the types of resources a firm has, how they are applied, and the intentions with which they are applied and the intentions with which they are applied (Simarmata et al., 2022). The organization's ability to rely on resources and diversify strategies is critical to innovation success.

Firm internal resources play a role in managing and expanding diverse resources. Correlations also exist between the types of resources a firm leverage and implements and the firm's corresponding development of experience, expertise, idea innovation, and knowledge application as it relates to the expansion of management and global/regional expansion (Chen, 2022). This correlation is becoming increasingly relevant and vital in an increasingly globalized market. Organizational pressure upon firms to rapidly pivot and adapt to the needs of a global audience, leverage virtual and remote platforms for working, and function in a multicultural context is growing (Golensky & Hager, 2020). For nonprofits, the ability to manage internal resources while managing growth, pressure, and change is closely related to resource management success.

In the current study, the application of the RBV theory was specific to the development of study components, such as the interview questions, as well as my interpretations of the participants' perspectives gathered through data collection. Penrose's (1959) RBV theory provided a guiding philosophical framework for this study's data collection and interpretation. The RBV theory provided a relevant framework for contextualizing the study because it offered a way of understanding how strategizing and resource use can combine to aid organizations' competitive advantage, such as nonprofit organizations. In the case of this study, resources were specified as financial support resources. The conceptual framework provided a context for evaluating how nonprofits, such as the Head Start program, strategize and implement resources of external financial funding and support to maintain solvency and competitive advantage in a changing world, specifically in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Business Problem Literature Review

The business problem I investigated in this study was associated with Head Start program's financial support problems created via the COVID-19 pandemic. Head Start programs are funded by the federal government through the Administration and Federal Budget (Ulmen et al., 2023). The expense for these nationwide programs has cost both state and federal funding over \$10 billion in U.S. dollars, and researchers have explored how the marginal value of public funds was spent on these programs (Johnson et al., 2019). Johnson et al. (2019) provided evidence showing significant differences in school finance reform application between Head Start programs and public schools based on

nonpoor versus poor children enrolled in such programs. While their study was expansive in examining Head Start programs to include K–12, the benefits provided to nonpoor students from school finance reforms provided significant improvements for children with their educational and economic needs and outcomes in the Head Start programs with no impact on spending.

Regardless of potential backlash, Head Start programs have been shown to affect long-term outcomes for students positively. Johnson et al. (2019) also noted that the same school finance reforms applied to Head Start programs with populations of poor students did lead to similar improvements in education and economic outcomes; however, they proved more positive long-term outcomes, such as less likelihood of incarceration or criminal behaviors. Early-life investments provide successful long-term and positive outcomes for sustained well-being with disadvantaged youth.

Nonprofits were affected by the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, many nonprofits, including Head Start programs, experienced the effects of the economic downturn caused by COVID-19 and the resulting restrictions (Jeffrey & Herman, 2020; Kim et al., 2022). Legislation and federal aid provided financial assistance to many nonprofits and other organizations experiencing the detrimental effects of COVID-19 restrictions. Existing literature has highlighted how COVID-19 and the resulting restrictions impacted organizations, especially nonprofits like Head Start, and their strategies for sourcing external financial funding (Scarborough et al., 2021). In response, new resources were created for sourcing external financial funding to nonprofits (Callie Silver & Coba-Rodriguez, 2022; Organization for Economic

Co-Operation and Development [OECD], 2020; Strassberger, 2022). Callie Silver and Coba-Rodriguez (2022), the OECD (2020), and Strassberger (2022) all concluded that Head Start programs and their funding strategies were established before the COVID-19 restrictions and the economic downturn; however, these strategies were considerably impacted by the COVID-19 restrictions and the economic downturn. The researchers further indicated that applying new tactics to connect with Head Start families was used and may have an essential place in a postpandemic world (Callie Silver & Coba-Rodriguez, 2022; OECD, 2020; Strassberger, 2022). Regions implementing crisis strategies at a multilevel governance level were used to build more resilient organizations. The implementation of these programs helped with family engagement during the pandemic. For nonprofits, the influence of financial strategizing for Head Start requires further exploration to identify how crisis management was navigated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many nonprofits to remain adaptable and solvent in the face of rapid change. The ability to quickly pivot and adapt to changing circumstances and resource opportunities was central to the success of nonprofits (Azevedo et al., 2022; Santos & Laureano, 2021; Shi et al., 2020). For some nonprofits, change navigation included pivoting towards online communication and transactions, applying for and taking advantage of available government aid programs, and changing marketing messaging and service provisions to meet the evolving needs of the surrounding community impacted by COVID-19 (Shi et al., 2020). Additional changes that required addressing financial and organizational functioning, including nonprofits,

caused many to leverage the online space and rapidly innovate (Ulmen et al., 2023). These changes indicate a substantial change to the financial and resource-based strategies used during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the limited extant research on the topic showed that Head Start programs' data capacity and financial stability continued to decrease during the COVID-19 pandemic (Newby & Branyon, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted all facets of life, including nonprofit funding strategies. The pandemic's impact ultimately challenged nonprofits' strategies to acquire funding (Aulgur, 2022; Newby & Branyon, 2021; Shi et al., 2020). Researchers suggested that the lockdowns had a potentially more significant, detrimental impact on the preexisting financial strategies used by smaller nonprofits, such as Head Start programs (Kim et al., 2022; Scarborough et al., 2021). Many smaller nonprofits traditionally leverage in-kind donations acquired through in-person events, in-person education, and direct community outreach; however, efforts to acquire such funding were immediately halted because smaller nonprofits had to cancel any planned, in-person activities or distributions of goods and services due to staff and labor shortages and lockdowns (Newby & Branyon, 2021; Shi et al., 2020). While the restrictions and economic impacts were disruptive to all organizations and nonprofits in varying degrees, some larger nonprofits experienced the advantage of already having access to online and technology resources necessary to pivot efforts and continue to reach donors and carry out specific initiatives through online platforms (Oliveira et al., 2021). Nonetheless, supply chain interruptions and lockdowns resulted in service provision interferences and staff shortages for many nonprofits.

Staff shortages were among the many challenges facing nonprofits during the COVID-19 pandemic. Concerning Head Start programs, a gap is evident regarding the strategies used to manage these nuanced changes. However, Shi et al. (2020) determined that services provided to people experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic from nonprofit organizations faced social challenges during this crisis. Shi et al. identified crisis management and adaptability as key strategies implemented by nonprofits for the distribution of provisions to individuals experiencing homelessness. They reported that the available data indicated that a ripple effect impacted nonprofits' financial strategy due to staff shortages that required the implementation of numerous services and strategies. Agility and innovations associated with nonprofit organizations may have been one approach used to combat continued funding challenges.

The lack of continuity and slowed responses during the COVID-19 pandemic created disruptions and challenges for the community served by nonprofits. According to Shi et al. (2020), the supportive services provided by nonprofits were necessary to support the surrounding community, such as those facing homelessness. Yet, during the COVID-19 pandemic, funding for state-based educational programs weakened with the financial impact of the early childhood educational sector (Ulmen et al., 2023). As a result, many communities needed access to invaluable support provided by nonprofits. For those in Head Start, children faced slowed or inconsistent access to educational programs. Ultimately, the financial challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the Head Start program's ability to provide sustained support to the surrounding community.

Head Start programs are dependent on enrollment and funding; however, the COVID-19 pandemic caused decreased enrollment, leading to recouping funding challenges once children returned to Head Start and other early childhood programs (Sonnier et al., 2020). Kim et al. (2022) examined the effects of COVID-19 on early childcare and education in California, claiming that Head Start programs centered their funding strategies more on the ability to support staff well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. Kim et al. developed multiple recommendations for early childhood programs, focusing on funding, services, staffing, reporting, and contracts improvements. The researchers stated that the navigation of enrollment and funding challenges are both interrelated and complex and that for many nonprofit leaders, managing these challenges requires a swift response. Nonprofits ultimately faced various program-level challenges with solutions for staffing shortages during crises, disparities based on program type, and program funding needs.

The effect of COVID-19 on nonprofit organizations' functioning strategies and strategic implementations led to the need for Head Start programs to quickly adapt to the crisis. Program leaders relied on their state and government funding to continue operations. However, like other nonprofits, Head Start was only in business due to its funding resources (Scarborough et al., 2021). The disruptions to financial strategy in all areas of operations of nonprofit organizations caused by COVID-19 necessarily led many nonprofit organizations to look towards the online space as a solution and strategy for maintaining sustainability (Chhabra et al., 2021; Costales & Zeyen, 2022; Santos & Laureano, 2021). Some Head Start programs leaned into AI development with big data

analytics and data processing vital for larger programs (Costales & Zeyen, 2022). Head Start programs were required to lean into various strategies to identify and guide crisis management. The success of these strategies appears to be related to company size and, thus, resource management. The unique adaptability of Head Start programs may have been crucial to surviving the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Business Problem Solutions

In this subsection, I present literature discussing potential business problem solutions. While there is a dearth of research related to the business problem solutions for Head Start programs, several studies discussed the financial strategies and solutions using such strategies for Head Start. One such solution pertains to focusing on financial support strategies guided by nonprofit leaders. Most of the literature reviewed described the role of nonprofit leaders, including program directors and financial staff, as being responsible for successfully implementing financial strategies. These responsibilities are most described as (a) ensuring effective planning and organization; (b) sourcing and providing needed sufficient resources; (c) compliance, legal, and financial oversight; (d) the selection and oversight of staff; and (e) the management of media and public relations (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020; Atouba & Shumate, 2019; McMullin & Raggo, 2020). These roles and responsibilities of nonprofit organization leaders are widespread, substantive, and most often appropriate for a team of leaders rather than a single individual.

Strategies for Funding

Head Start programs, like other nonprofits, use various strategies to gain external financial support. Some of the most common strategies include but are not limited to capital campaigns, online and in-person solicitation for giving, recurring membership or subscription options, donations through special events or promotions, and partnership sponsorships (Laallam et al., 2020; Oliveira et al., 2021; Päril et al., 2020). While these strategies are still used, the economic impact caused by COVID-19 forced many nonprofits and other organizations to pivot dramatically in their strategies for seeking and securing external financial support.

Multiple funding streams often complicate the operational capacities of nonprofit organizations. The most common use for funding outside the federal Head Start program is to provide teaching materials, participate in staff professional development, and use resources to improve current services (Bernstein et al., 2022). Unfortunately, the multiple funding streams often create a complex system of compliance, which takes a great deal of energy to manage, including the need to host multiple physical site inspections and deal with paperwork (Lu et al., 2020). Furthermore, having multiple funding streams may complicate the autonomy of a nonprofit organization, as targeted funding may create conditionality for using materials gained through said funding (Pratt, 2023). As such, Head Start programs may face difficulties from nonfederal funding sources concerning the acquisition of materials and their use.

Leadership roles and responsibilities are designated and delegated differently in nonprofit organizations. Nonprofits most commonly are led by a board of directors, each

with designated roles and responsibilities relating to these various components such as finances, public relations, legal compliance, hiring, and human resources (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020; Atouba & Shumate, 2019; McMullin & Raggio, 2020). Specific duties encompassed within these rules may include but not be limited to devising and proposing business strategies, including strategies for acquiring external funding, communicating with other board members and potentially, executives, conducting and managing performance reviews, ensuring all staff is given access needed resources and overseeing budgets and schedules on weekly, monthly and quarterly bases (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020; Atouba & Shumate, 2019; McMullin & Raggio, 2020). McMullin and Raggio (2020) described how critical the precise definition of these roles and responsibilities is to the smooth functioning and the acquiring of financial support of nonprofits, especially in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The specific role and task management amongst nonprofits requires precision funding allocation and management monitoring while considering unique day-to-day needs. The unique funding and leadership models frame how nonprofits seek external support.

When evaluating literature related to the roles and responsibilities of nonprofit leaders, including financial staff and board of directors, conflicting information was not prominent. Nonprofits with an enormous scope of service, serving multiple locations, include leaders and board members who perform more planning and delegation. In contrast, smaller nonprofits include leaders and board members who fulfill a wider variety of the roles and responsibilities encompassed in implementing and executing financial strategies (Corduneanu & Lebec, 2020; Golensky & Hager, 2020; Heifer

International, 2022; Hope Lives, 2022). A primary characteristic of literature relating to this subtheme was that roles and responsibilities varied dramatically depending upon the nonprofit, the context, and the size.

Solution: Needs Assessment

A key role and responsibility of the financial and nonprofit board of director staff, described frequently throughout literature, is the responsibility of conducting needs assessments. Needs assessments may relate to multiple categories described above, such as good morning financial needs assessments, legal compliance needs assessments, funding means assessments, hiring needs assessments, and marketing or public relations needs assessments (Bryson, 2018; Corduneanu & Lebec, 2020; Golensky & Hager, 2020). Nonprofit leaders must hold the appropriate skill, ability, and capacity to evaluate organizational context, surrounding social circumstances, and environment and contextualize the organization's needs. A needs assessment is a critical responsibility of nonprofit staff because a clear vision and strategy must be developed based on the specified budget of a nonprofit in a way that is aligned with the mission and values of that nonprofit (Bryson, 2018; Corduneanu & Lebec, 2020; Golensky & Hager, 2020). Effective strategies must also be developed based on the identified needs while identifying gaps between organizational resources in any area and the resources needed to reach the nonprofit's goals or desired community impact. Fulfilling financial gaps requires effective strategizing, planning, and gleaning stakeholder buy-in, whether buy-in relates to internal staff or external donors and partners, which is a critical component of needs assessments.

Tangible examples were found throughout the literature describing tasks involved in implementing strategies to fulfill needs assessments related to acquiring external financial support. Examples included but were not limited to (a) facilitating introductions between nonprofit staff members and key stakeholders or potential partners and donors; (b) providing essential public education to community members regarding the nonprofit's mission and vision; and (c) sourcing and acquiring the resources, such as educational resources, financial resources, and consulting resources, which the nonprofit staff and board need to carry out a financial strategy or plan (Bryson, 2018; Corduneanu & Lebec, 2020; Golensky & Hager, 2020). Each of these strategies may support effective outcomes for financial strategies.

A nonprofit's needs assessment is also based upon the financial budget and specifications regarding the amount of funding needed to meet budget proposals while working cooperatively with community partners and stakeholders and carrying out the proposed activities in a quality manner. A significant component of such needs assessment may also include variable factors influencing budget changes, such as inflation, fluctuating costs of goods and services, or the need for paid labor assistance to carry out proposed activities (Bryson, 2018; Corduneanu & Lebec, 2020; Golensky & Hager, 2020). Nonprofit leaders' roles often entail conducting the needs assessment and implementing solutions that are based not only on the proposed budget but also allow for realistic implementation of the nonprofit activities proposed, be it humanitarian efforts, providing educational resources to marginalized populations, offering housing resources to those in need, or other services.

Another subtheme from the literature explored was related to the increasing focus on diversity within nonprofits. Specifically, leadership roles include boards of directors, leaders, and financial staff (Golensky & Hager, 2020; Hurley & Choudhary, 2020). While this subtheme did not directly describe an aspect of conducting needs assessments, it seems essential to mention it within today's globalizing context. Many nonprofits are prioritizing designating board of directors and critical leadership or staff roles to women and racial minorities with an effort to increase diverse representation, contribute to corporate social responsibility efforts, and remain relatable in a progressive context (Hurley & Choudhary, 2020). However, one initial study provided evidence indicating that diverse representation, specifically female governance, is not significantly correlated with ethical governments or community engagement (Hurley & Choudhary, 2020). Research had yet to be conducted at the time of this study regarding correlations between diversity representation and the success of financial funding strategies among nonprofits.

Solution: Funding Strategies to Improve Financial Status

Implementation of financial strategies to increase nonprofit funding broadly characterizes leaders' key, overarching role, and responsibility. Examples include the nonprofit's board of directors and financial staff in securing and leveraging external sources of financial support (Bryson, 2018; Golensky & Hager, 2020; Levine Daniel & Fyall, 2019). Implementation encompasses a wide range of activities, including delegating projects and underlying tasks to teams, generating activities such as acquiring donations, and instigating change within a community. The level of delegation entailed within any implementation is dependent upon the level of resources a nonprofit has

access to, the scope of its project, the scope of funding, and the size of a nonprofit, including its underlying staff teams and capabilities (Golensky & Hager, 2020). For instance, leaders in a large nonprofit organization serving communities globally, such as Heifer International, delegate a wealth of projects and tasks to underlying national and local teams (Heifer International, 2022). On the contrary, small nonprofits, such as Northern Colorado's Hope Lives, which serves breast cancer patients, use little delegation throughout implementation because the responsibilities are covered by only two primary full-time staff. Two women run this small nonprofit with the help of various intermittent volunteers. Hence, the nonprofit's two primary leaders fulfill many roles that various boards of directors and financial staff would otherwise serve.

The surrounding legal and political environment also influences how financial strategies are implemented and carried out by nonprofits. For instance, a large majority of nonprofit organizations implement policy through forms of service delivery (Levine Daniel & Fyall, 2019). Furthermore, implementing funding and financial strategies is often interdisciplinary and involves the collaboration of leaders with community partners leaders (Bryson, 2018; Vedel et al., 2020). This means that the roles and responsibilities of directors and financial staff of nonprofits often entail interdisciplinary, holistic approaches involving communication, community events, public relations, and the ability to synthesize and evaluate information collected from all these domains and activities to mobilize funding strategies. Simply put, this means that nonprofit leaders often assume an integrative role involving strategizing and planning with internal staff, delegating, managing, communicating with external partners, developing proposals, acquiring buy-

in, and determining the most effective methods of funding strategies based on both qualitative and quantitative feedback collected (Levine Daniel & Fyall, 2019). The wide variety of roles and responsibilities encompassed herein implies that most nonprofit leaders must be able to pivot quickly and think critically.

The online space, including social media platforms, is also becoming a significant tool for facilitating nonprofit leaders' implementation of financial strategies. Themes of online communication, online space leverage, and social media use were prominent throughout the literature, describing financial support requiring strategies, facilitating communication, and implementing strategies. Literature relating to this theme commonly mentioned the increasing importance of nonprofit leaders' digital literacy as a skill needed to implement and carry out nonprofit strategies, including financial strategies (Bryson, 2018; Levine Daniel & Fyall, 2019; Vedel et al., 2020). As the technology and information age continues to expand rapidly, the viability of all organizations, including nonprofits, will depend upon leaders and, thus, organizations' abilities to navigate a changing social landscape, influenced heavily by online communication (Vedel et al., 2020). Nonprofits' use and implementation of social media are becoming increasingly important from a competitive and sustainable perspective.

Solutions: Maintenance and Evaluation

Like the importance of performance measurement, maintenance and evaluation is a critical task that must be carried out by all nonprofits and a role commonly assigned to financial staff and boards of directors. Maintenance and evaluation refer to the ability to collect feedback on the financial performance of a nonprofit or funding strategies

executed and either maintain what is working or change aspects of that strategy that are not achieving the desired results (Bryson, 2018; Golensky & Hager, 2020). Without the ability to collect feedback and evaluate outcomes, the financial sustainability of a nonprofit is compromised (Bryson, 2018). literature indicated several essential factors to evaluate their influence on the success or lack thereof of financial strategies implemented by nonprofit organizations. The most commonly mentioned factors include geographic indicators or influencers, cultural factors, legal and compliance landscapes, the public relation standing or credibility of a nonprofit, a nonprofit's surrounding socioeconomic environment, available financial resources, surrounding corporate partners and subsequent financial resources, and the level of community needs with relation to a nonprofit's mission and vision (Cheng et al., 2022; C. Lee, 2021; Mitchell & Calabrese, 2018). These factors are essential for nonprofit leaders to collect feedback regarding and evaluate.

Considering these factors above, the role of nonprofit leaders involves evaluating the levels and degrees of effect of each factor in relation to a nonprofit's financial success or the success of a funding strategy. Evaluation of these factors may be conducted formally or informally through anecdotal, qualitative, or quantitative data, depending on the size, scope, and available resources to a nonprofit. For instance, Cheng et al. (2022) recognized that the functioning, influence, and support gleaned by nonprofits are affected by surrounding environmental values. Cheng et al. evaluated the equity in public service provisioning facilitated by nonprofits by exploring racial disparities in public park access. Findings indicated disparities in access to parks and nonprofit-provided resources

experienced by minorities versus underrepresented populations. These findings contributed to understanding how surrounding environmental factors can influence nonprofit leaders' evaluation of community needs and, consequently, how and where funding may be provided. In this case, funding was not accessible to marginalized communities, but it was more greatly accessible to privileged communities, even though funding was needed to benefit marginalized communities. This case scenario illustrates the complex, interdisciplinary, and interwoven nature involved in characterizing nonprofit leaders' roles in implementing nonprofit financial support strategies (Golensky & Hager, 2020). A gap exists between the funding source and the education needed to glean funding, meaning that nonprofit leaders are responsible for educating privileged communities about the needs of underprivileged communities as a strategy for acquiring funding.

A substantial number of authors also recognized the lack of research specifically correlating or explicitly evaluating nonprofits' financial solvency and success with management or leadership approaches. In this case, maintenance and evaluation approaches are used (Kabeyi, 2019; Mitchell & Calabrese, 2018). Simultaneously, studies also indicated the phenomenon of a widespread, global shift in management and leadership approaches guiding maintenance and evaluation—from one that is conventional and transactional to one that is dynamic, integrative, and transformational (Kabeyi, 2019; C. Lee, 2021; Lu et al., 2020; Mitchell & Calabrese, 2018). In practical terms, a shift occurred in the maintenance and evaluation approach from one that valued and prioritized only quantitative financial metrics and data to an approach that

incorporated, recognized, and valued the impact of public relations, staff experiences, community impact, and experiences, equity and diversity inclusion, and other forms of qualitative feedback.

One primary criticism of nonprofit leaders' traditional and continuous approaches to maintenance and financial performance evaluation was concerns about the credibility of measurement methods. C. Lee (2021) questioned the credibility and validity of the methods used by nonprofits to measure their performance and suggested that more empirically robust, nonbiased data collection and evaluation approaches may aid many nonprofits' efforts to acquire and sustain funding. For instance, many nonprofits are intrinsically biased by their objectives and mission to contribute to a specific community initiative or social agenda (S. Y. Lee et al., 2022). This bias can naturally contribute to confirmation bias entailed in evaluating financial data—especially in the case of small nonprofits lacking access to more robust evaluation methodologies or empirical strategies. Such biased evaluation methods may be detrimental to financial solvency and eventually contribute to the premature dissolution of smaller, noncommercialized nonprofits (Lu et al., 2020). Furthermore, Kabeyi (2019) reinforced this comment by articulating the importance of strategic planning, maintenance, and evaluation in the sustainability of nonprofits within competitive marketplaces. Nonprofits must remain strategically savvy to the community's values, desires, and the characteristics of target audience donors to acquire and maintain necessary funding (Kabeyi, 2019). The fact that nonprofits are not structured as for-profit corporate enterprises does not exempt them from the challenges of market competition other organizations face.

This section discussed the roles and responsibilities of financial staff and program directors of nonprofits. Predominant themes found throughout the literature indicate a variety of roles and responsibilities assigned to financial staff and directors that depend upon a nonprofit's size, the scope of community contribution, access to resources, and staff (Bryson, 2018; Golensky & Hager, 2020; Levine Daniel & Fyall, 2019). Nonprofits with more staff and resource capabilities often assign strategic planning responsibilities to directors and financial staff, who then delegate tasks and project implementation to underlying teams. Smaller nonprofits often include directors or financial staff members who fulfill multiple responsibilities and implementation tasks. The primary themes found throughout the review of literature relating to the roles of program directors and financial staff included needs assessments, implementation, and maintenance and evaluation (Bryson, 2018; Golensky & Hager, 2020; Levine Daniel & Fyall, 2019). The primary criticism in the literature was the recognition that nonprofits' data collection may be subject to confirmation bias recording with the nonprofit social agendas and initiatives (Kabeyi, 2019; C. Lee, 2021). The skill and ability to conduct comprehensive, integrative, and holistic needs assessments to inform nonprofits' financial strategies and guide implementation efforts were mentioned throughout the literature as critical to nonprofits' financial solvency. Successful implementation, incredible maintenance, trustworthiness, skillfulness, focused maintenance, and evaluation guiding changes and adjustments were equally critical.

Solution: Leveraging the Online Space

Even though research evidenced the dramatic disruptions to financial strategy and solvency of nonprofits caused by COVID-19, the existing research also offered inconclusive and conflicting results related to the quantitative effects of COVID-19 shutdowns and economic recession. As such, there were questions left about the degree to which nonprofits in sectors other than the arts and entertainment experienced closures and altogether insufficiency of funding (Newby & Branyon, 2021; Shi et al., 2020). For instance, a report in the Nonprofit Business Advisor in 2021 claimed, based upon a systematic review of literature, that most nonprofit boards evaluated improved their operational functioning after COVID-19 due to the adoption of technology. However, this research did not specifically correlate financial metrics with findings. Other research also described the tremendous and beneficial effect that COVID-19-related relief funding and legislation had upon many nonprofits, allowing them to remain sustainable through times of challenge and crisis and, in some cases, even grow (Bin-Nashwan & Al-Daihani, 2020; Santos & Laureano, 2021). What was evident and apparent throughout the literature was that the adoption of online strategies to facilitate operations and financial campaigns and the acquisition of external funding marked an apparent shift in how nonprofit organizations carried out and implemented strategies pre- versus post-COVID-19.

Hence, in some instances, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the creation of new nonprofits aimed at combating the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as food shortages and other research shortages experienced by marginalized

communities. For example, many marginalized communities that COVID-19 affected more than privileged communities launched fundraising campaigns through social media platforms (Bin-Nashwan & Al-Daihani, 2020; Li et al., 2020). One such initiative was instigated by Muslim communities launching fundraising efforts to minimize and mitigate the socioeconomic effects of COVID-19 on frontline care providers and other vulnerable populations. A study examining these initiatives explored the various extrinsic and intrinsic motivations of donors to the campaign. Specifically, those who contributed through social media platforms, as that was the campaign's primary method and strategy for acquiring external financial support. Findings indicated that value alignment, religious beliefs, and the ease of the user interface of the technology platform were all positively correlated with increased contributions of donors (Bin-Nashwan & Al-Daihani, 2020). This indicates that the shift to the online space that many nonprofits experienced and underwent due to COVID-19 often necessitated steep learning curves in the use and implementation of different technology features (Li et al., 2020; Wang & Cheng, 2021). These findings pointed to the importance of an altruistic alignment of values in incentivizing, or for effective use of, the online space and acquiring financial contributions for nonprofits and the importance of the technical implementation and the ease of use of an online platform by target audience donors.

The pivot to the online space and social media use by nonprofits also mitigated a previously encountered phenomenon of information asymmetry and logistical coordination issues. In other words, adopting workflow and organization platforms facilitated a more streamlined planning, communication, and strategic implementation

period for nonprofits willing and able to undergo the learning curves associated with learning such platforms; this contributed to administrative and organizational efficiency in carrying out operations. This reduction in internal expenditures, administrative overhead burden, and even in many cases, the overhead of brick-and-mortar office space contributed to a widened revenue margin (Wang & Cheng, 2021). While this change in shift does not directly characterize a change in the way financial support was acquired, it characterizes a way in which financial solvency is achieved through the reduction of internal expenditure.

Nonprofits previously conducting work in person at schools and other organizations were forced to provide their services through virtual platforms, zoom meetings, or tele-mental health consults. Similarly, shifts towards and the adoption of online platforms to facilitate operations and workflows forced many nonprofits to change the way they provide needed support to communities (Cantor, 2020; Santos & Laureano, 2021; Wang & Cheng, 2021). For instance, some nonprofits previously providing only in-person relief services were forced to pivot community contributions to online education and support. One example is the mental health space (Cantor, 2020; Santos & Laureano, 2021; Wang & Cheng, 2021). Similarly, these changes entailed a steep learning curve for many nonprofits and staff providing services. In many cases, it also reduced operational expenses and administrative overhead, minimizing the burden felt due to the COVID-19-instigated recession.

Solution: Innovation

The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic led not only to the leveraging of online spaces to facilitate strategic implementations and the continued acquisition of funding from donors but also, in a greater sense, to rapid strategic innovations.

Nonprofits wishing to sustain operations and continue financial solvency were forced to innovate new methods of acquiring financial support, fulfilling the demands and needs of communities served, and communicating with stakeholders and partners in a fragmented working environment constrained by restrictions and lack of physical mobility (Azevedo et al., 2022; Finchum-Mason et al., 2020; Raeymaeckers & Van Puyvelde, 2021). This crisis-instigated innovation has led many nonprofits to reconsider high-level funding and community partnership models (Huang, 2022). Nonprofits were prompted to reevaluate all aspects of operations and overarching models, including but not limited to what types of messaging resonate with and inspire action in target audience donors and what specific community needs must be addressed. This subsequently meant that nonprofits had to be innovative in providing products or services and adapt them quickly to meet the community's needs. For instance, issues addressed before COVID-19 often transformed into shortages of healthcare supplies, food, or other services due to lockdowns and supply chain shortages. This rapid shift in community needs created an opportunity for nonprofits to be innovative about acquiring funding, their strategies and means of providing social support, and their overarching social initiatives (Finchum-Mason et al., 2020; Shi et al., 2020). Many nonprofits found themselves in situations where previous community needs rapidly transformed pre- versus post-COVID-19.

For many nonprofits, COVID-19 brought about a significant change in the external and surrounding regulatory environment, especially as restrictions were placed upon the flow of people and movement of goods and services. The innovations instigated by COVID-19 led to the development of new theoretical frameworks and models for operationally managing, running, and funding nonprofits (Huang, 2022). For example, Huang (2022) developed a post-COVID contingency-based framework to support nonprofits in developing accountability, leadership, and governance in a way adapted to a post-COVID environment's legal, compliance, and social needs landscape. In many cases, the instigation of vaccination requirements remained, while some had since been lifted at the time of this study. Such requirements impacted nonprofits' ability to perform service operations, recruit volunteers and staff who may or may not be compliant, and fulfill budgeting requirements (Huang, 2022). The Head Start program was also faced with the need to be innovative and pivotal in the performance and delivery of services and the acquisition of funding.

The Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) is a tool used to collect data and provide valuable information to the public and organizations about the Head Start programs' annual success, impact, and achievements. In many ways, the FACES report is Head Start's annual, comprehensive report (Doran et al., 2022). FACES also provides valuable data and insight regarding areas of potential weakness, strength, threat, and opportunity for the Head Start program. During the COVID pandemic, data from the FACES report indicated a massive shortage of providers and educators within the Head Start program and a subsequent deficit in the provision of developmental,

learning, and family wellness needs of community members—especially those in heavily affected areas, such as large, coastal, urban centers (Doran et al., 2022; Fisk & Russell, 2022). Some sources described the Head Start program as benefiting significantly from federal relief funding, but it remained unknown how the Head Start program directors have implemented that funding, changed funding strategies, and conducted innovations in response to COVID (Bernstein et al., 2022; Doran et al., 2022; Silver & Zinsser, 2022). The Head Start program was therefore faced with the opportunity to be innovative in-service provision models and the acquiring of funding.

Transition

The reviewed literature in Section 2 addressed what is known about the business problem. Information was also presented to refine the understanding of prior and potential solutions to address the identified problem. Literature showed a need for improved organizational strategies to support the ability to acquire external financial support. Topics such as the economic downturn that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic serve as one of many complicating factors influencing the garnering of financial support. However, a gap existed regarding Head Start project managers' effective strategies.

In the following section, Section 3, the methods for the data analysis and collection will be presented. In this section, I will discuss the recruitment model used to sample the targeted participants. Details will be provided concerning the approaches that were applied to collecting and analyzing data. Section 3 will also include a detailed discussion of ethical considerations within the framework of the study's methodology,

explanations of the justification for the selected methodology and research design, the population recognized from which the sample was selected, and the sampling technique. A presentation of the recruiting process and the means for collecting the data will be shared, followed by an overview and explanation of the data analysis process. Section 4 will follow with a discussion of the results of the study.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

Section 3 begins with an introduction to the facets of this project, focusing on the ethical considerations in the project and the nature of the study. The sample is then adequately described, along with the population from which these participants were drawn and the sampling strategy for recruiting this sample. I also discuss the method and research design that were selected as the most appropriate for the study. Furthermore, the data collection instruments are described, and an explanation of the techniques used for data collection and data organization is presented. The data analysis process is also explained as is how and why the data collected for the study were reliable and valid.

Project Ethics

As the researcher in this study, I recruited, scheduled, and guided the participants through the interview and group discussion process. I did not have a personal relationship with any of the participants in the study. I remained aware of and mitigated bias when collecting and analyzing the data by keeping a reflexive journal.

When considering project ethics, I ensured that I followed and adhered to the *Belmont Report*, providing respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (see The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). This included the informed consent process, protection of personal identification information, informing participants of the benefits and risks associated with the study, and security of the data collected. I was responsible for ensuring all participants understood the benefits and risks of participating as well as protecting their identities. Other responsibilities included acquiring all permissions before commencing

the study, such as receiving Walden University Institution Review Board (IRB) approval, site agreement, and completed business leader interview consent forms. I did not collect data for this study until approval was received from the Walden University IRB. The Walden University IRB approval number for this study was 08-02-24-1173353. I used the site agreement to garner permission from Head Start authorities to collect records from five Head Start programs, including personnel rosters, lists of external financial supporters, and memoranda of understanding with external supporters. In turn, I used an invitation template to ask for volunteers to participate in this study

The informed consent form was shared with all individuals volunteering for this study. The informed consent provided transparency of all facets involved with the study (see Grant, 2021). As an ethical consideration, all participants who agreed to the terms in the emailed consent form replied to the email with the words, "I consent," before any interviews were conducted. The informed consent process was shared with the participants, and I disclosed all information so that each individual could make an informed decision regarding their participation in the study. The consent form was discussed with each participant, and I explained the risks and benefits; what participation would entail; how their identity would be protected; that their participation was voluntary; and how they could leave at any time before, during, or after the interview with no consequence. I also ensured the participants understood all that was disclosed in this process.

Additionally, I made each participant aware that if they did not wish to answer a question at any time they felt discomfort, they could refrain from doing so. Participants

were informed through the consent form and before the interview started that they could withdraw from the study without consequences, and all data collected to that point would be destroyed. To withdraw, the participants could leave the interview, and I would delete any data collected at that point.

I saved the signed informed consent forms on an encrypted flash drive alone. No other data were saved to this flash drive to protect the participants' identities. The participants' answers to the eligibility and demographic questions were saved to a Microsoft Word document with no identifying markers and saved on a separate, encrypted flash drive. Both flash drives were locked in separate desk drawers in my office. All data collected were saved on the flash drive with the eligibility and demographic question responses. The data from the interviews were de-identified, and all personally identifying information was removed and replaced with an alphanumeric identifier (P1, P2, P3, etc.) for interview participants. Each Head Start program director de-identified all the collected shared documentation data, which were sent through encrypted emails. This flash drive was locked in my desk drawer except when in use. Both flash drives will be kept secure for 5 years and then physically destroyed.

Nature of the Project

Qualitative methods are used when researchers wish to determine answers to “how,” “why,” and “what” questions and answer open-ended questions (Busetto et al., 2020). A qualitative researcher uses nonstatistical data in textual content to observe patterns and extract themes (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Specifically, a case study design is used when a sample shares their experiences of an

episodic event with a researcher observing these experiences while searching for common experiences shared by the participants during the event (Schoch, 2020). Using a qualitative case study, I observed how the selected sample of Head Start program managers described their experiences regarding effective strategies they used to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a qualitative case study design allowed me to conduct interviews to gather participants' perspectives on the study topic.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The general population for this study included personnel employed at a U.S. Head Start program. At the end of 2022, over 52,000 Head Start programs were funded in the United States (National Head Start Association, 2023). Each program employed a program director who, in turn, employed financial and teaching staff, including teaching assistants. Depending on the school's student population, community needs, and funding, some Head Start programs employ an education coach to help train teachers and aids, a bilingual specialist, and a home visiting teacher which is typically a licensed social worker (Downer et al., 2024).

I used a purposive sampling technique, which allowed me to select participants based on whether they had the necessary characteristics to fit the study's purpose (Campbell et al., 2020). In this study, the participants had to be in the targeted population of Head Start directors or Head Start financial directors currently employed in the United States for a Region II Head Start program. The sample comprised six program directors and financial personnel employed at a U.S. Head Start program. This sample size was

consistent with Guest et al.'s (2020) suggestion for establishing the number of participants based on data saturation. Data saturation is achieved when a researcher has collected enough data to draw needed conclusions (Guest et al., 2020). During the data collection process, saturation is reached when participants repeat the same answers from previous participants. Data saturation provides trustworthiness and validates that the researcher has gathered enough data to establish a conclusion for the findings. To ensure data saturation, I carefully observed the point at which the participants began repeating their responses which occurred toward the end of my fifth interview. To ensure saturation was met, I completed a sixth interview, and during this interview, many of the responses were redundant; therefore, I determined I had reached saturation.

The sample participants had to have worked at one of the Head Start programs in Region II of the Regional Operational Office. Region II services all Head Start programs within New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands (Office of Regional Operations, 2023). Those who were eligible to participate met the following inclusion criteria: (a) individuals must be currently employed as a Head Start program director or as part of a Head Start financial staff, (b) all individuals must be employed in the same position with the same Head Start program for at least 12 months, (c) all individuals must volunteer to participate, and (d) all individuals must speak English.

I first chose Head Start to access this sample and contacted the Region II Head Start administrator to request recruiting access to their facilities. This regional administrator's contact information was on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families website. I emailed the administrator a

site agreement explaining the purpose and significance of the study as well as a request for authorization to recruit Head Start program directors and financial staff for this study. I also provided information on eligibility for participation, what participation entailed, and my contact information. The administrator was asked to allow me to email each potential participant an invitation requesting participation in this study. Participants could email me if they were interested in being a part of the study. Once I received an email from a potential participant, I asked them about the inclusion criteria and continued with the interview process and arranging a time for the interviews based on participant availability. My strategy for establishing a working relationship with the participants was to discuss with them in detail the significance of the project, their responsibilities, my responsibilities, and the intention of using this data to bring forth social change. I also highlighted that participating in the study was solely voluntary and should they have felt that they no longer wanted to participate, they could have left without consequences. Additionally, participants were informed that there were no incentives associated with this study but that their contribution would impact the future of the Head Start organization. Development of such a working relationship included asking pertinent questions and showing genuine interest in their lives and experiences while being readily available to answer their questions.

Data Collection Activities

As the primary data collection instrument, I conducted interviews using a researcher-developed protocol (see Appendix), which provided a guide-like script to assist with the interview process. This protocol allowed for probing questions to be asked

based on the participant's responses, guiding me to collect rich and robust data. My doctoral study committee reviewed the interview protocol for validity and reliability. The use of open-ended interview questions allowed the participants to share their experiences, thus helping to answer the "how" and "why" of qualitative research (see Busetto et al., 2020).

The data collection technique or process began with the recruitment of necessary participants. Recruitment could only begin after receipt of site authorization from Region II's regional administrator of Head Start and Walden University IRB approval. After permission was provided, I emailed potential participants an invitation to take part in the study and sharing pertinent information on the study and what participation entailed. I also attached both the inclusion criteria that must have been met for participant selection and an informed consent form. Once participants returned a signed informed consent form, I scheduled the interviews by sending all participants a Google Calendar with open days and times. This was sent to the entire sample simultaneously, so the days and times were available equitably to all participants.

Once the interviews were set, I sent each participant a Zoom link for their specific interview. Reminder emails were sent the day before the scheduled interviews. I also reminded each participant that video recording was unauthorized and would not be used during the interviews. Even though Zoom provided video and audio recording options, I only used audio recording. The collected data was transcribed using Zoom's transcription application, which allowed the audio recorded and saved data to be transcribed into a Word text document. After the transcripts were completed and the data were verified, I

completed member checking, which is asking the participant to review the transcribed interview summary of responses to ensure the data were correct and accurately transcribed. Member checking provides a measure of validity in the data collected (Motulsky, 2021). I saved the audio and transcribed data to an encrypted flash drive. The secondary data, including the last 3 years of audited financial statements, were obtained from the Federal Audit Clearinghouse website and saved to an encrypted flash drive. The audited financial statements validated the external financial funding during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program's 5-year strategic plan and various memos were obtained as a digital document from the Head Start program, which was also saved on the same flash drive to protect all information accordingly. I reviewed and cross-referenced the information with participants' responses to various interview questions for credibility.

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you implement to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the different ways that you support your financial staff in acquiring external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How have the organizational strategies of Head Start programs for external financial support changed in response to the economic downturn resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. How do you develop strategies to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

5. How did you measure the success of the strategies used to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?
6. What are some of the problems encountered in implementing funding strategies to acquire financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?
7. How did you overcome some of the problems encountered in implementing funding strategies to acquire financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?
8. What additional information would you like to share about funding strategies used to acquire financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

I organized the collected data using two encrypted flash drives: one for the signed informed consent and another to store all collected data. The audio data collected and saved were transcribed through the Zoom transcription application. I de-identified each transcript by removing any personally identifying information from the transcripts when transferring them to a Word document. During this process, I also kept a reflexive journal, including my personal assumptions, rationales behind specific ideas, and preconceived notions about the data. The audio files were saved under an alphanumeric identifier that matched the correct transcript. The interview transcripts were held on an encrypted flash drive along with the data from the eligibility criteria, the demographic

data, and the documentation data sent from the program directors. This drive was locked in a desk drawer in my office when not in use. The final step of data organization was to save the transcribed Word documents and upload them into NVivo 12. I used the NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software to store and categorize the data, ensuring the emergent codes were developed correctly. After 5 years, the data will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

I employed a reflexive thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2023) six steps for thematic analysis. In the first step, I had a colleague not connected to this study review the audio recording with the transcribed data to ensure the transcription was accurate. Then, I completed familiarization by reading and re-reading each transcript as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2023). Second, I also asked the participants to review my summaries of their interview responses for member-checking purposes. Member checking is a method that provides the trustworthiness of the data collected (Adler, 2022). I requested all participants review an interview response summary, which I developed to ensure the participants' ideas shared in the interviews were captured accurately and to provide any commentary, if any, to offer. Participants had 5–7 days to complete the member-checking process and return with any thoughts or comments. The participants had no changes and provided no additional data except that the summaries were exactly as they intended. The participants were grateful for the opportunity to participate in my study. In addition to familiarizing myself with the interview transcripts, I also analyzed notes from my reflexive journal and other secondary data obtained from the Head Start program directors, which include the program's 5-year strategic plan,

memos, and the last 3 years of audited financial statements. The audited financial statements were analyzed from the Audited Clearinghouse website. The use of multiple data sources was necessary to triangulate the research. I used data triangulation to cross-check the participants' responses with the secondary data to gain a more comprehensive understanding and reduce the risk of relying on one perspective. In the second step, I highlighted the transcripts, memos, and the 5-year strategic plan with keywords from the research questions by hand and compared the phrases and words highlighted to the codes extracted through the node process in NVivo. The codes were combined according to the same schema and relevant to the research question. Codes that overlapped were deleted to ensure the data were broken down into smaller, more meaningful pieces but not repetitive. This process consisted of collating the codes to form categories (i.e., prethemes).

Next, in Step 3, I generated a set of categories from the coded data. The categories drawn from NVivo provided the foundation for the themes. The codes formed categories, which then formed themes. In generating the themes, I identified similarities, connections, and patterns within each source, then compared and integrated the findings, looking for commonalities in verbiage and meaning among all data sources to get deeper meanings from the data. In Step 4, I further developed these categories while reviewing and revising each to form the themes. A review of the themes was done to ensure that the themes were related to the research question. In Step 5, I refined these themes further and provided a definition and name for each theme. The focus during this step was to

establish key themes. In the final step, Step 6, I incorporated the analysis into tabular content, which will be presented in Section 4.

In analyzing the strategies effectively put to work for Head Start program managers in acquiring external funds during the COVID-19 pandemic, three themes emerged that illuminated strategies to achieve financial sustainability. First, optimizing resources through strategic planning highly underscored the essence of agile budgeting with diversified funding streams. Head Start program managers have reallocated funds from less vital services to vital services like personal protective equipment (PPE), and technology for remote service delivery during the pandemic (Ritonga & Buanaputra, 2024). The study reinforced the existing literature on nonprofit management, which recommends strategic financial planning to withstand economic decline and adapt to changing circumstances. The theme highlights how managers use financial and intangible resources to sustain operations. This concurs with Penrose's (1959) RBV theory, which states that the successful management of resources will provide a competitive advantage.

The second theme emphasized that workforce stability and adaptability are integral to securing external funding. Head Start program managers' adoption of online strategies to help stabilize the workforce and financial campaigns is a shift in how nonprofit organizations navigate operational challenges. It is vital for organizations to build resilience to ensure continuity and maintain competitiveness (Mosteanu, 2024). In an ever-changing environment, nonprofit organizations must adjust their plans and mindset effectively and promptly to ensure stability in their workforce. A stable workforce can attract efficient workers and put the organization at a competitive

advantage, supporting the RBV theory that resources are vital in sustaining a competitive advantage.

The third theme, community collaboration and communication, is representative of the importance of relationship-building outside of the organization. The study established that community stakeholder involvement was essential in helping the management of the Head Start program acquire external funds. Communication and partnership strengthened funding opportunities and made nonprofit organizations resilient (Eden et al., 2024). Head Start program managers could ensure financial support by promoting collaboration and, at the same time, being responsive to the community's needs. This thus supported the literature that collaborative models are intrinsic to the success of nonprofit entities, especially in periods of economic turbulence. The theme also highlighted how community involvement in education can support learning and success, giving the Head Start program a competitive advantage. This is also consistent with the RBV theory, which purported that resources were vital in attaining sustainable competitive advantage in the nonprofit sector (Kelly & Given, 2024). Two such critical concerns include the effective utilization of resources through strategy and community-level engagement that grant resiliency to nonprofits during challenging times. The themes provide a straightforward approach for effective strategies for acquiring external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, all framed within RBV theory, which underlines resourcefulness as key to organizational resilience. All analyzed data were vital in generating code, categories, subthemes, and

themes correlated with the literature and the conceptual framework and will be saved for 5 years on an encrypted flash drive in a secured location.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability and validity methods are designed to ensure that the data are trustworthy. Reliability in qualitative research is focused upon dependability. Dependability requires observing how valid the data is and if its replicability is established (Adler, 2022; Vu, 2021). These data can include responses from a sample to questions asked during an interview or focus group (Stahl & King, 2020). Dependability is established by a researcher specifically recording the processes they use for recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. The qualitative researcher proves data dependability by demonstrating that the findings were based on quality and engaging steps despite any changes within the research setting or participants during the data collection process. For the purposes of the study, I addressed dependability by using member checking and a reflexive journal (see Stahl & King, 2020). Member checking involved the provision of the interview transcript and a summary interpretation of the interview to each study participant (McKim, 2023). The participant had 5–7 business days to review the summary of interview responses and provide any reflections or thoughts to the researcher. Any reflections provided by study participants that altered the content of the summary interpretation substantively were documented and incorporated during thematic analysis (see McKim, 2023). A reflexive journal allowed me to address

any biases I may have held regarding the research and reflect on any answers given to me by participants in real time.

Validity

Qualitative validity focuses on credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

While quantitative researcher uses tools to establish the validity of their instruments for data collection, qualitative researchers use these three elements considered concepts of trustworthiness (Stahl & King, 2020). The criteria of the trustworthiness elements provide articulated evidence that establishes the validity of the results.

Credibility

The first measure of validity involves credibility. Credibility must be established to ensure the data are truthful and honest (Campbell et al., 2020). Data validity was examined using member checking. Member checking is determining if the transcripts captured the meaning conveyed in the response's audio recorded and transcribed (Motulsky, 2021). The process was done to ensure their transcribed data had no inconsistencies and accurately conveyed the participant's responses. Member checking was conducted after the interview recordings were transcribed. Each participant received an email with a summary of their interview question responses. The participants were asked to review the summary and to provide feedback, if any. The participants acknowledged that the transcribed information was consistent with their responses and no additional information was provided.

Transferability

Transferability involves how well the established processes can be repeated (Stahl & King, 2020). The purpose of transferability is to share the method and design so it can be transferred to another study from which other researchers conclude with the same or comparable results (Stahl & King, 2020). I ensured the transferability of the data by using thick, rich, and robust verbiage to describe each step in the data collection process, including recruiting and data analysis.

Confirmability

The final criterion for trustworthiness is confirmability. Confirmability ensures the data can be replicated to confirm the results (Nassaji, 2020). I used the reflexive journal data to establish confirmability. Reflexivity is the attitude I adopted when the data were collected and analyzed to ensure the data were developed and that findings were based on the responses from the sample and not any self-held perceptions or biases.

Data Saturation

Data saturation is considered the point that a researcher reaches when, during data collection, there is no more to collect that would provide any value to the results (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Collecting sufficient data was necessary to draw valid conclusions, but once recurring themes emerged, a researcher should recognize that the saturation point has been met. Therefore, research requires a researcher to collect appropriate data to have enough information for an in-depth discovery to answer the posed research questions. The saturation point is determined when the participants begin to answer questions and repeat previous responses from others in the sample.

I carefully analyzed the data of six participants and developed trends and themes based on their responses and information acquired via observations to ultimately saturate the data. Each interview was transcribed directly after the interview, and the content was reviewed for keywords and phrases that matched the research question and purpose of the study in search of codes. The first three interviews showed different responses, and I found very few similarities in responses. However, during the fourth interview, I noted that some of the responses from this individual were similar to those of Participants 1 and 2. When interviewing Participant 5, I found their responses were similar to those provided in the first three interviews. For example, these first five participants stated they needed more physical resources and classroom equipment, including technology. At the beginning of Interview 6, I felt saturation had been met, but I decided to finish this sixth interview. This participant's responses were noted early in the interview process as redundant to the previous five interviews. At this point, I determined that the data were saturated and found no new data for any new results.

Transition and Summary

In Section 3, I described the project and its methods for discovering answers to the research questions. Explanations of the methodology and research design were shared and justified. My role in this study was shared. I explained the process for recruiting with the sampling strategy and the general and targeted population used for gathering a sample. The sample number of individuals was justified, and the ethical practices employed for this study were discussed. Data collection methods, interviews, focus groups, and documentation from Head Start programs were explained. The process for

the data collection and data organization techniques were presented. The data analysis process was shown, and I shared the methods of proving the data was trustworthy. In Section 4, I will present the findings, explaining how the themes were extracted and using tables to illustrate the process.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies for the Head Start program managers to obtain external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with six Head Start program managers currently employed in the New Jersey Head Start program. The interviews were held on Zoom, were audio recorded, and then transcribed. The transcribed data were coded, collated into categories (i.e., prethemes), and then combined to form three themes: managers leverage resource optimization and strategic planning to secure financial sustainability, managers enhance workforce stability and adaptability to navigate operational challenges, and managers rely on community collaboration and communication to attract external financial support.

Table 1 illustrates the process from codes to categories to themes.

Table 1

Codes to Categories to Themes

Codes	Categories	Theme
Access to emergency funding (e.g., Head Start COVID funds, state grants)	Resource management	Managers leverage resource optimization and strategic planning to secure financial sustainability
Provision of physical resources like PPE, remote work technology, and classroom equipment		
Strategic reduction of nonessential expenses to reallocate funds efficiently		
Prioritization of funding for staff retention and operational continuity		
Development and execution of strategic plans focused on financial diversification	Strategic planning and innovation	

Codes	Categories	Theme
Continuous innovation in funding strategies to reduce dependency on federal grants		
Use of specialized consultants for grant applications		
Employee knowledge transfer and training initiatives to address staff turnover	Workforce and knowledge retention	Managers enhance workforce stability and adaptability to navigate operational challenges
Proactive retention strategies, including bonuses and competitive compensation		
Challenges in maintaining consistent knowledge management processes		
Organizational adaptability and flexibility in response to crises	Operational adaptability	
Rapid shift to virtual operations and hybrid work during the pandemic		
Adapting program services to address changing community needs		
Difficulties in replicating comprehensive digital transformation and hybrid work models		
Leveraging community reputation to attract new funding	Community engagement and partnerships	Managers rely on community collaboration and communication to attract external financial support
Unique community partnerships enabling access to exclusive funding opportunities		
Enhancing program visibility to attract donations and community support		
Efficient internal communication through virtual platforms and regular meetings	Communication and collaboration	
Staff collaboration and shared responsibilities in grant applications		
Alignment of funding strategies with community needs assessments		

These themes were defined and then examined to determine how each theme answered the research question: What effective organizational strategies do Head Start program managers use to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic? The participants' interview responses and the secondary data provided evidence of Head Start program managers employing several effective organizational strategies to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theme 1: Managers Leverage Resource Optimization and Strategic Planning to Secure Financial Sustainability

Theme 1 encompassed the leveraging of resource optimization and strategic planning to secure financial sustainability. Participants highlighted the acquisition of emergency funding, such as "Head Start COVID funds and state grants" (P3), which facilitated the provision of PPE and remote work technology, ensuring operational continuity. Organizational adaptability emerged as a critical intangible resource, transitioning participants to "a fully virtual system" (P1) to mitigate disruptions. Human resource strategies, including employee training to address turnover, were emphasized, such as memorializing procedures to support new hires (P5). Value creation was achieved by aligning funding strategies with community needs assessments, enabling organizations to "increase program visibility through social media and local events" (P6). Unique partnerships and the use of specialized consultants enhanced access to exclusive funding opportunities, as noted by P4 who stated, "Hiring a consulting firm to help write and implement grants was crucial." These efforts underpinned sustained competitive

advantage, proactive retention strategies, and dynamic capabilities, ensuring organizations could adapt to evolving demands while maintaining service delivery.

According to P3, “We applied for the Head Start COVID funds, which we received, as well as other state funding during COVID.” Their response described manager activities vis-a-vis accessing emergency funding to address immediate financial needs. The proactive approach of managers was critical during COVID-19 because managers could provide essential resources to maintain operations during a critical period. Managers also prioritized the provision of physical resources. The allocation of funds by managers to supply PPE and technology necessary for safe and effective program delivery was instrumental for Head Start. P4 noted, “Funding was used to provide PPE, remote learning devices, and other equipment necessary for safe operations.” P4’s response showed that programs optimized their budgets to focus on critical areas by strategically reducing nonessential expenses. The response from P4 coincides with P1’s statement, “We carefully analyzed our expenses and eliminated nonessential costs to optimize our budget.” The prioritization of funding for staff retention was also crucial, as P6 stated, “We ensured the majority of our resources were allocated toward direct program delivery and staff retention.”

Provision of physical resources, like PPE, remote work technology, and classroom equipment, was explained as a necessity. P6 claimed, “We provided laptops, printers, and other tools for remote work to ensure our staff could function effectively from home.” P1 also noted the need for PPE, “We provided staff with PPE and ensured classrooms had the necessary equipment for hybrid learning.” Such statements

emphasized the need for financial assistance, with the managers required to recognize how allocating and reallocating financial resources was important.

Resource managers emphasized the strategic allocation and reallocation of resources, including emergency funding, physical resources like PPE, and the prioritization of staff retention to ensure operational continuity. P6 explained, “We ensured that the majority of our resources were allocated towards direct program delivery and staff retention.” Prioritization of funding for staff retention and operational continuity was recognized with the allocation, utilization, and optimization of available resources used to ensure organizational sustainability and operational continuity. P3 reported, “We reallocated funds to ensure continuity of essential services like staff wages and classroom resources.” The emphasis was on effective planning, prioritization, and reallocation to address critical needs during financial constraints or emergencies.

Effective planning also included the strategic reduction of nonessential expenses to reallocate funds efficiently. P4 shared, “We ensured operational continuity by managing expenses, such as utility reductions during closures.” P5 agreed, stating, “We cut nonessential expenses, such as in-office utilities, to prioritize other critical needs.” Participants noted having a need for continuous innovation in funding strategies to reduce dependency on federal grants. For example, P4 said that hiring “a consulting firm to help us write and implement grants was crucial.” P6 found that using an outside grant writer “helped us secure funding from foundations we wouldn’t have otherwise reached.” Other participants claimed the use of specialized consultants for grant applications was beneficial, with P1 noting the “contracted consultants who specialized in identifying

funding were tailored to our organizational needs and brought about a positive and necessary change in our funding planning.”

The participants explained how workforce and knowledge retention focused on stabilizing the workforce through proactive retention strategies, training, and knowledge-sharing initiatives to address turnover and gaps. Community engagement and partnerships highlighted leveraging community trust and partnerships to secure funding and enhance program visibility. Operational adaptability underscored flexibility and innovation in organizational responses, such as transitioning to hybrid work and adapting programs to meet evolving community needs. Strategic planning and innovation reflected the development of sustainable strategies, including financial diversification and engaging consultants to optimize grant applications. Finally, communication and collaboration showcased the critical role of clear internal communication and teamwork in aligning efforts with organizational goals and fostering shared responsibilities, such as in grant writing. Secondary data, in the form of the program’s 5-year strategic plan and memos, also contributed to the theme by demonstrating policies designed to foster communication and align teamwork via clear mandates and approaches to strategic planning.

These findings, while supported by some of the existing literature, also extended existing knowledge concerning the strategies employed by Head Start program managers with the objective acquiring external financial support during the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Existing research showed that while nonprofits are not structured as for-profit corporate enterprises, they are still not exempt from the

challenges of market competition other organizations face and are required to leverage resource optimizations and strategy planning to secure financial sustainability (Bryson, 2018; Gee et al., 2023; Golensky & Hager, 2020; Hawkins et al., 2023; Kabeyi, 2019; Levine Daniel & Fyall, 2019; Searing et al., 2023). Researchers noted that nonprofit organization leaders must focus on the roles and responsibilities assigned to financial staff and directors that impact their resources and staff, which in turn keep their organization sustainable (Gee et al., 2023; Golensky & Hager, 2020; Levine Daniel & Fyall, 2019). Kabeyi (2019) reinforced this comment by articulating the importance of strategic planning, maintenance, and evaluation in the sustainability of nonprofits within competitive marketplaces. Nonprofits must remain strategically savvy to the community's values, desires, and the characteristics of target audience donors to acquire and maintain necessary funding (Kabeyi, 2019; Rayne et al., 2024).

The activities of Head Start program managers aligned with the strategic resource management discussed by Santos and Laureano (2021) and Strassberger (2022) who emphasized the necessity for innovative financial strategies in nonprofit organizations in times of crisis. Extensive research on financial strategies might help researchers understand Head Start program managers' strategies to acquire external funding. Information exists on financial strategies necessary for any nonprofit organization's success (Strassberger, 2022); however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and consequential financial downturns marked an era of significant impact and shifts in many nonprofits' financial experiences (Santos & Laureano, 2021).

The current study findings suggested that sustainability requires thinking outside the box and using innovative ideas. Existing research supported this idea, focusing on the ability of nonprofit organizational leaders to pivot and adapt to changing circumstances and resource opportunities quickly being central to the success of nonprofits (Azevedo et al., 2022; Santos & Laureano, 2021; Shi et al., 2020). Often, the disruption to financial strategy in operations of nonprofit organizations caused by COVID-19 necessarily led many nonprofit organizations to look towards the online space as a solution and strategy for maintaining sustainability (Chhabra et al., 2021; Costales & Zeyen, 2022; Santos & Laureano, 2021). Some Head Start programs leaned into AI development, with big data analytics and data processing vital for more extensive programs (Costales & Zeyen, 2022). Head Start programs were required to employ various strategies to identify and guide crisis management, and the success of these strategies appears to be related to company size and, thus, resource management. The unique adaptability of Head Start programs may have been crucial to surviving the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The responses from the participants were supported by Chen's (2022) assertion regarding the importance of knowledge retention and innovation. The adaptation of operations to virtual platforms supports the findings of Azevedo et al. (2022) on the necessity of adaptability and rapid innovation for organizational sustainability during the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of the literature reviewed in the current study focused on the use of online resources to improve and secure financial sustainability (i.e., Chhabra et al., 2021; Costales & Zeyen, 2022; Santos & Laureano, 2021; Ulmen et al., 2023). Notably, the change navigation discussed in the literature included pivoting towards online

communication and transactions, applying for and taking advantage of available government aid programs, and changing marketing messaging and service provisions to meet the evolving needs of the surrounding community impacted by COVID-19 (Shi et al., 2020). While the current study findings did not specifically delineate online resources, participants recognized an increased visibility associated with online or internet use, such as with social media outlets.

The strategies identified in the current study findings, such as leveraging resource optimization, enhancing workforce stability, engaging in community collaboration, and implementing strategic innovation, were aligned with RBV theory, in which Penrose (1959) posited that an organization's resources and strategic application were crucial for achieving a competitive advantage. The Head Start program managers included in the current study described their effective leveraging of tangible and intangible resources during the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The findings of the current study aligned with the reviewed literature from Section 2, showing how effective business practices in nonprofit organizations can be successful during economic downturns. The findings supported the extension of the current body of knowledge on management leveraging resource optimization and strategic planning to secure financial sustainability during the COVID-19 pandemic. The activities undertaken by the program managers at Head Start confirmed Santos and Laureano's (2021) assertion that innovative financial strategies were essential for nonprofit success, especially in crises.

Theme 2: Managers Enhance Workforce Stability and Adaptability to Navigate Operational Challenges

Another key theme that emerged through thematic analysis involved enhancing workforce stability and adaptability to navigate operational challenges. Managers implemented Head Start employee knowledge transfer and training initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic to preserve institutional knowledge amidst staff changes. P5 stated, “We hired a company to memorialize critical procedures so new staff could learn quickly.” In addition to activities focused on recruiting, retention was also crucial. Proactive retention strategies were employed to keep staff engaged and reduce turnover. The strategies included competitive wages and bonuses. P5 noted, “Retention bonuses and competitive compensation helped us keep our staff engaged.” Operational adaptability was also essential at Head Start to achieve the maintenance of service delivery. Programs rapidly shifted to virtual operations to continue serving communities. According to P1, “We moved to a fully virtual system during COVID-19, which allowed us to continue operations without disruption.” The implementation of hybrid work schedules addressed both safety concerns and operational needs, according to P6 who stated, “We implemented hybrid schedules to balance in-office and remote work needs.” The adaptation of program services to address community needs was also significant. P5 noted, “Our rapid shift to virtual learning helped us maintain service quality during the pandemic.”

This theme highlights the role of fostering a stable and skilled workforce while maintaining the flexibility to adapt to unforeseen circumstances. Theme 2 addresses

improving turnover challenges through training, knowledge-sharing, and retention-focused initiatives. P4 stated, “Some institutional knowledge did not transfer due to sudden staff departures, but we implemented training programs to mitigate this.” P6 explained how they “held frequent training sessions to ensure staff were prepared to manage the new technologies and systems required.” The participants reflected on the ability of an organization to remain flexible and responsive to changing circumstances. P4 claimed, “We transitioned from paper to everything virtual, in part to overcome challenges.” P3 agreed, noting how they “transitioned to virtual meetings and digital documentation to adapt quickly to the situation” in an attempt to remain flexible. These findings showed how managers prioritized adjusting operations and workflows to ensure organizational resilience and continuity in response to changing conditions. Secondary data, such as the program’s 5-year strategic plan, demonstrated that strategic planning was key to fostering communication and internal strategies to improve operations and workflows.

The reviewed literature in Section 2 associated with this theme was somewhat limited; however, the few studies focusing on workforce stability and adaptability to navigate operational changes showed researchers who agreed with the current findings. Based on studies reviewed in Section 2, the COVID-19 pandemic forced many nonprofits to remain adaptable. The ability to quickly pivot and adapt to changing circumstances and resource opportunities was central to the success of nonprofits (Azevedo et al., 2022; Santos & Laureano, 2021; Shi et al., 2020; Woznyj et al., 2024).

For example, Shi et al. (2020) reported that for some nonprofits, change navigation included pivoting towards online communication and transactions, applying for and taking advantage of available government aid programs, and changing marketing messaging and service provisions to meet the evolving needs of the surrounding community impacted by COVID-19. Shi et al. continued to identify crisis management and adaptability as key strategies implemented by nonprofits for the distribution of provisions to the homeless. The available data indicated that a ripple effect impacted financial strategy due to staff shortages that required the implementation of numerous services and strategies. Agility and innovations associated with nonprofit organizations may have been one approach used to combat continued funding challenges.

Researchers considered that additional changes that required addressing financial and organizational functioning, including nonprofits, caused many managers to leverage the online space and rapidly innovate (Bin-Nashwan & Al-Daihani, 2020; Newby & Branyon, 2021; Santos & Laureano, 2021; Ulmen et al., 2023). These changes indicate a substantial change to the financial and resource-based strategies used during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the limited research focusing on Head Start programs' data capacity and financial stability continued to decrease during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature relating to the theme of managers enhancing workforce stability and adaptability to navigate operational challenges commonly mentioned the increasing importance of nonprofit leaders' digital literacy as a skill needed to implement and carry out nonprofit strategies, including financial strategies (Belte et al., 2023; Bryson, 2018; Gee et al., 2023; Levine Daniel & Fyall, 2019; Vedel et al., 2020). As the technology and

information age continues to expand rapidly, the viability of all organizations, including nonprofits, will depend upon leaders and, thus, organizations' abilities to navigate a changing social landscape, influenced heavily by online communication (Nikita et al., 2024; Vedel et al., 2020). Nonprofits' use and implementation of social media are becoming increasingly important from a competitive and sustainable perspective.

The findings of this study also align with RBV theory, which was determined by observing the participants' perceptions related to enhancing workforce stability and adapting to organizational changes. The RBV theory is based on the premise that any organization's performance is determined explicitly by, or a function of, the resources the firm or organization has access to (Dionysus & Arifin, 2020). The findings showed the importance of following innovation to create sustainability and, thus, as technology moves forward and continues to advance, recognizing the need for continual competitive advantage aligned with RBV theory's provision of such advantage. The emphasis on workforce stability and adaptability served to extend existing knowledge. The emphasis illustrated that operational adjustments can mitigate crisis impacts. Managers implemented knowledge transfer initiatives and retention strategies, as P5 stated, "We hired a company to memorialize critical procedures so new staff could learn quickly." The response from P5 aligns with Chen's (2022) assertion on the importance of knowledge retention and innovation. The adaptation of operations to virtual platforms supports the findings of Azevedo et al. (2022) on the necessity of adaptability and rapid innovation for organizational sustainability during the pandemic, as community collaboration strategies employed by managers confirm the literature's emphasis on the

role of community engagement in securing financial support. Leveraging reputation and enhancing visibility reflects the strategies discussed by Callie Silver and Coba-Rodriguez (2022) and the OECD (2020), highlighting the importance of community partnerships in building resilience. These findings address the gap that Bernstein et al. (2022) identified regarding the lack of focus on how economic downturns affect Head Start program managers' funding strategies, thereby contributing new insights into nonprofit financial management during crises.

Theme 3: Managers Rely on Community Collaboration and Communication to Attract External Financial Support

The third theme illustrated how managers rely on community collaboration and communication to attract external financial support. This theme captured the value of building trust and fostering relationships with external stakeholders to secure financial resources. Based on the participants' responses to the interview questions, the findings showed how enhancing visibility and engagement through effective communication and collaborative efforts with community members and organizations could provide positive financial outcomes. The participants claimed that managers should focus on creating a shared sense of purpose to attract and sustain external support during challenging times.

Community collaboration and communication were activities relied on by management to attract external financial support, forming another central theme. The leveraging of program reputations held a role in attracting new donors during COVID-19 by Head Start management, based on responses from P6. Specifically, P6 stated, "Our reputation in the community helped us attract more donors during this time." Unique

community partnerships also facilitated opportunities to access funding. P1 noted, “Collaborating with local businesses opened doors to funding opportunities unique to our area.” Enhancing program visibility through social media and outreach to local organizations also increased donations. P6 discussed the success of Head Start, noting that “We increased program visibility by sharing our initiatives on social media and with local organizations.” Effective communication and collaboration held an integral role in the efforts taken by management. Additionally, managers emphasized efficient internal communication to align staff with organizational goals. Organizational communication was maintained through effective scheduling to support communication and collaboration, as P3 stated, “Weekly updates through emails and virtual meetings helped us keep the team aligned on goals and progress.” For example, collaborative efforts in grant applications involved staff at all levels, as P6 noted, “All staff, including leadership, worked together to apply for and secure grants.”

The findings illustrated how community engagement and partnerships emphasize building and leveraging relationships with external stakeholders to secure support and resources. For example, P5 shared, “Our community program area supports Head Start by providing services funded through external funding that comes through community donations.” The participants perceived that such engagement and partnerships include strengthening visibility, trust, and collaboration with community members and organizations to achieve shared goals. The engagement was based on unique community partnerships enabling access to exclusive funding opportunities. P6 noted, “We built unique relationships with local boards to identify funding specific to our region.” These

relationships encouraged community support by enhancing program visibility to attract donations and community support. P1 said, “We participated in local events to showcase our programs and attract funding support,” while P5 felt that they “increased visibility through online communications and social media campaigns.”

Communication and collaboration underscored the importance of clear and effective communication and teamwork within and across departments. The participants claimed such measures involved fostering collaboration, maintaining alignment with organizational goals, and ensuring stakeholder engagement through consistent dialogue and shared responsibilities. The findings from this study’s sample showed that efficient internal communication was most successful through virtual platforms and regular meetings, with P6 saying, “Frequent team updates kept the staff informed and involved in strategic decisions.” P3 found that through collaboration and shared responsibilities, “Regular town hall meetings helped us gather input and foster collaboration across departments for grant applications.”

The enhancement of strategic innovation for competitive advantage was also evident. The management at Head Start focused on sustainability by investing in staff development and retention during the COVID-19 pandemic. P1 stated, “Providing career growth opportunities internally helped us retain talented staff.” The response from P1 demonstrated the link between employee development and organizational strength at Head Start. Long-term diversification of revenue streams was pursued by Head Start with the objective of building resilience against future economic uncertainties. P5 explained, “Our 5-year strategic plan emphasized diversifying funding sources”. The shared plan

also indicated the value of improving these funding sources. The findings indicate that Head Start program managers effectively utilized resource optimization, workforce stability, community collaboration, and strategic innovation to acquire external financial support during the pandemic-induced economic downturn. Management at Head Start addressed the challenges posed by the economic crisis by accessing emergency funds, optimizing budgets, retaining staff, adapting operations, engaging with the community, and planning strategically. The strategies identified align with the research question by illustrating practical approaches to securing external funding and ensuring program sustainability during financial hardship.

The findings for this study associated with community collaboration strategies employed by managers confirmed the literature's emphasis on the role of community engagement in securing financial support. Leveraging reputation and enhancing visibility, such as P6 stating, "Our reputation in the community helped us attract more donors during this time," reflects the strategies discussed by Callie Silver and Coba-Rodriguez (2022) and the OECD (2020) that highlighted the importance of community partnerships in building resilience. These findings address the gap that Bernstein et al. (2022) identified regarding the lack of focus on how economic downturns affect Head Start program managers' funding strategies, thereby contributing new insights into nonprofit financial management during crises. The emphasis on community collaboration and communication also supported Strassberger's (2022) findings that strong community engagement enhances nonprofit funding opportunities. A review of the secondary data, such as various memos, demonstrated the program managers' effort to strengthen

communication and collaboration with the community to attract external financial support. The memos were also used to provide information on the need and use of external funding.

The findings of this study were aligned with existing literature on effective business practices in nonprofit organizations during economic downturns and support the extension of the current body of knowledge. Management leveraged resource optimization and strategic planning to secure financial sustainability during the COVID-19 pandemic. The activities undertaken by the program managers at Head Start confirmed that Santos and Laureano (2021) and Parker (2024) contended that financial strategies were essential for nonprofit success, especially in crisis situations. Manager participants demonstrated prudent financial management practices recommended for navigating economic challenges by accessing emergency funds and reducing nonessential expenses. The emphasis on community collaboration and communication also supported Strassberger's (2022) findings that strong community engagement enhances nonprofit funding opportunities. The sample highlighted the effectiveness of leveraging community relationships among program managers at Head Start. The strategies, including workforce adaptability and strategic innovation, both corroborate existing literature and provide practical insights into how Head Start program managers successfully navigated financial challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic (Movahedazarhouligh & Jones, 2024; Silver & Coba-Rodriguez, 2024). The findings contributed valuable knowledge to the field of nonprofit management by illustrating effective practices in resource optimization, community engagement, and strategic planning.

The strategies identified, such as leveraging resource optimization, enhancing workforce stability, engaging in community collaboration, and implementing strategic innovation, were aligned with RBV theory as RBV theory posited that an organization's resources and their strategic application were crucial for achieving a competitive advantage (Penrose, 1959). Management access to emergency funding and the strategic allocation of resources are themes in the research that confirmed the importance of resource diversification and optimization, both discussed in prior literature. The activities of Head Start program managers reflected the strategic resource management discussed by Santos and Laureano (2021) and Strassberger (2022) as they emphasized the necessity for innovative financial strategies in nonprofit organizations in times of crisis.

The findings from the thematic analysis were aligned closely with RBV theory. RBV theory included the assertion that an organization's unique resources and capabilities are crucial for achieving a competitive advantage in an industry. The Head Start program managers included in the study described their effective leveraging of tangible and intangible resources during the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Program managers also achieved investment in human capital through knowledge transfer initiatives and competitive compensation. These findings demonstrate that the program managers at Head Start recognized skilled personnel as valuable resources.

Managers had also harnessed intangible assets like reputation and community relationships to attract external financial support. Program managers used rare and inimitable resources to gain a competitive advantage. The competitive advantage

obtained by the program managers at Head Start is consistent with RBV principles. Strategic innovation was also highlighted by the program managers at Head Start in activities such as the diversification of revenue streams. The finding reflects a proactive approach to resource management that strengthens organizational resilience. These strategies exemplify the practical application of the RBV theory, showing how effective resource utilization can sustain organizations during economic crises.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

The study's findings suggested that managers working in Head Start programs can make significant changes to their business practices to improve the effectiveness of current strategies related to acquiring external financial support. Whereas the existing literature focused on specific funding streams, overall, the information shared by experts provided nonspecific information and solutions (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2020; McMullin & Raggo, 2020; Movahedazarhouligh et al., 2023). The themes found based on the sample's perceptions and experiences suggested that to increase such financially supportive strategies, managers should leverage current resource optimization and strategic planning to secure continued financial sustainability, enhance workforce stability and adaptability to navigate operational challenges, and rely on community collaboration and communication to attract external financial support. These themes provided information that suggests how such changes can provide methods to overcome any existing lack of effective strategies Head Start managers currently use to find external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The improved professional practice associated with Head Start managers was reflected in the samples' explanation of the importance of carefully managing available resources and developing forward-thinking strategies to ensure financial stability. The findings emphasized proactive measures to allocate resources efficiently, reduce unnecessary expenditures, and plan for long-term sustainability. From the findings, I suggested that managers implement innovative approaches to diversify funding sources and reduce dependency on single revenue streams. These innovative approaches included working with emergency funding such as Head Start COVID funds and state grants, focusing on allocating, utilizing, and optimizing available resources to ensure organizational sustainability and operational continuity.

However, researchers found that multiple funding streams often complicate the operational capacities of nonprofit organizations (Bernstein et al., 2022; Pratt, 2023). For example, Bernstein et al. (2022) claimed that common use for funding outside the federal Head Start program is to provide teaching materials, participate in staff professional development, and use resources to improve current services which the findings disagreed with participants noting that allocation of funds must be implemented to ensure sustainability and not focus on one single use. Furthermore, researchers considered that having multiple funding streams may complicate the autonomy of a nonprofit organization, as targeted funding may create conditionality for using materials gained through said funding (Bernstein et al., 2022; Pratt, 2023). The participants from this study agreed with this notion, noting that multiple funding streams often create a complex

system of compliance, which took a great deal of energy to manage, including the need to host multiple physical site inspections and deal with paperwork.

Based on this study's findings, business contributions also included developing forward-thinking strategies that drive long-term success and reduce dependency on limited or traditional resources. Head Start business managers noted that financial and operational sustainability can be assured by creating innovative approaches and leveraging expertise. Specifically, such changes recommended by the sample included effective planning, prioritization, and reallocation to address critical needs during financial constraints or emergencies. These suggested changes were in pursuit of identifying contributions and recommendations based on project findings with a message focused on business and organization leaders and a message to the research-scholar community. Specifically, the provision of physical resources like PPE, remote work technology, and classroom equipment can create a strategic reduction of nonessential expenses to reallocate funds efficiently and thus prioritize funding for such necessities as staff retention and operational continuity.

Findings from my research providing recommendations for professional practice and business contributions also included management's enhancement of workforce stability and adaptability to navigate operational challenges. Fostering a stable and skilled workforce while maintaining the flexibility to adapt to unforeseen circumstances. Such a change in Head Start managers' strategies involved addressing challenges like turnover through training, knowledge-sharing, and retention-focused initiatives. Managers should further prioritize adjusting operations and workflows to ensure organizational resilience

and continuity in response to changing conditions. Specifically, highlighting strategies to maintain a stable and skilled workforce while addressing challenges like turnover and knowledge gaps fosters a supportive environment through training, knowledge-sharing practices, and retention-focused initiatives.

The existing literature reviewed in this study only considered such initiatives associated with operational adaptability but only based on its outcome from disruptions to financial strategy in all areas of operations of nonprofit organizations caused by COVID-19 (Hoang et al., 2024). Researchers suggested that solutions involved looking towards the online space as a solution and strategy for maintaining sustainability (Chhabra et al., 2021; Costales & Zeyen, 2022; Nikita et al., 2024; Santos & Laureano, 2021). Sustainability in operations was suggested by enlisting the use of Zoom platforms to conduct video conferencing and reach donors or partners, and social media platforms used to carry out campaigns and promotional strategies for acquiring support (Chhabra et al., 2021; Costales & Zeyen, 2022). The implementation of online space was evident as a strategy used by many organizations to ensure continuity and sustainability.

The results found in this study from analyzing the samples' responses also included a suggestion that managers must rely on community collaboration and communication to attract external financial support. The participants relayed that the value of building trust and fostering relationships with external stakeholders was necessary for securing financial resources. Such means for professional practices would thus enhance visibility and engagement through effective communication and collaborative efforts with community members and organizations. It was noted that

managers who focus on creating a shared sense of purpose were more likely to attract and sustain external support during challenging times that impacted financial sustainability. Such consideration emphasizes building and leveraging relationships with external stakeholders to secure support and resources. Specifically, improving business practices involves strengthening visibility, trust, and collaboration with community members and organizations to achieve shared goals.

Implications for Social Change

The findings from this study further suggested implications for social change. The potential impact from these findings regarding professional practices and business contributions may change a society's broader structure and dynamics, including improvements in community engagement and partnerships, creating a more functional and strategic plan through innovation, and increasing the potential for hiring and retention practices of Head Start employees. The outcome of such changes may reflect the ability of an organization to remain flexible and responsive to changing circumstances through implementing innovative approaches and adjusting operations, programs, and processes to maintain efficiency and effectiveness during crises. By implementing the suggested changes for business contribution and professional practices, social change involving shifts in cultural norms, behaviors, power structures, and societal institutions can potentially lead to positive transformations within the community.

Positive transformation must further be associated with Head Start programs and how the changes will impact an organization or the manager of such an organization and the community. Children within a given community who meet the required financial and

educational needs can learn through a Head Start program. Children participating in Head Start programs will benefit emotionally, socially, and cognitively. Head Start programs can act as a protective factor and support children with incarcerated parents, reduce the likelihood of future criminal involvement and teen parenthood, and increase high school graduate and college enrollment (Anders et al., 2023; Garcia et al., 2023). Head Start programs not only mitigate the negative effects of having a parent incarcerated but also reduce the chances of engaging in criminal activities later in life.

Having access to a Head Start program can have an intergenerational impact. Children with access to Head Start preschool programs reduce the likelihood of their children engaging in criminal behavior by approximately 49% and reduce the next generation of teen parents by approximately 35% (Barr & Gibbs, 2022). External financial support and obligation strategies must prove effective in maintaining such a program to help improve the next generation, mainly since the pandemic caused an economic downturn for such nonprofit organizations. Community members with children who would benefit from Head Start would thrive by implementing effective organizational strategies.

Tangible examples were found throughout the existing research, with experts describing tasks involved in implementing strategies to fulfill needs assessments related to acquiring external financial support. Examples included providing essential public education to community members regarding the nonprofit's mission and vision, facilitating introductions between nonprofit staff members and key stakeholders or potential partners and donors, and sourcing and acquiring the resources, such as

educational resources, financial resources, and consulting resources, which the nonprofit staff and board need to carry out a financial strategy or plan (Bryson, 2018; Corduneanu & Lebec, 2020; Golensky & Hager, 2020). Each of these strategies was considered a supportive measure providing effective outcomes for financial strategies.

Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for further research involving suggestions based on the study's results should be built upon the findings of a current research project, highlighting the areas where more data is needed, potential new variables to explore, or different methodologies to investigate a topic more comprehensively. Based on the given limitations discussed in Section 1, a recommendation for such research includes expanding the sample size, changing the methodological approach from qualitative to quantitative due to the constraining factors of a qualitative study, and expanding the region in which the sample was selected (Region II). Expanding the sample size would strengthen the accuracy and reliability of the results. Additionally, expanding a sample size could provide a stronger representation of the population and allow a future researcher to draw more robust conclusions while minimizing any tendency for sampling error.

Expanding the setting where the researcher recruited the sample from is also recommended for future research. This expansion can allow researchers to test the generalizability of the findings and support the transferability of this study's outcomes. Future researchers could use an expanding setting to explore potential variations across different contexts and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Such understanding could ultimately lead to more robust and impactful research conclusions.

Changing the methodological approach from qualitative to quantitative is another recommendation for future research. Removal of constraining factors of a qualitative study increases the ability for objective results. A quantitative approach allows for generalizing the research findings to a larger population. Such an approach can provide objective findings using specific hypotheses, testing with statistically reliable data, and establishing cause-and-effect relationships. Quantitative data results in a more objective, numerical format that can be easily analyzed and interpreted using statistical methods and thus could support qualitative findings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative single case study research project was to explore strategies Head Start program managers used to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This purpose addressed the problem of some Head Start program managers needing more effective strategies to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The research question that guided this study was: What effective organizational strategies do Head Start program managers use to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic? Interview responses were collected from a sample of six Head Start directors and financial staff members, and the data collected was analyzed for themes. Three themes emerged: managers leverage resource optimization and strategic planning

to secure financial sustainability, enhance workforce stability and adaptability to navigate operational challenges, and rely on community collaboration and communication to attract external financial support.

The themes answer the research question, establishing that through effective organizational strategies, proven successful during the COVID-19 pandemic, a Head Start program director or financial manager could provide strategies to maintain and sustain their program. The findings further showed how early education professionals who successfully sustain such programs as Head Start find community and social improvements through engagement, collaboration, and partnerships. Such collaborations between Head Start programs and the community offer potential hiring and retention opportunities as well as offering educational opportunities for children of these communities. The implementation of this study's findings suggested the means for changing education practices as business contribution and professional practices can impact and change positive norms for communities with Head Start programs.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

What you will do

What you will say—script

Introduce the interview and set the stage—often over a meal or coffee

Script: Hello and thank you for participating in this interview. I will be asking you a series of questions and sub questions in relation to this research project. Let's review the informed consent so I can be certain you understand all that is involved, your rights as a participant, and what to do if you wish to stop the interview.

First let me reiterate the purpose of this research. I wish to explore effective strategies Head Start program managers use to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

You have met the inclusion criteria to participate in this interview and will need to verbally agree to the following:

1. You understand this interview is being audio recorded.
 2. You understand the results from your responses will be used in combination of other participants responses to answer the research questions.
 3. You understand that participation is completely voluntary on your part. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. The researcher will follow up with all volunteers to let them know whether or not they were selected for the study.
 4. You understand that being in this study could involve some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life such as
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sharing sensitive information. With the protections in place, this study would pose minimal risk to your wellbeing.

5. You understand participation offers no direct benefits to individual volunteers. The aim of this study is to benefit society by providing information and knowledge regarding the financial challenges Head Start programs often face. Once the analysis is complete, the researcher will share the overall results by emailing you a summary.
 6. You understand the researcher is required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. The researcher is only allowed to share your identity or contact info as needed with Walden University supervisors (who are also required to protect your privacy) or with authorities if court-ordered (very rare). The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. If the researcher were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the dataset would contain no identifiers so this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data will be kept secure by saving the signed informed consents on one encrypted flash drive and all data saved on a second, separate flash drive. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.
 7. Please say yes or no to the fact that
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you understand these items.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch for nonverbal queues • Paraphrase as needed • Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What strategies do you implement to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic? 2. What are the different ways that Head Start program directors support their financial staff in acquiring external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic? 3. How have the organizational strategies of Head Start programs for external financial support changed in response to the economic downturn resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic? 4. How do you develop strategies to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic? 5. How did you measure the success of the strategies used to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic? 6. What are some of the problems encountered in implementing funding strategies to acquire financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic? 7. How did you overcome some of the problems encountered in implementing funding strategies to acquire financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic? 8. What additional information would you like to share about funding strategies used to acquire financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?
<p>Wrap up interview by thanking participant</p>	<p>Script Well if you have no other comments or questions, thank you so much for participating in this interview.</p>

Schedule follow-up member checking interview	Script I would like to schedule a follow-up member checking interview where I can ask some follow up questions and you determine if the transcribed interview responses concisely portray the meaning in your responses.
Introduce follow-up interview and set the stage	Script Hello again, I just wanted to follow up and ensure the transcribed interview accurately conveys the meaning you intended in the question responses.
Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question	Script The following questions were responded to during the interview. I would like to ask if you have anything else to add or if your responses convey what you actually meant in response to the questions.
Bring in probing questions related to other information that you may have found— note the information must be related so that you are probing and adhering to the IRB approval. Walk through each question, read the interpretation, and ask: Did I miss anything? Or what would you like to add?	<p>1. What strategies do Head Start program managers implement to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?</p> <p>This question establishes the notion if you recognized there were financial needs within the program and if you were able to acquire outside financial assistance.</p> <p>In your previous response, did I miss anything? Or what would you like to add?</p>

2. What are the different ways that Head Start program directors support their financial staff in acquiring external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

This question asks you to relate any ideas, strategies, or methods you used during the pandemic to acquire external financial support. It is understood that after the principal federal funding, the most common sources of funding for Head Start are state and local sources, the Childcare and Development Fund (CCDF), other federal sources such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program, tuition, and private fundraising, more funds may be needed to be raised.

In your previous response, did I miss anything? Or what would you like to add?

3. How have the organizational strategies of Head Start programs for external financial support changed in response to the economic downturn resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic?

You know that Head Start is a federal program that addresses child development for disadvantaged children. With this knowledge and understanding that children who grow up in economically disadvantaged households must deal with several issues that can negatively impact their future school performance, did you feel this was a vital part of your job responsibilities?

In your previous response, did I miss anything? Or what would you like to add?

4. How do you develop strategies to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Did you have any guidance on establishing such strategies? What other ideas did other directors have? Did they share these with you?

In your previous response, did I miss anything? Or what would you like to add?

5. How did you measure the success of the strategies used to acquire external financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Did you recognize there was a need in your program, and if so, do you feel that the strategies implemented were appropriate and successful? How were they successful or not?

In your previous response, did I miss anything? Or what would you like to add?

6. What are some of the problems encountered in implementing funding strategies to acquire financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Head Start programs require dedicated financial staff to develop organizational strategies to manage external financial support, especially now that they are dealing with the economic downturn that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, were you fully aware of such needs in your program?

In your previous response, did I miss

anything? Or what would you like to add?

7. How did you overcome some of the problems encountered in implementing funding strategies to acquire financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

This question recognizes that unfortunately, the multiple funding streams often create a complex system of compliance, which takes a great deal of energy to manage, including the need to host multiple physical site inspections and deal with paperwork. How did you address the challenges associated with this?

In your previous response, did I miss anything? Or what would you like to add?

8. What additional information would you like to share about funding strategies used to acquire financial support in response to the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Do you have anything else you could elaborate upon that would help in my research?
