



## The Community Platform for Universities and Communities: Building a Network for Developing and Sharing Research, Knowledge, Resources and Projects

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*A vision for universities: "[T]he University [of the future] will be....as radically different as the University of the late 19th and 20th century was from the generation of higher educational institutions that preceded it. ... campus-community collaboration will be at the very center of the new, democratic, Deweyian university for the new century.. [with a primary goal] of creating a better, more democratic, and more decent America." — Ira Harkavy, University of Pennsylvania*

*A vision for the social sciences: "The most important lesson for public policy analysis...is that humans have a more complex motivational structure and more capability to solve social dilemmas than posited in earlier rational-choice theory. Designing institutions to force (or nudge) entirely self-interested individuals to achieve better outcomes has been the major goal posited by policy analysts... for much of the past half century. **Extensive empirical research leads me to argue that instead, a core goal of public policy should be to facilitate the development of institutions that bring out the best in humans.** To explain the world of interactions and outcomes occurring at multiple levels, we also have to be willing to deal with complexity instead of rejecting it." — Elinor Ostrom, Nobel Prize Speech*

*A vision for students: "[T]he great aim and end of all learning" is to help students develop "an inclination joined with an ability to serve Mankind, one's Country, Friends and Family." — Benjamin Franklin*

Our goal: Build a network of universities that are interested in deepening their work on the nonprofit sector, civic capacity, and community well-being using the Community Platform and the other frameworks from the Civic Leadership Project. The network would function as both a “community of practice” where universities could learn from one another as well as linking universities together (alongside local and national funders and community partners) to conduct parallel interdisciplinary research, demonstration and service learning projects that both contribute to their local communities and provide comparative data across the network of partners that can be used to address a variety of research and policy questions. Within the network, we might have some partners focused on broad nonprofit sector-wide issues while others are focused more on specific policy issues or populations. We believe this “*dual use*” approach focused on both practical community impact and the advancement of research is central to the long-term success of communities and universities.

Some of the questions that a network could begin to address include:

- What is the role of different sectors as service providers at a community level – this is building on what we have started with the Community Platform – in meeting the needs of veterans, immigrants, and the uninsured, among other vulnerable populations?

- What support and funding infrastructures for the nonprofit sector work best? Some communities have a single dominant private funder, others have many small ones. Does this make a difference for the sector? What role does collaboration between private and government funders play in the community? What is the role of business in supporting the nonprofit sector?
- There are a number of ways that organizations get technical assistance and advocacy services across the country. Some rely on strong state or local nonprofit associations; others have strong field-specific or local associations (ranging from associations of community theaters to state-level associations of universities); some represent only nonprofits while others represent and support nonprofits as well as businesses and government entities.
- How can communities build their “civic capacity” to tackle the challenges that they face in human services, public health, economic/community development, and the environment? Some communities have focused on top-down strategies in fields like education “P-21 Councils” or Washington, DC’s “Eight Neighbors meetings” (Board of Trade, local nonprofit associations, chamber of commerce, and others). Other communities have emphasized more bottom-up strategies using civic deliberation methodologies or volunteer/civic engagement strategies. What is working?
- Sociological concepts like community resilience, social capital, and collective efficacy have all gained traction in policy circles as organizing concepts for measuring the trust and connections within communities along with other aspects of community culture. How can we better measure and strengthen them within communities over the long term?

While researching existing arrangements in different communities can be useful for shedding light on some questions and issues, there’s a great deal of potential in developing interdisciplinary demonstration projects that can be tested in multiple communities and that take greater advantage of universities’ roles as potential providers of long-term research support as well as “boots on the ground” for promising work being done in education, public health and social services. The university network could provide a good forum for developing these.

Whenever feasible, we would seek to build on and partner with existing networks including Campus Compact, the Anchor Institutions Task Force, the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities/Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, and Community-Campus Partnerships for Health. In our experience, these associations generally welcome opportunities to connect their members to concrete opportunities such as we are proposing.

We will also explore building partnerships between four-year research universities and community colleges, which have very different student populations and institutional needs, but that have shared interests in strengthening their local communities. The work of the Rappaport Family Foundation and

the Austin Community College's Center for Community Based & Nonprofit Organizations are potential partners in this work. In particular, research and demonstration projects on immigrant communities and veterans could benefit from combining the research expertise of the universities with the closer ties that community colleges often have with these populations.

**Networks for Research Collaboration:** Networks seem to be used increasingly by research funders. The National Science Foundation has a specific program devoted to supporting *Research Coordination Networks*.<sup>1</sup> As Richard A. Friedman of the Weill Cornell Medical College recently wrote on the New York Times blog post, "Of course a debilitating disease [like depression] has nothing in common with a subatomic particle, except that both are mysterious and elusive. But it was those very qualities that inspired international teams of physicists to work together for years until they finally identified the boson last year. Among biomedical scientists, who compete for the same research dollars and want to be first across the finish line with an important finding, such cooperation is hardly the norm. But there are signs that this is changing."<sup>2</sup> In the nonprofit world, a good example of a multi-site research project is the Social Capital Benchmark Survey coordinated by Bob Putnam, conducted in a number of communities around the country with a shared core set of questions, and financially supported by local community foundations.

**The Role of the Community Platform:** The Platform is intended to provide a technology foundation for the network, a flexible tool in the hands of people (both inside and outside universities) with the time and leadership skills to actively and thoughtfully engage their communities. But technology alone is insufficient. The following section describes the broader intellectual foundations in more detail.

## The Need

**Students:** In a world where the secure jobs that pay a living wage are increasingly scarce, replaced by workers overseas and by "intelligent machines," it will be increasingly important for students to develop different mindsets about what they hope to accomplish in their lives and what constitutes "a good life" – goals of both a liberal education and many experiential learning programs. The starting point is a focus on the value of community, leadership, wisdom, and a balanced and purposeful life. A broad community-focused research experience supported by the Community Platform and a strong liberal arts core curriculum can support this learning.

Getting a college degree is touted as the key to escaping a life of minimum wage jobs and unemployment but the results of various surveys point to the limitations of college as a gateway to middle class success. But it's not that simple. Forty-four percent of recent undergraduates report being

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm\\_summ.jsp?pims\\_id=11691&org=SBE](http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=11691&org=SBE)

<sup>2</sup> Friedman, Richard A. *A New Focus on Depression*. Retrieved at <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/12/23/a-new-focus-on-depression>

underemployed.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as a recent blog post on the Economist website argues, “Huge swathes of people, in Europe and North America in particular, spend their entire working lives performing tasks they secretly believe do not really need to be performed. The moral and spiritual damage that comes from this situation is profound. It is a scar across our collective soul. ... meaningless employment—in what [David Graeber] calls ‘bullshit jobs’—is concentrated in ‘professional, managerial, clerical, sales, and service workers.’”<sup>4</sup>

These observations may not apply to the ten percent of undergraduates getting degrees in science, technology, engineering or math (STEM) or the 17% in health care or with a biology major, or for the 6% getting degrees in education.<sup>5</sup> However, for the majority of students now in business majors (20%), the social sciences, history or psychology (16%) or other fields without clear technical job-specific skills, work life without an advanced degree may well be quite unsatisfying.

For those without STEM degrees, a survey sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) found that, “Across many areas tested, employers strongly endorse educational practices that involve students in active, effortful work—practices including collaborative problem-solving, internships, research, senior projects, and community engagements. Employers consistently rank outcomes and practices that involve application of skills over acquisition of discrete bodies of knowledge. They also strongly endorse practices that require students to demonstrate both acquisition of knowledge and its application. Employers think that more college graduates have the skills and preparation needed for entry-level positions than for advancement.”<sup>6</sup>

Although business-oriented internships and majors may provide some of these necessary skills, a survey by Payscale of 68,000 workers found that business majors are *more* likely to feel underemployed than any other major but for criminal justice.

What’s a university to do to prepare its students? Students *want* meaningful work that makes a difference in their communities. Nearly 30 percent responded that it was “essential” or “very important” for them to participate in a community action program; 36% said the same about becoming a community leader.<sup>7</sup> These numbers pales beside the percentage that want to be “very well off financially” but if wealth is increasingly recognized as an unrealistic goal, a college with a strong liberal

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<sup>3</sup> Jaison R. Abel and Richard Deitz. Just Released: Are Recent College Graduates Finding Good Jobs? (Federal Reserve Bank of New York). <http://libertystreeteconomics.newyorkfed.org/2013/06/just-released-are-recent-college-graduates-finding-good-jobs.html#.VBD9e2NCeHM>

<sup>4</sup> R.A. (“An Economist economics correspondent”). On “Bullshit Jobs.” The Economist, Aug 21, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2013/08/labour-markets-0> quoting from Graeber, David. *On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs*. Strike! Magazine, Aug. 17, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs/>

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved at [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cta.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cta.asp)

<sup>6</sup> *It Takes More than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success*. [http://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2013\\_EmployerSurvey.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2013_EmployerSurvey.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, *2013 College Freshman Survey* (p.40). <http://www.heri.ucla.edu/monographs/TheAmericanFreshman2013.pdf>

arts/civic engagement program has a better opportunity to help its students see a vision of the good life rooted in the deep satisfaction that comes with using head and heart to build a better world.<sup>8</sup>

The recommendation of AACU 's National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement's to educators seems on the mark: "to advance a 21st century vision of college learning for all students—a vision with civic learning and democratic engagement an expected part of every student's college education."<sup>9</sup>

**Communities and Nonprofit Organizations:** Inequality is not likely to change anytime soon. Chasing the next tech boom like every other community is no guarantee of economic success. Instead, communities need to do more to develop and coordinate their local assets – people and institutions – for self-sustaining and vibrant community and economic life. Universities in their role as "anchor institutions" can play a critical role providing "boots on the ground" (student volunteers and interns to help meet community and nonprofit needs in education, public health, and community development, among other areas) and in conducting community and nonprofit research projects that add to our understanding and make practical contributions.

Nonprofits provide a central means by which people can collaborate over a sustained period of time to achieve a common good. As such, there's an inescapable moral dimension to the work beyond the instrumental quest for effectiveness, efficiency, and financial viability or profit shared with the for-profit sector. With the growth of well-paying jobs stalled thanks to advances in automation and other forces, nonprofits seem poised to take a larger role in economic and community life. Besides providing services and recreation, they represent a realm where no one will get rich but many can have the opportunity to make a living, find a calling, and be connected to a community. Universities could do much more to support them in mutually beneficial relationships.

**College and Universities:** All but the elite colleges and universities face major challenges. The impact of MOOCs ("massive open online courses") will only grow; major new support from government is unlikely. Not only will MOOCs impact the bottom line of these institutions but they will also face stiff competition if they are not in the top tier of universities. Persistent economic inequality makes it increasingly difficult for many families to afford a four-year college for their children. And if technology and globalization continue to weaken the market for meaningful and well-paying jobs that require non-STEM degrees, then the appeal of an expensive college education accompanied frequently by student debt will diminish.

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<sup>8</sup> This emphasis on finding a deeper purpose or meaning in life is consistent with a range of findings in psychology. See, e.g., Maslow (195\_) and, more recently, M. Seligman (20\_\_), Deci & Ryan, *The "What" and "Why" of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior*. [http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2000\\_DeciRyan\\_PIWhatWhy.pdf](http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2000_DeciRyan_PIWhatWhy.pdf). In business literature, the findings on the role of intrinsic motivation on the job also point to the same conclusion. See, e.g., \_\_\_\_.

<sup>9</sup> AACU (2012). *A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy's Future: A Call to Action and Report from The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement*. <http://www.aacu.org/crucible>

## Service Learning

Universities can use the planned **Community Platform Higher Ed Module** to track student community service hours, faculty projects, and more. Students can post volunteer hours from their mobile phones and print their "co-curricular resumes" Department heads can summarize their departmental activities and your center for community engagement can report on the university as a whole, show maps of activities by department or area of the city, produce trend reports.

## Academic Courses

The Community Platform could prove useful across a wide range of courses and disciplines:

### Business

- Social entrepreneurship
- Marketing social change (or for business too)
- Nonprofit finance
- Behavioral economics
- Institutional economics
- Performance measurement, evaluation, and performance dashboard development for local organizations.
- The art of network building: In this case, knitting together a local community and finding a way to sustain it, can teach skills of customer service, learning from the customer, innovation, network building, marketing research – not to mention teaching the persistence and patience that one needs to succeed as a social or business entrepreneur.

### Leadership studies, peace and conflict studies, community building and similar majors or concentrations

*A Social Change Model of Leadership Development: Guidebook* developed by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA (1996) provides one possible framework around which a course could be developed. Books such as Boyatzis' *Resonant Leadership*, Heifetz's *Leadership Without Easy Answers* and Wheatley's *New Science of Leadership* are popular books that seem to get substantial use in higher education and that also complement community-focused research.

### Sociology, anthropology, social work, and urban planning

- Community Needs Assessment
  - Map and analyze existing data from the Census Bureau's American Communities Survey and other federal sources
  - Upload locally generated administrative data on crime, education or other indicators
  - Conduct community surveys, aggregate the results, and add map on the Platform

- Community Asset Mapping to identify community resources and service delivery locations, including those of nonprofit organizations, schools, government facilities, businesses, as well as informal resources.
- Gap Analysis to understand the availability and distribution of assets or resources in relationship to community needs
- The “field station” model used by Bucknell University has students working out of specific communities (in this case in rural Pennsylvania)
- Research to assess interaction between culture, mental health and illness, and program outcomes (e.g., high depression levels among mothers on TANF)
- Understanding communities as systems of institutions, culture and subcultures

### **Interdisciplinary social science**

- Nonprofit studies
- Education
- Field research modeled on Elinor Ostrom’s work on collective action or “common pool (finite) resource” problems
- Community and social psychology and political science. Can community members develop a broadly shared and inclusive vision for their community, shared goals on how to achieve the vision, and the sustained focus and collective action to reach those goals?

### **Research methods**

- Household surveys
- Nonprofit surveys
- Qualitative methods

### **History**

- Explore the history of the community; the role of the university in the community; the intersection of economic, demographic, social and political issues in this community in contrast to other partner sites.

### **Computer Science, Information Technology & Library Sciences**

- Website design and graphics (focus on enhancing the Community Platform or open source products like Drupal content management system, which is built a similar technology)
- Knowledge management for sustainable communities
- Database design, development, and manipulation with SQL using our large dataset of nonprofit organizations and community indicators.

### **Journalism, English, film-making**

- Videos, storytelling, journalism
- Helping nonprofits tell their stories

- Documenting a community (see Columbia Heights multimedia presentation from GWU class)

## Public administration and public policy

- Performance measurement and evaluation

## Types of Research Activities

### Research on Nonprofit Organizations

- **Basic research and reports** documenting the financial health, numbers and economic impact of the sector using IRS Form 990 data
- **Surveys of nonprofit organizations** to better understand their financial health, community impact, governance, access to volunteers, mix of fundraising strategies, performance and outcome measurement, and more.
- **Subsector/Field/Industry studies.** Examples include research on the performing arts and environmental organizations.
- **Integrating Methodologies to Study Specific Organizational Issues.** Combine Form 990 analysis, a survey, and case studies into a comprehensive analysis of important issues facing nonprofit organizations in your community. Examples could include an exploration of the role of government revenues, private contributions, or rising occupancy costs.
- **In-depth quantitative and qualitative research on individual organizations.** See Appendix B.

### Community-Centered Research and Projects

- **Resources and Needs “Gap Analysis”:** Mapping of nonprofit and other community resources in relationship to community needs to inform policymakers, funders, and potential volunteers.
- **Household Surveys** to assess giving, volunteering, civic engagement, social capital and a sense of collective efficacy and responsibility.
- **Special Studies.** Multi-method studies of populations such as arts organizations, immigrant populations, and more.
- **The Civic Leadership Project,** a holistic pilot project to test whether or not a comprehensive community-wide approach to mobilizing nonprofit organizations, individuals and the business community could make a measureable impact on key indicators of community well-being and the public’s sense of civic responsibility.

**Research Projects combining organization and household data.** Performing Arts Research Collaborative

**Social Psychology and Behavioral Economics:** Research comparing communities and in the lab

- Giving and volunteering and prosocial experiments. Do results vary by community or university? Does local civic culture matter?
- Ostrom-style natural and experimental studies of collective action

- Cross-site lab experiments:
- Examples: Does awareness of high executive compensation change attitudes toward a nonprofit? Willingness to volunteer or donate? Does it matter if the individual already has a relationship or knows of the organization? Does it matter if the individual is presented with a choice between a number of seemingly worthwhile organizations or is offered the opportunity to give or keep a possible contribution?

## Overview: Non-Research Activities

### Nonprofit Organizations: Tools and Resources

- The Community Platform.
- Outcome measurement
- Form 990 Online and making nonprofit data available electronically.
- KnowledgeBase – Integrate local or national research into a local system

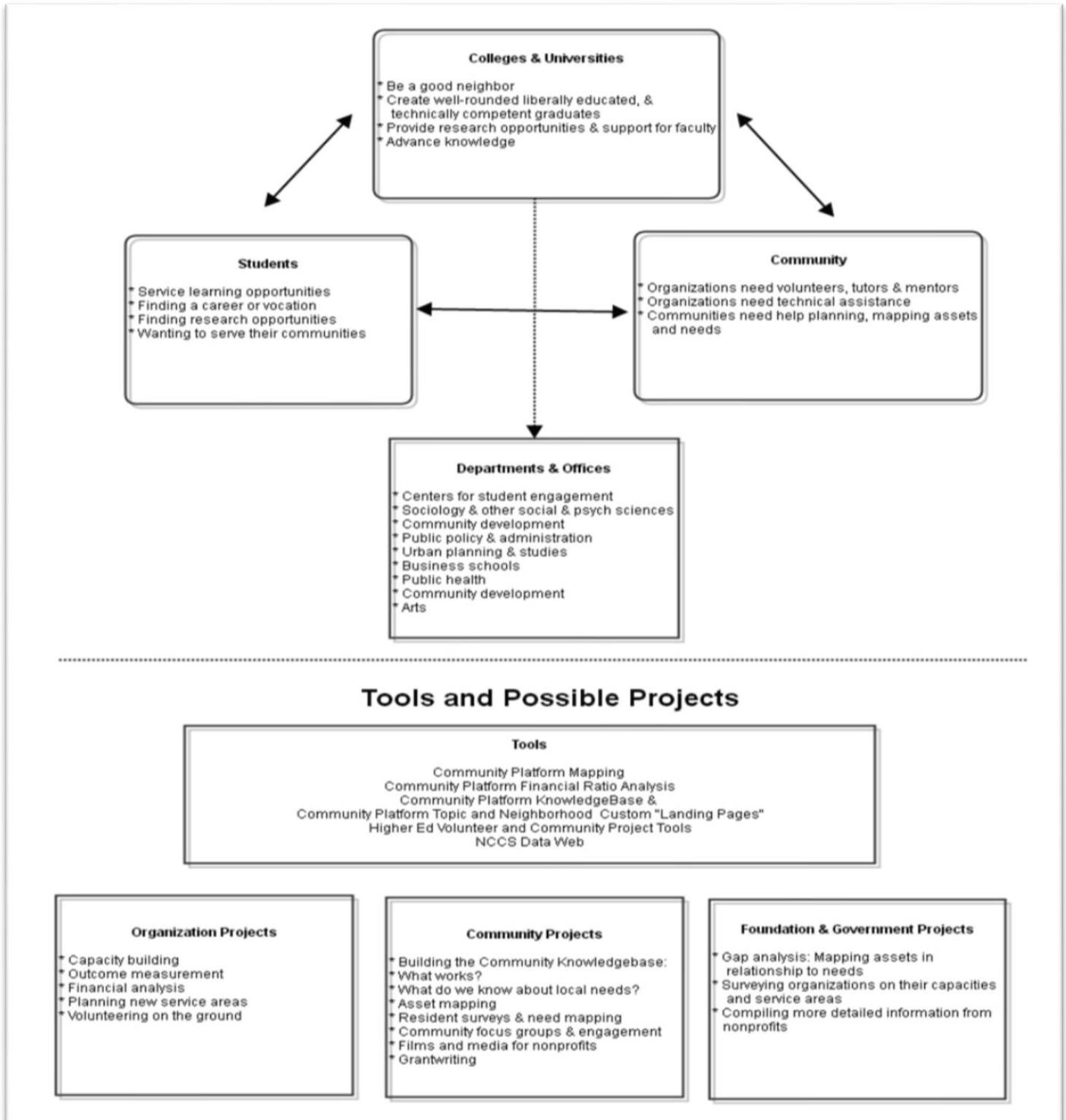
### Practice

- Build undergraduate support for individual nonprofits, nonprofit coalitions and community-building work into the curriculum through service learning, volunteering and long-term “engagements” or “field stations” to help organizations and neighborhoods with whatever they need.
- Create opportunities for faculty and graduate students to become involved in community research projects.

## Overview: Benefits of the National Network

- Be part of a learning network.
- Students have opportunities to work with our national team as well as in their own communities.
- Participate in nationwide research projects -- with customization for local communities -- like the Social Capital Benchmark Survey conducted by Bob Putnam more than ten years ago in collaboration with local community foundation partners
- Regular webinars on topics of general interest
- Students and faculty can contribute to our library of Evidence-Based Outcome Measures, Best Practices, and innovative community practices.

## Appendix A: Overview Chart



## **Appendix B: The Nonprofit Organizations Capacity-Building, Assessment & Narrative Project**

### **Data Challenges**

Existing research on nonprofit organizations suffers from a number of data collection challenges. Researchers themselves are stymied by a lack of data responsive to the most topical issues. IRS Forms 990 alone, unfortunately, don't capture many of the more important questions researchers are interested in. More in-depth qualitative research, case studies and evaluations tend to be time-consuming and expensive, while seldom yielding results that can be generalized to a field, let alone to the sector as a whole. Survey research, while able to reach a broader audience, often yields implausible and biased results for the questions researchers are most interested in (e.g., on collaboration, fundraising costs, advocacy or outcome measurement) since organizations either don't understand the questions or respond more positively about their activities than experts would deem accurate.

### **A University Network**

Creating a network of parallel projects across many universities that ask largely the same questions and use the same methodologies would go a long way toward overcoming these research barriers. By standardizing research methodologies across multiple locales, researchers could get the rich qualitative information they want while simultaneously enjoying the benefit of a wider breadth than any individual or research team could achieve alone. From a data collection standpoint, the use of participant-observation strategies, in which the universities would embed interested students within organizations for the purpose of providing services to the organizations, would provide greater insight on questions of collaboration, advocacy, fundraising and outcome measurement than the information generated in one-time surveys or interviews. And in terms of generalizability, the data from different communities might be aggregated to permit cross-community comparisons as well – although it may take several years to amass sufficient data, depending on the data collection being used.

### **Value for Organizations**

Such an approach would *also* benefit the organizations themselves. Often, research on nonprofit organizations suffers from low response rates and unwillingness of organization managers to spend time with researchers on qualitative research. This is because organizations often see little in return for their time and effort. But what if organizations could get direct benefits from being part of ongoing university-based research projects? By utilizing and building upon community research networks, this approach stimulates sustained interaction between researchers, organizations, and the student body. In exchange for participating in a long-term and in-depth qualitative and quantitative research project, organizations could become part of a peer learning community and receive a guarantee of, say, 100 hours of trained upper-class student services. These services could take a range of different forms depending on the needs of the organization and the capabilities of the university. Ideally, there would be a number of participating professors who would ensure that the students produced quality products and work.

- Design or improve the organization website.
- Complete registration forms for GuideStar Exchange, the Community Platform, Charity Navigator, state charity registrations, etc.
- Develop and implement communication and community outreach plan. This could include everything from writing about or creating a video on individual programs or the organization history, to preparing press releases, to conducting door-to-door campaigns to educate potential supporters or clients about the work of the organization.
- Conduct an environmental scan of the organization’s industry or local community. (What are implications of economic and demographic forecasts on organization’s goals?)
- Help the organization implement an outcome and performance measurement system
- Help with database development and administrative tasks

## **Value for Students**

Finally, the proposed program includes substantial benefits to the students themselves, those that are the participant-observers and the mediators between the organizations and the researchers. To be successful, a high level of supervision by participating professors and a high level of practical training of students would be needed. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for universities to better prepare their students to make a positive contribution to their communities and organizations after they leave the university. What appears to be a growing emphasis on co-op programs and intensive internships points to the value of this approach and the likelihood that universities would see this as an opportunity to be welcomed – especially at a time when approximately half of university graduates report being “underemployed.” This approach enables interested students to receive important experience in *both* the research and nonprofit sectors, by simultaneously helping collect data of the most interest to nonprofit researchers *and* contributing to practical tasks of benefit to the organizations they are embedded in.

From an academic perspective, there are a number of research paradigms that could be used for the work depending on the specific focus. These include traditional qualitative approaches such as field research and grounded theory and qualitative methods such as participant observation, direct observation, unstructured interviewing, and case studies. The approaches could also draw from the traditions of community-based participatory research, participatory action research, and asset-based community development research.

## **Potential Organization-Level Research Topics**

One possible division of potential topics for student research is below. Other frameworks have been developed by McKinsey (see below), TCC and others.

- General information about the organization, including:
  - Organization history
  - Organization mission
  - Service delivery: Geographic areas served, types of services, willingness to refer people to other complementary or competing organizations (and access to information on other organizations necessary to do so)

- Governance and Financial Structure
  - Finances, and financial & accounting practices – use of “social enterprise models” and complex organizational structures for generating earned income
  - Governance: Size, independence, level and types of activities of board (in practice, not in theory)?
  - Fundraising (number of individual donors, number of renewing donors, other private sources, in-kind contributions and donated services? How does org. use special events?)
  - Executive and line staff compensation and recruitment
  
- Performance Measurement and Strategic Planning
  - Outcome measurement: What systems are in place?
  - Strategy and planning: Is there a plan? What information did the organization use? Are board and executive leadership well-informed?
  - Perceptions of major challenges and opportunities facing the organization?
  
- Public Engagement and Communications
  - Communications, marketing and community outreach: How does the organization engage its local community members in roles as potential clients or supporters? Is there active outreach? What role does its website and social media play? What role could they play? Does the organization issue press releases, have relationships with the press? Would these be beneficial?
  - Volunteer or member recruitment and management
  - Use of technology
  
- Collaborations
  - Collaboration with other nonprofits
  - Collaboration with religious congregations
  - Collaboration with business
  - Collaboration with government
  - Advocacy & involvement in coalitions: Role of executive director, formal and informal networks and activities
  
- Identification of best practices in all areas above

## **Help Organizations Meet Reporting Requirements & Standards**

The student volunteers could also help organizations meet a variety of nonprofit standards and reporting efforts:

- GuideStar Exchange standards
- Charity Navigator standards
- Wise Giving Alliance standards
- State charity registration and renewals
- State nonprofit association “standards of excellence” (I’m not sure if any still have them in place.)

## **Putting the Organizational Assessments Together and Combining Them with Community Data**

A second phase of work would be to combine the data collected above to enable grounded assessments of the capacity for strengthening the nonprofit sector as a whole. Options include:

- What are the opportunities for greater collaboration and coordination among service providers? (Univ. of San Diego research on food banks might be a good model for this type of work.)
- What role could intermediary or umbrella organizations play in supporting management training, collective impact work, collective fundraising and volunteer recruitment, knowledge management and distribution, etc.?

## **Alternative Organization Capacity Framework**

The Organization Capacity Framework developed by McKinsey for Venture Philanthropy Partners in 2001 “defines nonprofit capacity in a pyramid of seven essential elements: three higher-level elements – aspirations, strategy, and organizational skills – three foundational elements – systems and infrastructure, human resources, and organizational structure – and a cultural element which serves to connect all the others:

### ***Higher level elements***

- Aspirations: An organization’s mission, vision, and overarching goals, which collectively articulate its common sense of purpose and direction
- Strategy: The coherent set of actions and programs aimed at fulfilling the organization’s overarching goals
- Organizational Skills: The sum of the organization’s capabilities, including such things (among others) as performance measurement, planning, resource management, and external relationship building

### ***Foundational elements***

- Human Resources: The collective capabilities, experiences, potential and commitment of the organization’s board, management team, staff, and volunteers
- Systems and Infrastructure: The organization’s planning, decision making, knowledge management, and administrative systems, as well as the physical and technological assets that support the organization
- Organizational Structure: The combination of governance, organizational design, interfunctional coordination, and individual job descriptions that shapes the organization’s legal and management structure

### ***Connective element***

- Culture: The connective tissue that binds together the organization, including shared values and practices, behavior norms, and most important, the organization’s orientation towards performance.