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The Nonprofit Nerd (September 2016)

The Nonprofit Institute at Portland State University

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THE NONPROFIT NERD

Research you can use.

This month's theme is **Networked Philanthropy**.

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



RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

While there isn't a precise definition of networked philanthropy, what is clear about the phenomenon is that it entails people and organizations coming together to pool their collective resources to create positive change. The [coalition members of D5](#) provide a great example of how many organizations can come together to develop a cohesive strategy and tools to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in philanthropy.

At the individual and community level, giving circles are becoming more popular and influential, as this [recent Stanford Social Innovation Review article](#) demonstrates. Giving circles are especially popular with women. This [informative report from the Women's Philanthropy Institute](#) tells us why.

For funders, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and the Monitor Institute have partnered together to provide two helpful resources for moving into a networked philanthropy mindset: [Catalyzing Networks for Social Change](#) and [Cracking the Network Code: Four Principles for Grantmakers](#) (login required to download).



NERDS AT WORK



In this issue, we are proud to feature an interview with “Nerd at Work,” Sue Hildick, the President of [Chalkboard Project](#), an Oregon-based initiative that has led the way in networked philanthropy efforts.

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

Chalkboard Project (Chalkboard) has been working to make Oregon’s schools the best in the nation for the past 12 years. Our goal is to see every student in Oregon succeed, especially those from historically underserved communities.

We started this effort with research, data, and evaluation. So you can say these not only shaped our work, they were foundational to our work.

From the beginning, Chalkboard was conceived in two stages. The first was discovery, where we conducted research on best practices, measured public opinion in the largest statewide poll on education ever done in Oregon, ran focus groups, and invested in broad civic engagement to create a framework for improving quality and strengthening accountability in Oregon’s K-12 public education.

The second stage was implementation—to produce real results for Oregon’s schoolchildren by advocating for improvement, educating the public, working with educators and other key stakeholders, and executing pilots. Again, we relied on data and third-party evaluations to inform our implementation efforts, to guide the different stages of implementation, and to shape our legislative priorities.

We entered into this work without any preconceived direction, and let the research, data, and evaluation efforts guide the process and our direction.

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

Public K-12 education is a complex issue and Chalkboard entered into it with three goals in mind: (1) to help transform Oregon’s K-12 education system; (2) to elevate public discourse about public education; and (3) to forge a new model of collaboration among foundations.

The six founding foundations understood the importance of bridging data and research to action on recommendations. They recognized together they could make a greater difference by acting proactively on solid research and data to not only shape policy recommendations, but also to inform their strategic direction. To this day, the board relies on data and evaluation to guide its mission.

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

We rely heavily on third-party evaluations and data to inform our work. Chalkboard works closely with both economists and educators to analyze the data to help us understand its impact on our state as a

whole—from overall student achievement to identifying achievement and opportunity gaps to its impact on our state’s economy and vitality. Our goal is to lift up the evidence and elevate the quality of data and information to drive decisions at all levels. We take this responsibility very seriously. In fact, we have become known for releasing high-quality and well-researched information. It’s become our brand. For example, we analyze student achievement data gathered through annual statewide assessments to gauge if our efforts are making a difference in the collaborating districts. We’re able to look at different student populations to see, for example, if results for African-American or Hispanic students are improving.

We also conduct qualitative perception surveys to understand how educators perceive these efforts—How do they feel about the changes? What’s working well? What can be done differently or better? It’s important we understand the impact these transformational efforts are having on individual teachers and the culture in the schools and districts where the work is happening.

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

Patience and commitment. There is no one source of data that can provide all the insight we need to do our work. Data collection and analysis can be challenging, but it is a critical component to nonprofit efforts. I believe research, data, and evaluation help us get better at asking the right questions and identifying the root causes to address. Not every nonprofit will have the resources and capacity to conduct the many types of data collection and analyses Chalkboard has done over the years, but it is essential we all find ways to measure impact, because as the old adage says, “You can’t improve what you can’t measure.”



INSTITUTE NEWS

9/29 - Catch members of The Nonprofit Institute at Oregon Business’ 8th annual [100 Best Nonprofits to Work for in Oregon awards dinner](#).

9/30 - Deadline to [apply](#) for The Nonprofit Institute’s Professional Certificate in Nonprofit Program Evaluation 2016/2017 cohort.

11/1 - Deadline to [apply for spring admission](#) for the MPA and for the Graduate Certificate in Nonprofit and Public Management at PSU.



FELLOW NERDS

If you’re interested in learning more about networked philanthropy, NPI recommends you get to know the great work of these fellow nerds, some of whom are based right here in Portland!

[All Hands Raised](#)

[Oregon Community Foundation's Oral Health Funders' Collaborative](#)

[Ninety-Nine Girlfriends](#)

[Social Venture Partners-Portland](#)

[The Whitman Institute](#)

[Indie Philanthropy Initiative](#)

[Change Philanthropy](#)

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.



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