

# The Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration: From Vision to Victory

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This article details the genesis of the *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* (JSEPA), the official section journal of the Section of Democracy and Social Justice (SDSJ) of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA). It is written to memorialize and celebrate the victory of JSEPA's establishment for the generations of scholars and practitioners who will contribute to its success in the years to follow, as well as the readers—students, faculty, and practitioners alike—who will rely upon its findings to provide understanding and direction to solving some of the greatest inequities confronted by government.

## Introduction

As the words of the late Nelson Mandela aptly capture, “It always seems impossible . . . until it’s done.” The vision for establishing a journal with a decided focus on social equity within public administration began with a vision shared by Susan Gooden, a professor and later dean of the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University, during her 2016–2017 presidency of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) and Richard Gregory Johnson III, a professor at the University of San Francisco, who was chair of the Section on Democracy and Social Justice (SDSJ) section of ASPA during that same period. A few years later, in December 2020, the proposal to establish the *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* (JSEPA) was presented to ASPA's National Council where it was unanimously approved. A year later, in August 2021, Mary E. Guy, a professor in the School of Public Affairs at the University of Colorado Denver and Brian N. Williams, an associate professor in the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy

at the University of Virginia, were selected as JSEPA's inaugural coeditors.

To provide background for how the journal came about, it is worth noting that personal résumés, as well as organizations' historical accounts, often convey a linear, well thought out path of success. In reality, this masks many details along the way, including accomplishments and milestones, as well as formative decisions and challenges. This article, which appears in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration*, profiles the “birth” of this journal—capturing both its purpose and promise—as well as some of the key sausage-making in the journal's birth story. This article is written to memorialize and celebrate the victory of JSEPA's establishment for the generations of scholars and practitioners who will contribute to its success in the years to come, as well as the readers—students, faculty, and practitioners alike—who will rely upon its findings to provide understanding and direction for solving some of the greatest inequities confronted by government.

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## JSEPA in Broader Context

While JSEPA is a new academic journal in public administration, its launch is best understood against the broader context of social equity's development in the field, and indeed the nation. Since its inception, a thorny challenge for democracy in the United States has been the lack of congruence between lofty and uncontested foundational democratic goals, such as "justice for all" and all persons being "created equal" against the stark reality of their woeful shortcomings in practice, including, for example, broken treaties with American Indians, the legal institution of slavery, Jim Crow policies, lack of equal rights for women, and a problematic history of both legal and practiced discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, and ability status.

Frances Harriet Williams, the only high-ranking African-American female in the federal government during President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, conveyed the value of social equity as a foundation of the field of public administration in a 1947 *Public Administration Review* (PAR) article, "Minority Groups and OPA," its first publication with a focus on equity. Williams, who also served as a member of PAR's editorial board, was a pioneer in advancing equity scholarship in the field. "Her work as a practitioner was pioneering because she paved the way in articulating the importance of impartiality and fairness in the public sector" (Gooden 2017, 777). Her work was advanced via a broader discussion of social equity within the academic field in the late 1960s at the first Minnowbrook Conference (Minnowbrook I).

First convened in 1968 and held by the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University under the leadership of Dwight Waldo, Minnowbrook I provided an opportunity for invited public administration scholars to assess the status of the field. Against the national 1960s context focused on civil rights, racial inequality, and injustice, the young Minnows noted: "A government built on a Constitution claiming the equal protection of the laws had failed in that promise. Public administrators, who daily operate the government were not without responsibility" (Frederickson 1990, 228). The field's response to the political and social turmoil of the 1960s was the advancement of "new public administration" which rejected the idea that administrators were value neutral and recognized

a constellation of values which include responsiveness, worker and citizen participation in decision making, social equity, citizen choice, and administrative responsibility (Frederickson 1980).

As captured by social equity pioneer and ASPA past president Philip Rutledge, "My scholarly friends in the profession can trace our current thoughts and dilemmas around social equity back to Aristotle and Plato. Others would stop at Woodrow Wilson's seminal writings on the study of public administration. But in my own mind, I trace the 'invention' of social equity as a practical tool in public administration to the Minnowbrook conference convened by Dwight Waldo, George Frederickson, and a group of Young Turks in the 1960s" (Rutledge 2002, 391). While it is beyond the scope of this article to capture the historical development of social equity in the field of public administration, other authors have done so (see, for example, Frederickson 1971; Frederickson 1980, Frederickson 1990; Frederickson 2005; Gooden 2015b; Gooden and Portillo 2011; and Wooldridge and Gooden 2009). The actions of Frederickson and Rutledge ignited an intellectual focus on social equity in public administration that robustly continues today. In fact, it was Phil Rutledge who led the work of the congressionally chartered National Academy of Public Administration to develop a standing panel on social equity. The panel developed a working definition of the term, mainstreamed the study of social equity into the field more broadly, and hosts annual conferences on the subject.

In brief, social equity includes "the correction of existing imbalances in the distribution of social and political values. In contrast to equal treatment for all, equity proposes that benefits be greater for those most disadvantaged" (Denhardt 2004, 105). As Frederickson explains, "It's time for public administrators of all kinds to ask the so-called second question. The first question is whether an existing public program or proposed program is effective or good. The second question is more important. For whom is the program effective or good?" (2005, 36). "Social equity recognizes the historical, political, social, and economic influences that structurally influence prospects for access, opportunity, and outcomes. Social equity in public administration further recognizes the importance of public servants and public sector organizations in fulfilling the democratic principle of fairness" (Gooden 2015a, 373).

Since the development and interrogation of the term “social equity” at Minnowbrook I, many more milestones have been realized and advanced through the intellectual contributions of individual scholars, as well as the collective efforts advanced through our professional associations. These include, for example, the unrelenting work of the Conference of Minority Public Administrators (COMPA), since its founding in 1971; establishment of the Standing Panel on Social Equity in Governance by the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) in 2000; the same panel’s establishment of a working definition of social equity in 2000; the formal adoption of social equity by NAPA’s board of directors as the fourth pillar of public administration in 2005; and the establishment of the ASPA Section of Democracy and Social Justice (SDSJ) in 2008. It also includes the national recognition of social equity excellence through awards, such as the ASPA Gloria Hobson Nordin Social Equity Award for lifetime achievement, first awarded in 2002; the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA)’s annual Diversity Award, Social Equity Award, and Social Justice Curriculum Award, all of which were first presented in 2011; and the establishment of the best book award and the best paper award for works focused on social equity and social justice by SDSJ, which were first awarded in 2019.

### The Genesis of JSEPA

As the interest and appreciation for social equity scholarship increased throughout the field of public administration, a common concern that emerged among scholars, particularly doctoral students, and tenure-track faculty, was the lack of outlets to publish their social equity research. These conversations occurred formally and informally among colleagues, and were particularly discussed in ASPA’s SDSJ, which as a newer ASPA section engaged younger and newer scholars in the field and provided an important outlet where their concerns could be seriously advanced. Emblematic of their concerns, an analysis of all articles published in the field’s flagship journal *Public Administration Review*, revealed that of the 4,073 articles published in a period spanning more than seven decades (between 1940–2013), only 208 or 4.26% were focused on social equity (Gooden 2015b, 374).

In addition to the low percentage of published social

equity scholarship in the field’s flagship journal, an additional concern was that among those articles that were published, most were in the area of human resources management, with very few publications in other core areas of the field such as budgeting, ethics, and theory (Gooden 2015b). Ultimately, “decades of PAR scholarship on social equity have yielded remarkably few studies that analyze contemporary structural causes of social inequities in the public sector . . . An important challenge not only for the journal, but also for the field more broadly, is to understand through the voices of scholars and practitioners why social inequities in the administration of public services persist and how these patterns can be significantly reduced” (Gooden 2015b, 378–379). JSEPA directly addresses this challenge.

As discussed next, the idea for developing a journal focused on social equity was the result of parallel efforts advanced by Susan Gooden and Richard Gregory Johnson, III in 2017. Gooden had proposed the need for such a journal in 2014, beginning conversations with ASPA’s executive director, William Shields. Concrete efforts did not begin until 2017 when Gooden, as the first African-American female president of ASPA, and Johnson, as chair of ASPA’s Section on Democracy and Social Justice, were committed to realizing the establishment of the journal as a tangible result of their leadership legacy.

### The Road to Implementation

Much of the work of ASPA is accomplished through its chapters and sections. Organized geographically, chapters provide an opportunity for local engagement of academics and practitioners in advancing public administration ideals. Sections offer a specific topical focus to engage a cross section of members. The Section of Democracy and Social Justice (SDSJ) is one of more than 30 sections in ASPA. SDSJ was the brainchild of Richard Box, a professor at the University of Nebraska Omaha and the section was officially established in 2008. It was founded specifically to draw awareness to, and action on, social equity and human rights. The section focuses on matters of civil rights, LGBT matters, women’s rights, disability rights, and related concerns. It is an overarching umbrella that devotes serious attention to the struggles of many marginalized communities. In fact, it might also be suggested that the section exists to provide a voice for those communities in

public administration who remain a voiceless and invisible part of the “public.”

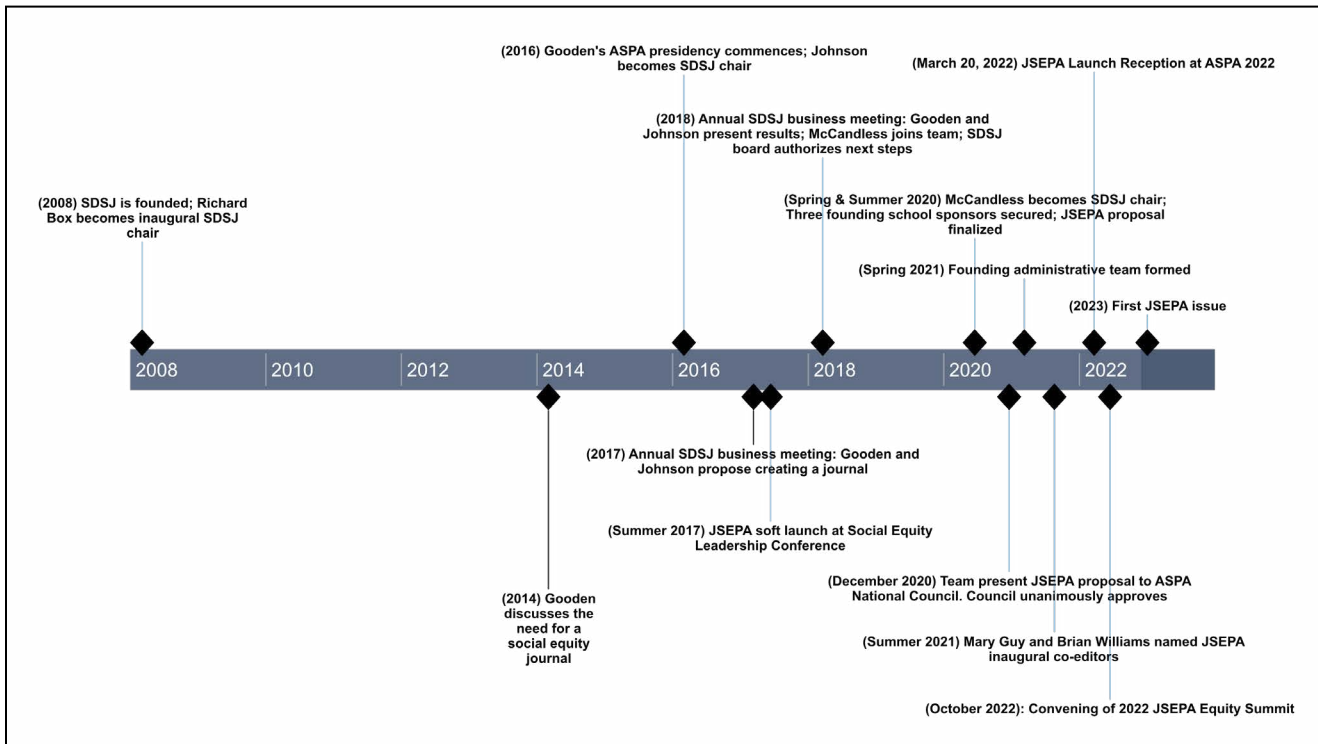
Clearly, the founding of a social equity journal was decades in the making. However, beginning in 2014, this endeavor was particularly formative (see Figure 1). While SDSJ’s membership numbers and outreach expanded over the years, there was a key dimension that still needed to be tackled: the establishment of a social equity journal. It was in this context that Johnson became SDSJ chair (2016–2018) with an intense focus on advancing social equity scholarship.

Johnson was concerned that social equity was not receiving the attention in public policy journals that other topics were receiving. Therefore, as a key next step toward creating a journal, he set about establishing a section newsletter. This newsletter highlights key activities of the section, as well as thoughtful examination of equity issues. It received ASPA’s Patricia Yearwood Chapter/Section Newsletter Award at the 2019 ASPA conference in Washington, DC. Every member paying dues receives a copy of the newsletter, and the newsletter is also publicly posted on SDSJ’s website.

With the newsletter successfully established, Johnson next set his sights on the establishment of a section journal. This task would prove much more challenging. His idea of establishing a section journal was shared by Gooden, who had earlier expressed an interest when serving as ASPA vice president. It was during the 2017 SDSJ business meeting at the annual ASPA conference in Atlanta that these two ideas joined. At this meeting, Gooden mentioned she had long thought of the name for such a journal: The *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration* (JSEPA). The board and attendees were enthusiastic about the potential to launch a journal and approved next steps as well as the JSEPA name Gooden proposed.

The idea was met with overwhelming support among attendees, but many expressed concern over how difficult the challenge would be to create a section journal. This concern proved to be correct. Johnson would spend the rest of his administration trying to chase down leads about starting a journal. It proved to be a challenging task. While Johnson pushed the establishment of JSEPA, the timeline to accomplish it

Figure 1. JSEPA Timeline



exceeded his term as chair. It would be two years before the proposed journal would see the light of day.

The excitement of developing JSEPA was quickly accompanied by the not-so-exciting practical details and logistics of moving a concept from vision to reality. Gooden and Johnson began by identifying well-respected journals in the field and reaching out to their editors to acquire information about section-sponsored journals. At the top of their list was the journal *State and Local Government Review* (SLGR). SLGR is a well-respected journal founded in 1968 and published by Sage. It is the section journal of ASPA's Section on Intergovernmental Administration and Management. A hallmark of SLGR is its strong editorial team, timely and informative reviews, and excellent communication with authors. SLGR offered a concrete example of the excellence Gooden and Johnson were committed to fostering for JSEPA.

While Gooden and Johnson were impressed with SLGR, they were only professional acquaintances with the journal's editor and managing editor, Michael Scicchitano and Ed Benton. On March 27, 2017, Gooden emailed Scicchitano and Benton to share the idea for JSEPA and to request an in-person meeting in Gainesville to learn more about the success of their journal. They met in Gainesville on April 20, 2017. Scicchitano and Benton provided priceless tips, sobering advice, and specific resources. As Gooden shared, "I left that meeting with a true appreciation for the amount of work involved for running such a well-oiled journal. My immediate thought was that for JSEPA to be successful, we would need a super strong editor who would commit to JSEPA as a top priority. I knew JSEPA would not be successful if the editor approached it as a 'side effort.'"

In addition to securing an editorial team, JSEPA also needed a publisher. ASPA's William Shields agreed to pursue a few informal inquiries with print journal publishers and the information he shared in May 2017 raised important challenges. First and foremost, most publishers were not interested in launching new print journals, so the road ahead would be difficult. Shields also provided information on ASPA's policies and procedures which would require a well-crafted prospectus, including a statement of purpose, funding formula, and target audience. The prospectus would need to be presented to and approved by ASPA's National Council before it could be established as an ASPA section (i.e., SDSJ) journal.

At the 2018 National Conference in Denver, Gooden and Johnson presented their findings to the SDSJ board. Attendees were again enthusiastic about the potential for a social equity journal. It was also at this business meeting that the SDSJ board officially voted in favor of next steps and finalizing the journal's name—the *Journal of Social Equity and Public Administration*—proposed earlier by Gooden at the 2017 ASPA conference.

The SDSJ board was eager to get the word out, so JSEPA saw a soft launch later that year at the 2017 Social Equity Leadership Conference of the National Academy of Public Administration hosted by the University of Nebraska Omaha. Further, while the journal now had a name, a vision, and an institutional home within SDSJ, there was still considerable distance to cover to realize its implementation. Still, Gooden and Johnson knew they needed to seek additional assistance, someone who would be very thorough and detail-oriented, and who was also committed to the JSEPA vision. Enter Sean McCandless, who at the time was about to begin working as an assistant professor at the University of Illinois Springfield.

Across 2018, 2019, and 2020, the new three-person team—Gooden, Johnson, and McCandless—worked to make JSEPA a reality. During these years, the team continued to interface with journal publishers, prominent academics, and practitioners throughout the field. Additionally, based upon ASPA's requirements for starting section journals, the team worked to craft a proposal for JSEPA. A major discussion point during this time was whether the journal should be a "traditional" print journal, or open access. The team considered numerous options and recommended to the SDSJ board that JSEPA should be open access because such a journal would better fulfill the social equity mission of countering and removing boundaries for knowledge production and consumption.

McCandless's term as SDSJ chair started in spring 2020, and the enthusiasm to establish JSEPA was more acute as summer and fall 2020 approached. This was fueled by COVID-19 becoming a global pandemic. Alongside it, a more challenging and longer pandemic, that of racism committed in and by public institutions, was once again evident with the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis. This brought greater attention to other cases of Black, Indigenous, and other persons of color who had been attacked and killed by law enforcement. As more and



more people on social media called for a social equity journal, the team acted even more quickly. JSEPA needed to be made a reality. At the same time, SDSJ scrambled to draw attention to these inequities and to highlight the need for a dedicated space for social equity discussions. In fact, SDSJ was awarded the 2021 ASPA Overta Culp Hobby Training Award for the section's social justice programming.

### ***Securing Resources***

First, using the information on best practices in starting a journal, Gooden took the lead in securing seed funding. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 George Floyd murder, Gooden committed to making the case to other public affairs deans about the importance of JSEPA. She began with schools that had a demonstrated record and ongoing commitment to advancing social equity. Together, deans of the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University, the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, and the College of Public Affairs and Community Service at the University of Nebraska Omaha, led by Susan Gooden, Laura Bloomberg, and John Bartle, respectively, agreed to provide seed funding for the journal.

These developments came in tandem with advancements on the technical aspects of starting JSEPA. Knowing that JSEPA would be open access, the team met with several institutions' libraries to secure a publisher. The topics ranged from broad picture questions regarding indexing and outreach to technical questions like manuscript management software. With the help of Laura Bloomberg, then dean of the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, the University of Minnesota Libraries agreed to become JSEPA's publisher.

### ***Securing ASPA Approval***

With the founding sponsorships secured, throughout fall 2020 the team worked with ASPA executive director William Shields to finalize the proposal for JSEPA. The proposal worked to justify the need for JSEPA. Key elements pointed to the need for urgent action on social equity, especially given crises like the murder of George Floyd, which brought greater attention to other cases of Black, Indigenous, and other persons of color (BIPOC) who had been attacked and killed by law enforcement. The proposal also pointed to the growing place and importance of social equity in the field, especially evident in terms of: 1) the NAPA Standing Panel on Social Equity and the Social Equity Leadership Conference; 2) the growing number of social equity awards in the field, especially ASPA's Gloria Hobson Nordin Social Equity Award; 3) more panels and conference tracks focused on social equity; 4) a major uptick in social equity submissions and publications in numerous journals; 5) the need for a dedicated space for social equity discussions; and 6) more attention in bodies like NASPAA and public administration classrooms on topics of equity. On December 16, 2020, the team presented the proposal for JSEPA to the ASPA National Council. The Council unanimously approved JSEPA as SDSJ's official journal.

### ***Editorial Search***

With approval in hand, spring and summer 2021 saw the team, along with the SDSJ Board, recruiting JSEPA's founding administrative committee, whose primary charge was to draft and approve the call for applications and then recruit the first editorial team (see Table 1).

In August 2021, SDSJ announced Mary E. Guy (University of Colorado Denver) and Brian N. Wil-

**Table 1. JSEPA Founding Administrative Committee**

<b><i>Committee Leads</i></b>	<b><i>Committee Members</i></b>
Chair: Susan T. Gooden (Virginia Commonwealth University)	John Bartle (University of Nebraska Omaha)
Richard Gregory Johnson III (University of San Francisco)	Laura Bloomberg (University of Minnesota)
RaJade M. Berry-James (North Carolina State University)	Laurie DiPadova-Stocks (Park University)
Sean A. McCandless (University of Illinois Springfield)	Bok Gyo Jeong (Kean University)
	Bruce McDonald (North Carolina State University)
	John Ronquillo (University of Colorado Denver)
	Michael J. Scicchitano (University of Florida)

liams (University of Virginia) as JSEPA's inaugural coeditors-in-chief. In the months that followed, Guy and Williams recruited Tia Sherèe Gaynor (then University of Cincinnati), James Wright II (Florida State University), and Jodi Benenson (University of Nebraska Omaha) as associate editors as well as doctoral student Adam Croft (University of Colorado Denver) as editorial assistant. Together, this team worked with the University of Minnesota Libraries to set up JSEPA. Additionally, Guy and Williams named the founding editorial board of 27 global scholars, each of whom specializes in various dimensions of social equity (see Table 2).

Three other milestones occurred in late 2021 through early 2022. The first was the official launch of

the journal's website (JSEPAJOURNAL.ORG). The second was the announcement of the editorial board, a truly international representation of social equity scholars and advocates. The third was JSEPA's official launch reception at ASPA 2022 in Jacksonville. It included 10 sponsors (see Table 3).

### Launching the Vision

As Guy and Williams eloquently surmised in their proposal to serve as the journal's coeditors-in-chief, "We envision JSEPA as the first journal researchers go to when they seek cutting-edge coverage of social equity issues, and the first outlet authors consider when preparing a manuscript about social equity in the context of administration action. As the only journal dedicated

**Table 2. JSEPA Founding Editorial Board**

James Agbodzakey, University of North Texas at Dallas	Sean A. McCandless, University of Illinois at Springfield
Aisha Azhar, University of Management and Technology, Pakistan	Kenneth J. Meier, American University
John Bartle, University of Nebraska Omaha	Kris Norman-Major, Hamline University
Domonic Bearfield, Rutgers University, Newark	Shannon K. Portillo, University of Kansas
Abraham Benavides, University of North Texas	Norma Riccucci, Rutgers University, Newark
Rajade M. Berry-James, North Carolina State University	Alasdair Roberts, University of Massachusetts Amherst
Brandi Blessett, University of Cincinnati	Marilyn M. Rubin, Rutgers University, Newark
Erin L. Borry, University of Alabama at Birmingham	Meghna Sabharwal, University of Texas at Dallas
Angela M. Eikenberry, University of Nebraska Omaha	Genie Stowers, San Francisco State University
Susan T. Gooden, Virginia Commonwealth University	Amporn Tamronglak, Thammasat University
Irving Huang, Tamkang University	Ador Torneo, De La Salle University
Richard Gregory Johnson III, University of San Francisco	Seung-Bum Yang, Konkuk University
Patria de Lancer Julnes, University of New Mexico	Staci Zavattaro, University of Central Florida
Kim Moloney, Hamad Bin Khalifa University	

**Table 3. JSEPA's Sponsors**

<b>Founding Sponsors</b>	<b>Launch Sponsors</b>
Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota	Levin College of Urban Affairs, Cleveland State University
School of Public Administration, University of Nebraska Omaha	School of International and Public Affairs, North Carolina State University
L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, Virginia Commonwealth University	Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University
<b>Editorial Sponsors</b>	School of Public Affairs and Administration, Rutgers University Newark
Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia	Department of Public Policy, University of Connecticut
School of Public Affairs, University of Colorado Denver	

to social equity and public administration, JSEPA will play a vital role in advancing scholarship and informing practice. By exploring, describing, explaining, and critiquing issues pertaining to social equity, the journal will become the best resource on the subject. It will be the home for both conceptual and empirical papers that explore social equity in the context of administrative action and the pursuit of public purposes. In sum, our goal is for JSEPA to quickly take its spot as a leading voice on social equity and public administration.”

To become that leading voice, JSEPA will need to pursue excellence. While the reputation of academic journals is influenced by many factors, the most important are high quality and impact (see, for example, McCurdy and Cleary 1984; Morales, McKiernan, Niles, Schimanski, and Alperin 2021; and Williams and Lewis 2020). Such terms are subjective, however. Even when metrics, such as the Journal Impact Factor (JIF) are used, the measures are questionable: “as these concepts are context dependent, and in part because they fail to account for the numerous limitations and biases that are present in the creation and implementation of

citation metrics” (Morales, McKiernan, Niles, Schimanski, and Alperin 2021, 9).

Williams and Lewis (2020) suggest that a better way to gauge impact is to rely upon a range of measures. “There are several key proficiencies that are required to successfully navigate these fields: scholarly expression, which gives credibility from the academic field; policy relevance, which gives authority from the politics field; practical applicability, which gives utility from the field of application; broadcasting skill, which gives visibility to the media field; and monetary value, which gives weight from the economic field. Paying attention to these allows for the development of a framework for understanding, measuring, and encouraging research impact for those who seek to produce research that speaks to multiple audiences” (558).

In this vein, Raadschelders’ work (2008), as depicted in Table 4, offers a useful framework to consider the purpose of research published in JSEPA, its impact on the field of public administration, and its prioritization of both academics and practitioners. Ott and Bennett (2012) apply this framework as they “engage with wide-

**Table 4. Using Raadschelders’ Traditions of Public Administration Scholarship to Explore Different Understandings of Academic-Practitioner Relations**

	<b>Practical Wisdom</b>	<b>Practical Experience</b>	<b>Scientific Knowledge</b>	<b>Relativist Perspectives</b>
Purpose of research	Gaining a better understanding of practice and developing ideas that have application to practice	Making technical refinements to practice	Search for better scientific understanding and principles	Producing multiple interpretations of action and context; deconstructing dominant narratives and prescriptions
Relationship with practitioners	Engaged interested, normative commitment to betterment of public administration practice	Mission to give solutions and prescriptions for practitioners	Practitioners as focus of study, practice, and institutions and arena for inquiry	Ambiguous normative commitment
Obligations of researchers	To develop applied theory, enhance practice, and support practitioners	Refine practices, improve public administration practices	To science and the academy and the stock of human knowledge	To diverse communities of researchers and, less centrally, to reflective practitioners
Role of practitioners	Dialogue with academics, enabling access to organizational settings for researchers to apply new research knowledge	A role for pracademics, practitioners seen as the expert voice in diagnosing problems and setting agendas	Enabling access to organizational settings; largely as objects of inquiry	Enabling access to organizational settings, largely as objects of inquiry; practitioners encouraged to engage in reflective practice

*Source:* Orr and Bennett, 2012, 489.



spread calls to foster a reconnection between academics and practitioners in public administration scholarship” (494). Employing the approaches of Williams and Lewis (2020, as well as Ott and Bennett 2012), offers important perspective to consider when considering the quality and impact of JSEPA. This includes the consideration of the practical, as well as the theoretical and the scientific as well as the applied.

### JSEPA’s Voice in Public Administration

In “Social Equity in Public Administration: A Call to Action,” scholars attending the Minnowbrook at 50 conference scripted the “Call to Action” Social Equity Manifesto declaring that social equity must be advanced in research, teaching, service, and scholarly engagement (Blessett et al. 2019). As a field of professional study, social equity narrowly achieved prominence in *Public Administration Review*, the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, and *Administrative Theory and Praxis*. Albeit a pillar of public administration, challenges and solutions in public policy, public budgeting and finance, personnel management and ethics, non-profit management, research methods and analysis, and program evaluation still dominate the scholarly outlets in our field. After considerable thought, the Minnowbrook at 50 scholars declared that the time was now for the field to recognize social equity policy and practices as well as address critical aims in public administration (Blessett et al. 2019). While pivoting and planning for social change takes considerable time, many thought leaders continue to work consciously toward fostering social equity to ensure that our government works and promotes justice for all (Johnson and Svara 2011).

The collective voice of JSEPA advances the social equity action agenda in the field of public administration by enveloping a strategy that connects theory to practice and problems to solutions. JSEPA aims to promote the research and scholarship of academics, practitioners, and students—to describe, explore, and explain policy, programs, and practices—that advance the equitable distribution of public goods and services. Specifically, the voice of JSEPA frames *where we are now* juxtaposed to where *we are going* to offer an intentional guide for social equity scholars in ways that identify how research and practice inform efforts to dismantle the systems and structures that threaten democracy.

As a community of practice, social equity scholars

conduct research and generate knowledge to improve the skills of public administrators who work to advance racial equity and support underserved communities. For decades, social equity champions and cheerleaders have had their research and scholarship kept out or left out of the scholarly journals. Their unique contributions to discovery of knowledge have been marginalized. As such, JSEPA is the scholarly outlet for research, teaching, service, and engagement that enables academics, practitioners, and students to exchange knowledge and skills with policymakers, advocates, and activists for the social good and the future direction of the field. Likewise, JSEPA aims to shed light on the breakthrough approaches that champion our collective moral responsibility to solve wicked problems through social innovation and social change in a fair and just way. Finally, as a peer-reviewed open access journal, we know that JSEPA will encourage scholarship that broadens participation and highlights the synergy of social equity research. The launch of JSEPA enables scholars to share knowledge that benefits everyone in society, particularly marginalized communities who have been disproportionately impacted by economic, social, and political conditions. As a scholarly outlet for early career professionals, engaged scholars, practitioners, and policymakers, JSEPA offers meaningful networking that results in wide dissemination of knowledge to ensure a government of the people, for the people and by the people. Social equity research that dismantles structural racism and eliminates social inequality is essential for fostering social equity in policy, programs, and practice.

One may ask “Does social equity matter?” The answer is yes: both to the future of this nation and as a pillar of public administration that supports democracy around the world. Social equity is a serious matter. When there is a considerable gap in the academic history and knowledge base, fairness and justice are at risk. In “Social Justice Education in Public Policy Schools Is Crucial for the Nation’s Future,” Berry-James asserts, “Going forward, our curricula changes must advance our understanding of social equity and social justice, develop culturally competent professionals, and address critical issues in the public sector. Our students must be trained to identify problems as well as develop strategies to critically analyze oppression” (as cited in Cliburn and Bohanon 2021, 1).

During public administration’s recent troubled times, public policies have disadvantaged people of color by supporting structural racism and systems of

oppression that disadvantage marginalized communities (Berry-James et al. 2021). These unjust and unfair policies, programs and practices are often assessed after the fact, when disproportionate outcomes of health, housing, education, employment, and matters of justice make clear the harm that was caused. Notwithstanding inequities in government infrastructure facilities, systems, and structures, public infrastructure impacts the fair representation and funding for marginalized communities.

As the leading voice in social equity, we know that JSEPA will create a call-to-action for some of the most pressing concerns in the field of public action, as was the case in “Civil Rights, Social Equity, and Census 2020,” where Berry-James, Gooden, and Johnson (2020) describe the ongoing challenge of political participation, representation, and fair funding for racial/ethnic and marginalized groups. Despite the importance of the decennial census, Berry-James, Gooden, and Johnson note that the design, implementation, and evaluation of the U.S. Census point to an unfair and unjust undercount for communities of color. This is a serious matter that impacts voting representation and government funding across policy areas like education, health care and housing in state and local communities. The price of fairness and justice has far too long been paid with insufficient funds (King Jr. 1963). Finding critical research and scholarship in social equity has been an ongoing challenge in public administration. This is why creating JSEPA is the action needed to synthesize the collective effort of social equity thought leaders and practitioners.

Equally important, JSEPA is a tangible manifestation of the importance of social equity research in the field. New scholars who study social equity will have an important journal for their work. While social equity scholarship will continue to have outlets for publication in other journals, as well as special symposia, the launch of JSEPA demonstrates the seriousness and relevance of social equity research in its own right. It provides a vital resource for junior and senior scholars alike, as they build and sustain their professional careers.

For decades now, scholars have called for the field to take social equity seriously (Rosenbloom 2005) by pursuing a post-modern cultural competency framework (Rice 2007) to understand how to manage diversity in the workforce (Berry-James 2010; Riccucci 2021) while considering representative bureaucracy and distributional equity (Meier, Wrinkle, and Polinard 1999). In the face of racism, sexism, and all of

the other “isms” that are known or unknown, JSEPA is the social equity manifesto. In practice and in print, JSEPA conveys to the field of public administration and our community of scholars a professional identity focused on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion and in our scholarly journey, a personal commitment to knowledge production. As a collective voice, JSEPA communicates a strong message that social equity matters. For the academic leaders who have committed time, talent, and resources to establishing JSEPA, the manuscripts that are published in this journal give context to the critical issues in public administration at home and abroad. The body of scholarly work acknowledges the hurts and harms that inequity and injustice have caused and the commitment of others to make a way out of no way—to affirm that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (King Jr. 1963).

JSEPA is a call to action for a community of scholars, policymakers, practitioners, advocates, citizens, and others who support the ideals of democracy and who lean in to advance equity for all. It is our hope that JSEPA will continue to be the scholarly outlet for research that focuses on class inequality, a collaborative pedagogical response that offers tried and true teaching strategies to improve the MPA curriculum to empower public services to dismantle and disrupt systems of oppression. It is our hope that JSEPA will serve as a critical and reflective home for faculty who are committed to public service. It is our hope that JSEPA will always be the leading journal for engaged scholars who are intent on sharing lessons learned, best practices, and breakthrough approaches as we continue to study social problems and seek feasible solutions to address critical issues. It is our greatest hope that JSEPA will rise quickly to be among the first download for anyone who believes in the academic and intellectual activities that foster social equity and for academics, practitioners, or students who claim social equity as an area of research interest or scholarly engagement.

During the pandemic, most of us were working remotely when we bore witness to the callous murder of George Floyd (McNeil 2021). Collectively, we sprang into action to write action statements for professional associations like NAPA, NASPAA, ASPA, ASPA-SDSJ, and our home academic departments. While most of the diversity statements read the same, in our social equity action plans *we* promised to do better. Our collective voice will be found in JSEPA to broaden the path so that

*all of us can intentionally do better when we help government and society redress the historical inequities and injustices that persist, despite the fact that some of us look but don't see or hear but don't listen.*

## Conclusion

The focus and dissemination of social equity scholarship in the field of public administration has certainly come a long way since Frances Harriet Williams authored the first article on the topic published in PAR in 1947. JSEPA proudly stands upon Williams' shoulders today and we are proud to dedicate this journal to her pioneering vision and legacy of social equity scholarship in public administration. Inequity and injustice is a global concern. Solving these inequities is a herculean task, but JSEPA is committed to being a part of the solution. The greatest indication of JSEPA's success will be realized when the study of equity, inequity, and justice is no longer needed because it has indisputably been achieved. This is an audacious goal for sure, but as Nelson Mandela taught us, the impossible can indeed be accomplished. JSEPA offers an important step along this victorious journey.

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