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## The Nonprofit Nerd (August 2016)

The Nonprofit Institute at Portland State University

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# THE NONPROFIT NERD

Research you can use.

## Welcome to the Inaugural Issue of The Nonprofit Nerd!

The Nonprofit Institute (NPI) at Portland State University (formerly the Institute for Nonprofit Management) is excited to introduce you to our new e-newsletter, The Nonprofit Nerd. In each newsletter, we'll provide you with some great research, data, and best practice resources on a particular theme, as well as introduce you to some amazing nonprofit nerds who are making research and data "work" for them.

We hope the resources and insights we share in The Nonprofit Nerd will inspire you to get your nerd on and find innovative ways to make research and data work for you and your nonprofit.

This month's theme is **Network Leadership**.



### RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

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The Stanford Social Innovation Review's (SSIR) recent article series on [The New Network Leader](#) is a phenomenal resource to introduce you to the concept of network leadership and how networked leaders can effectively understand and address complex social challenges.

If SSIR's article series introduces the concept of network leadership, then [The Kellogg Foundation's Collective Leadership Workbook](#) is a how-to manual. It provides a step-by-step framework for how leaders can move from "I" to "We" in building sustainable collective leadership strategies to affect community change.

Of course a networked leader needs a network, one made up of sustainable, meaningful relationships. The Center for Creative Leadership's [A Leader's Network: How to Help Your Talent Invest in the Right Relationships at the Right Time](#) white paper will help you understand what makes an effective

network, the challenges of developing networks over different career phases, and how to help your organization put the pieces in place to develop them.



## NERDS AT WORK

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In this issue, we are proud to feature an interview with “Nerd at Work,” Keith Thomajan, the President & CEO of [United Way of the Columbia-Willamette](#). Here Keith shares his thoughts on how research, data, and evaluation influence their work.

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### How does research, data, and evaluation shape your approach to your work?

United Way is entering the third year of a ten year commitment to Break the Cycle of Childhood Poverty in our region. We work with more than 50 organizations we fund – our Breaking the Cycle partners – to identify key metrics and performance indicators that track specific educational, economic and health indicators related to poverty

alleviation. We also track data that give us insight into organizational performance of our partners – how they are improving their internal systems to apply equity principles to service provision and improve overall quality of services. For example, we have worked intensively with partners on Equity and Cultural Competency and can now track each organization’s baseline and progress across key domains. The partners represents our leading youth, family and community organizations – serving literally hundreds of thousands of local kids and families – and we believe that our ability to increase the effectiveness and competency with kids and families of color will translate into better downstream outcomes. Data – ours and theirs – is the key to our looking for this correlation.

### What role does data play in your organization's decision-making and strategic direction?

The 21st century United Way is committed to being a data-driven organization. Data shaped and directed our ultimate commitment to focus on Breaking the Cycle of Childhood Poverty in our Region and to focus explicitly on addressing the racial disparities that kids and families of color face.

### What kind(s) or sources of research and data do you find most valuable?

In addition to data from organizations we fund, we use regional data to gauge our impact at an aggregate, regional level. U.S. Census data – from the Decennial Census to American Community Survey data – are useful in giving us an integrated view of the population United Way serves in our region. We also track Oregon Department of Education data to track how well schools and students are performing, as well as health outcome data from a variety of sources. All these data are most useful when they are disaggregated by race and ethnicity because we know there are pervasive patterns where people of color are disproportionately impacted by poverty, resulting in worse academic, financial and health outcomes than their White counterparts. As such, we are focused on eliminating racial and ethnic disparities as a key element of a strategy to dramatically reduce poverty in our region.

## What advice do you have for fellow nonprofit professionals to encourage them in using research, data, and evaluation?

*Patience and commitment.* Collecting and analyzing data in more traditional grant making isn't an overly complex challenge. But as we seek to understand how the variety of programs and services provided by our grantees are helping to break the cycle of generational poverty, we must be willing to embrace greater complexity in the questions and methods we use to understand what leads to good or poor outcomes. We must be patient in order to develop trust among our partners - whose sophistication and capacity for data collection and analysis is quite diverse – to use client data in a way that protects their clients' privacy and leads to actionable knowledge. We must also remain committed to pursuing innovative approaches to analyzing data and understanding their meaning and context while working in close collaboration with partners. Tools such as those used by for-profit corporations to analyze big data could be valuable tools to the social sector to understand how we can organize programs, services and funding that lead to better outcomes – but the sector must be committed to overcoming the mistrust and doubts of using these tools to inform decision-making.



### INSTITUTE NEWS

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8/5 - [YNPN Activate! Summit](#) - Members of NPI team will be co-hosting the opening reception of YNPN's national conference with YNPN-Portland as well as presenting at the conference. *We hope to see you there!*

8/12 - [Fall 2016 Cohort Application Deadline: WVDO Certificate in Nonprofit Fundraising](#)

9/1 - [Winter 2017 Application Deadline: MPA and Graduate Certificate in Nonprofit and Public Management](#)



### FELLOW NERDS

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If you're interested in learning more about network leadership, NPI recommends you get to know the great work of these fellow nerds:

[Converge for Impact](#) (based right here in Portland!)

[Collective Impact Forum](#)

[Beth Kanter's Blog](#)

[Leadership Learning Community](#)

If that's not nerdy enough for you, check out our local and national friends and the great research, data, and best practice resources they have to offer. [Read more](#)



## JOIN THE NERD NATION

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