

THE Nonprofit QUARTERLY



21st-Century Communications: Authenticity Matters



Wells *on* the State of Civil Society
Organizations and Young Citizens

Sweetland and Shore *on* Strategic
Framing in the Digital Age

Guo and Saxton *on* Getting—and
Keeping—Philanthropic Attention



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Welcome

DEAR READERS,
Welcome to the *Nonprofit Quarterly's* summer 2014 issue, on communications. We struggled with this topic. Part of the problem was establishing a clear boundary around it; for instance, we started off obsessed with the concept of brand, and then wondered, Is this branding thing really so important? And what does "brand" mean in the context of the nonprofit sector?



We explored the discipline of framing strategies for social media-based communications, and then dove into the deep pool of civic engagement and the ways in which our relationships and our communications practices and expectations have changed over time—and then realized that this is the point. We are at a watershed moment in which a new communications practice is being explored by everyone, and nonprofits are in that rushing, detritus-filled stream with the rest of the world, trying desperately to understand when to relax into the current, making the most of its power, and when to protect their existence from that current.

We revisited our obsession with branding and began to see that it is, in fact, an important concept. If people are going to be in a relationship with you, they want assurance that they can trust in who you are. This “who you are” comes across through many channels and in many ways, as Jan Masaoka of the California Association of Nonprofits and Jon Pratt of the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits stress in our interview with them about the branding of the nonprofit sector. What you say about yourself communicates your identity, but also, and more importantly, so does your every action and what others say about you.

Thus, this issue took form as a collection of thoughts that all meet at the same juncture: that communications with our stakeholders are to be ignored at our own risk, and that, in the end, tools are less important than the integration of voice and the recognition of the reciprocal relationship between our stakeholders and us.

Finally, we believe that we are being called to a higher associational practice, and trying this without our younger leaders would be a foolhardy mission—not least because they have been born into this new age: our older leaders are struggling to master a new language that is our younger leaders’ native tongue. But that is a topic for a future issue! In the meantime, we hope that this edition will make you think about who might feel they have a stake in the way your organization behaves, and consider how they might be brought into a conversation in which shared values and aspirations ring true.



The Nonprofit Ethicist

by Woods Bowman

Oral pledges are exactly what they sound like: pies in the sky—get written confirmation or strike them off the books. If transparency comes back to bite you in the proverbial behind, just stay still—things should settle in time. Don't envy your more-powerful neighbors—turn lemons into lemonade and connect with their resources. And, if voicing dissent puts you in the doghouse, choose your battles wisely and make sure to speak up as often in support.

DEAR NONPROFIT ETHICIST,
I am a development director, and my executive director recently told me to record in our database a large pledge from a board member. However, the ED had nothing in writing, and I could not reach the donor to confirm the pledge. As it happens, the pledge was crucial to meeting our financial goals—without it, we would have fallen short of reaching them. (Call it a coincidence, if you like.) Is the executive director's word alone sufficient to allow recording the pledge on our books? What happens if I do as he says and the donor does not come through? Will our books show a "bad debt" for the board member?

Worried

Dear Worried,

You are in a tough spot. Your executive director obviously has a personal interest in the outcome. Generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) require that you get a pledge in writing. Oral and third-party representations are

unacceptable. If you do as your executive director asks and your auditors cannot find written documentation from the donor, they may insist that you restate your net income before they sign off. (Cancelling the pledge before the audit is published will not cause a bad-debt entry, because the "pledge" was not valid in the first place.) A restatement showing that you fell short of your goals and contradicting the executive director should embarrass him. Maybe you could drop a hint in that direction, if there is still time before the audit.

Dear Nonprofit Ethicist,

I was recently elected secretary of a nonprofit membership organization. Two years ago I applied for the position of executive director, as well as a staff position. I did not get hired for either. I hold no ill will toward the new ED nor the staff person who was hired. I have never said a negative thing about them, and have always acted with an earnest desire for transparency. Thus, in an attempt to be transparent prior to

an ED evaluation, I disclosed this information to the other board members and expressed my intent to abstain from the ED evaluation in order to avoid any perception of impropriety. However, the other board members are now using the disclosure almost as a weapon. What else could or should I do?

Lost in the Land of Transparency

Dear Lost,

I'm not sure I can envision how other board members are "now using the disclosure almost as a weapon," but it sounds unpleasant. It seems as if they are overreacting—unless there is another issue lurking beneath the surface. All I can say is that, based on your description of events, you acted honorably. My advice is to keep your eyes and ears open for clues about related issues. If there are none, things should calm down eventually.

Dear Nonprofit Ethicist,

We are located in a city dominated by a university that operates a fundraising

machine at a level of professionalism almost nobody else can afford. Needless to say, its donor base is international. To ice the cake, the university does not sanction campus activities that benefit nonprofits outside of the university. I am in an arts organization. Starving artists are not a myth! Our development budget is pretty much my (\$13/hour) salary, software, and our chamber of commerce membership. How can we “compete” with a beloved institution on these terms?

Poor Relation

Dear Poor Relation,

Your question is practical rather than ethical (unless you plan to raise funds on campus under an assumed name), but I don't stand on formalities. My advice: don't covet your neighbor's donor list. In my experience, residents of college towns are not big contributors to their local institution. Instead, they are more likely to expect the college to pay them as “payments in lieu of taxes.” Furthermore, with few exceptions, donors to college sports are not donors to arts and cultural organizations.

Your university is actually an invaluable resource, especially if your college town is located far from cultural opportunities. Market your organization to the faculty. It's easy to get a campus directory—put volunteers to work on cross-referencing faculty names in the campus directory with your local telephone directory. Of course, get prospects to buy tickets before you ask for donations. I suggest focusing on faculty because they have money and flexible schedules, and in remote locations they are hungry for cultural opportunities. If your university is large, cross-referencing will take a lot of time, so until you get the faculty to buy in, ignore administrators and students. Administrators are too busy and students are—um—too distracted.

Dear Nonprofit Ethicist,

Sometimes I go to a meeting where everyone who expresses an opinion is on the same page. The rest of us sit quietly, and one or two of us are treated like foxes in the chicken coop, because we do not buy into the assumptions on which the discussion is based, and may even believe those assumptions to be immoral or harmful to the community. However, we become pariahs if we protest too loudly or too long. We could be banned from future meetings, and then our organizations would lose our representation. Eventually, we sell our souls to the devil. What to do?

Voice in the Wilderness

Dear Voice in the Wilderness,

As Kermit would say, “It's not easy being green.” Dissent is never welcomed and dissenters are often ostracized. Before I can give you advice on how to take over the group (a coup de group?) and redirect it, I need to know how it is organized, how it elects officers, and its rules for conduct of its business. With the information you provide, I can advise only three things: (1) Keep attending the meetings to keep abreast of developments that may affect your organization; (2) whenever you agree with the majority, speak up in support so they don't pigeonhole you as a troublemaker and stop inviting you to meetings; and (3) restrict your negative comments to the most egregious proposal in any one meeting. My last suggestion will not change minds, but it will keep you from selling your soul to the devil.

WOODS BOWMAN is professor emeritus of public service management at DePaul University, in Chicago, Illinois.

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Twenty-First-Century Communications *versus* The Illusion of Control: *An Epic Battle*

by Ruth McCambridge

If there were one thing you might want to take to heart regarding twenty-first-century nonprofit communications, it is that if you ignore the reciprocity principle, you may risk your organization's survival.

Editors' note: *The following article is a collection of ideas about organizational communications that are actively in play across all sectors. It is neither exhaustive nor definitive, but is meant to encourage consideration about the relationships between nonprofits and philanthropy and their publics.*

SINCE EARLY AUGUST, A REMARKABLE SCENE HAS been playing out in Boston. The CEO of the local grocery chain Market Basket was ousted in late June 2014, the result of a family feud. It could have ended there, but apparently this CEO had treated his workers fairly, providing good salaries and benefits (resulting in some long-term, dedicated employees), and his customers fairly, providing good products at low prices. And it seems these stakeholders have a sense of a shared future together, because after Arthur T. Demoulas was fired from the helm, protestors took to the streets, with work stoppages,

boycotts, and press events seeming to emerge out of nowhere. Workers don't show up, warehouses have become clogged with undelivered products, past customers are taping receipts from competing markets onto the store windows, and shelves are bare of perishables. At the time of this writing, the company is losing millions of dollars daily. While the board says there are multiple suitors for the company, it may well be that the defining bid goes to Arthur T. Demoulas—because the community wants *him*.

This kind of support would make most nonprofits proud beyond measure. I am reminded of articles we have published by Buzz Schmidt, who asserts that “all enterprise is social”—that, in its entirety, it has impacts, both positive and

RUTH MCCAMBRIDGE is the *Nonprofit Quarterly's* editor in chief.

negative.¹ It takes from community, on balance, or contributes to it.

The story of Market Basket helps us to understand the multiple ways in which every enterprise has an impact on its community. Many thousands of people feel that they have partial ownership of Market Basket's fate, and that level of involvement can be an organization's biggest asset or worst nightmare, depending on how one honors it. We have seen this kind of engagement emerge in the nonprofit sector, such as when stakeholders voted with their feet, wallets, and energy during the Susan G. Komen for the Cure debacle. And, it may be that the changes in governance we have all been sensing will continue to cut across sectors as people begin to understand and use their collective power in guiding institutions that they care about. But if we don't know what our stakeholders are thinking and experiencing, we will be at some risk.

Segregating Communication Is So Five Minutes Ago

The degree to which nonprofits neglect or marginalize their communication functions seems, if you believe in the notions of public benefit and the common good, both wasteful and immoral: communication is, after all, core to the associational and democratic purposes of the nonprofit sector. Communication helps build the intelligence of whatever enterprise one is engaged in. It creates energy and interest in that enterprise; builds an understanding of issues and of ways to take people-supported action on those issues (reframing when the public impression of the issue is off-kilter); and, of course, helps advertise the enterprise to those who might support it. Communication also serves to provide those who are meant to benefit with a way to help guide the enterprise.

These seem like functions that are too multiple and important to be marginalized. Yet even when a nonprofit has a paid, professional communications staff, both the organization and the staff often misunderstand their role as one of advertising—convincing and informing rather than engaging. By engaging, I mean involving stakeholders as part of the intelligence and energy of the enterprise in a way that respects them, integrates their thoughts and ideas, responds to them,



Communication, as we are looking at it here, requires reciprocity. This reciprocity extends beyond the message sent and received fairly accurately to a deeper and longer negotiation of sorts: a searching out of common interests, topic, and form that ends in a sharing of intelligence toward a common end and the common good.

and encourages them to respond to one another while advancing cause and knowledge.

Get with the Program

Over the past half decade, we have seen a virtual explosion of journalism sites in our sector. They run the gamut from investigative strongholds like ProPublica—and state and local sites focused on policy issues and local issues, respectively—to sites that provide venues for lay journalists to contribute to the public intelligence. Some of this latter category involves journalism under the extreme conditions of a suppressed free press (in an international context), and it provides information in a different form that is even more iterative than journalism has been in the past. Thus, the truth is pieced together for people to act upon.

In pioneering organizations like Wikipedia, MoveOn.org, and Change.org, people act and create together on a shared platform, and the results have changed the face of interactions between people and information and institutions. This and other factors invite us to rethink the role and style of communications in our work.

Communicate at or with? Reciprocity

Communication, as we are looking at it here, requires reciprocity. This reciprocity extends beyond the message sent and received fairly accurately to a deeper and longer negotiation of sorts: a searching out of common interests, topic, and form that ends in a sharing of intelligence toward a common end and the common good. This is, at its essence, a different practice from telling people something they ought to know or do. It is different even from devising focus groups to figure out how to tell someone something that will resonate. Instead, it is at its best an invitation to engage with a community of interest—and through that engagement, a powerful social contract of sorts can be built to advance a cause.

Of course, we all have a contextual way of hearing and knowing that emerges from our own experience of things. A “community’s” understanding of issues is therefore both local and diverse; still, there are some common archetypal stories that speak to large portions of the population in very much the same way.

Our pluralistic democracy is, then, a garden of voices, identities, and points of view, and of ways in which people can be called to action when an important aspect of their identity is addressed in a respectful manner and given play to express itself with others. This is what the soul of communications can and should be in the nonprofit sector.

This playing with ideas in a common space is, of course, aided by technology, which calls on us to act differently in that space and bring a practice ethic to it that strives not for low common denominators but rather the highest of aspirations, even seven generations out.

Pacing

In an interview *NPQ* conducted with Mark Jurkowitz in 2009, Jurkowitz pointed out that there is no longer a news cycle and that instead there is a 24-hour, 365-day-a-year, never-ending potential to break news—and this can potentially be done virtually free of an institutional intermediary. It’s a new communications world with different pacing.²

Keenan Wellar, author of “Social Change and a Welcoming Environment for Youth in the Nonprofit Community,” notes that today’s communications require what he calls “transparent pacing.” He writes,

Our volunteer coordinator receives frequent feedback from volunteers who were excited to contribute time and ideas to a particular cause but who come away feeling rejected—even in cases where they were responding to an agency calling out for volunteers. Volunteers report feeling as if they were distracting staff from other work or, in some cases, they never heard back at all. Other complaints include training and orientation that is offered infrequently, and/or once training is completed, limited opportunities and no room for creativity.

At LiveWorkPlay a volunteer inquiry typically receives a same-day response, and rarely will more than 48 hours pass. After a telephone or email exchange, moving to the next step of a face-to-face meeting with our coordinator is usually a matter of days, and the first opportunity for a formal orientation and training takes no longer than a month. While these necessary processes

are underway, our coordinator is already working with the candidate to come up with a plan, and collaborating with other staff and volunteers about the possibilities. This may all seem very obvious, but we have amassed substantial feedback that indicates it is far from common practice.

When the process works well, it's no surprise that the digital generation appreciates this type of transparent pacing, and that they share their positive experiences with others.³

Weller writes that this responsiveness pays off in many ways because, "The best form of volunteer recruitment is also the oldest: person-to-person recommendations. Today's networked youth have the ability to amplify their recommendations to friends, family, and coworkers in a matter of minutes."⁴

Integrity and Trust

To be in a communications space that is reciprocal over the long term requires that your nonprofit be trusted to manage, and even be in, that space responsibly. There are some characteristics that you may want to look to in self-examination:

- *Stance.* Do we have a clearly understood "identity," with a point of view that can act as the foundation for discussion? In "Mechanisms for Stakeholder Integration: Bringing Virtual Stakeholder Dialogue into Organizations," Paul Driesen, Robert Kok, and Bas Hillebrand describe this characteristic as follows:⁵

Organizational identification refers to the degree to which internal and external stakeholders share beliefs about the central and enduring characteristics of the organization and reflects a bond between the stakeholders and the organization (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002; Maignan & Ferrell, 2004).⁶ . . . In a virtual context, organizational identification is a particularly important organizational outcome, as organizational identification represents the "critical glue" that links stakeholders to organizations in the absence of physical meetings (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 1999).⁷

- *Platform for inclusion.* Again, the authors are clear on the importance of ensuring that the capacity is present to manage conversations:⁸

Organizations should match their coordination mechanisms to the high intensity and richness of virtual stakeholder dialogues. Organizations without proper internal coordination are prone to act incoherently on the issues raised by its stakeholders and likely to face poor organizational identification among its stakeholders. These organizations may not live up to the expectations raised during the dialogue. . . . Without suitable coordination mechanisms, engaging in virtual stakeholder dialogue is a superficial attempt to present a favorable appearance. Managerial practices that are only adopted for ceremonial reasons have low effectiveness (Kostova & Roth, 2002).⁹ Adopting virtual stakeholder dialogue without suitable coordination mechanisms has detrimental performance consequences.

- *Openness to suggestion and dialogue.* The authors call this "bandwidth," and write:¹⁰

Higher bandwidth structures provide more capacity to accurately exchange information, making responses to stakeholder issues more effective (Van de Ven, et al., 1976).¹¹ With virtual environments moving the locus of activity more towards the periphery of the firm, structures where the coordinator is located far from the issues at hand (low bandwidth) are not likely to be effective for coordinating all issues (Eisenhardt & Brown, 1998; Nambisan, 2002).¹²

The key to greater bandwidth is a plan to get you there. While not rocket science, it does take design and a commitment to a less centralized leadership environment.

Curation

A concept called *curation* is central to all of this. By curation we mean the organization of information, thoughts, and ideas. The challenges to the

A concept called *curation* is central to all of this. By curation we mean the organization of information, thoughts, and ideas.

Framing is a powerful
act, and repetition
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the new surface for
reconsideration.

curation of this space between organizations and constituents parallel the challenges of a learning organization (or any kind of community of practice) in that beyond the discussion, people need other kinds of information—such as research and other points of view—that feed their knowledge and opinion.

Frames, Communicating with the Press, and Repetition

If you believed that key press contacts were likely to be important to you, you would probably try to form some kind of relationship with them. And, because they must communicate with the larger public, and may be seen as being more objective than you about your work, you would likely want them to understand the frame through which you view the work that you do. Why? Because the media still, at least in part, set or reinforce the frames through which the public views an issue. But many reporters are besieged by self-serving press releases that signify nothing. Organizational profiles, then, told from an organizational, exceptionalist perspective, might be less interesting to the media than, say, a story that notes a trend or important piece of national research, and then makes a local connection that is not simply a way to self-appreciate—for instance, a recent piece of research on nursing homes that suggests nonprofits are generally rated more favorably than for-profit facilities.

If you had a relationship with a local reporter, you could pass that information along—perhaps with a suggestion that local residents may be interested in the ways in which nonprofits differ, as far as nursing homes are concerned. And then you might suggest that there are, indeed, some fields in which nonprofits undeniably perform better. These kinds of efforts can be far more effective than self-aggrandizing press releases, which accrue to your credibility usually not at all. But such efforts, of course, require that you pay attention to your field.

They also require that you understand how commonly assumed frames of reference may not be serving your cause, and then you must embark on a campaign to reframe an issue—a profound act of systems-changing guerrilla warfare: by seizing the

frame of reference, you take control of the field. In Donella Meadows' classic article, "Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System," she describes a frame, or paradigm, as follows:

The shared idea in the minds of society, the great big unstated assumptions—unstated because unnecessary to state; everyone already knows them—constitute that society's paradigm, or deepest set of beliefs about how the world works.

There is a difference between nouns and verbs. Money measures something real and has real meaning (therefore people who are paid less are literally worth less). Growth is good. Nature is a stock of resources to be converted to human purposes. Evolution stopped with the emergence of Homo sapiens. One can "own" land. Those are just a few of the paradigmatic assumptions of our current culture, all of which have utterly dumfounded other cultures, who thought them not the least bit obvious.

Paradigms are the sources of systems. From them, from shared social agreements about the nature of reality, come system goals and information flows, feedbacks, stocks, flows and everything else about systems.¹³

But an issue cannot be reframed just one time and that should do it. Reframing takes repetition from many points in a system, stories, and research that reinforce the issue's validity. Framing is a powerful act, and repetition drives it deep into our psyches, where our ideas reflect back upon the new surface for reconsideration.

Making Sure You Are on the Same Page—The Definition of Terms

The extent to which we agree to misunderstand one another can be staggering. In a Discover card commercial, a guy calls the credit card company to say he has heard that it provides frog protection. He is holding a plump frog that, clearly, he deeply cares for. The guy on the other end of the call says, "Oh yeah, fraud protection? You bet!"—and even when they check back with one another about being on the same page, apparently they are just willing to agree to let stand whatever misunderstanding exists.

This, I believe, happens all the time, and it dumps a load of disappointment in the middle of a relationship.

A Governance Surprise

More and more often, we see examples of boards of corporations that have not come to terms with the reality that their power is increasingly enjoyed only at the pleasure of their stakeholders, who have opinions. The ease with which one group of stakeholders can communicate their case to another group is mind-boggling. This communication makes it harder to hide things internally and easier to organize externally for institutional change. What does communication have to do with this? The lack of communication can cause serious errors in judgment regarding actions that the board thinks it can take without serious blowback.

• • •

Communication is a function that cannot be segregated, and its deployment should be strategic: How broad a bandwidth do you want? What are you promising in terms of responsiveness, and toward what end? Who is involved? The answer to that last question is, I suspect, “everybody.” In the same way that many advocate for a “culture of philanthropy,” where everyone attends to funding, we may need to promote cultures of communication, community learning, and action. After all, isn’t that what we are here to do?

NOTES

1. See, for example, Buzz Schmidt, “All Enterprise Is Social: Measuring the Impact of Endeavors across the Profit Boundary,” the *Nonprofit Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 18–23, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/management/24167-all-enterprise-is-social-measuring-the-impact-of-endeavors-across-the-profit-boundary.html>.
2. “Nonprofits and Journalism: An Interview with Mark Jurkowitz,” the *Nonprofit Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 53–57, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/management/1600-nonprofits-and-journalism-an-interview-with-mark-jurkowitz.html>.
3. Keenan Wellar, “Social Change and a Welcoming

Environment for Youth in the Nonprofit Community,” the *Philanthropist* 25, no. 2 (2013): 114.

4. Ibid.

5. Paul H. Driessen, Robert A. W. Kok, and Bas Hillebrand, “Mechanisms for Stakeholder Integration: Bringing Virtual Stakeholder Dialogue into Organizations,” *Journal of Business Research* 66, no. 9 (2013): 1465–72.

6. C. B. Bhattacharya and Kimberly D. Elsbach, “Us versus Them: The Roles of Organizational Identification and Disidentification in Social Marketing Initiatives,” *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 26–36; and Isabelle Maignan and O. C. Ferrell, “Corporate Social Responsibility and Marketing: An Integrative Framework,” *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 3–19.

7. Batia M. Wiesenfeld, Sumita Raghuram, and Raghu Garud, “Communication Patterns as Determinants of Organizational Identification in a Virtual Organization,” *Organization Science* 10, no. 6 (November–December 1999): 777–90.

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More and more often,
we see examples of
boards of corporations
that have not come to
terms with the reality
that their power is
increasingly enjoyed
only at the pleasure of
their stakeholders,
who have opinions.

Two Eras of Civic Information and the Evolving Relationship between Civil Society Organizations and Young Citizens

by Chris Wells

Literature suggests that online organizations are more likely to embrace a newer, more youth-friendly communication style than organizations working within the formal political realm. The author's study of Facebook communications mainly confirms this, but the low levels of youth-friendly communications across the board raise doubts about the likelihood of a civil society resurgence through social media.

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SINCE THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY, PARTICULARLY in the United States, civic institutions such as political parties, interest groups, government watchdogs, and community associations have provided essential connections between individual citizens and political processes. They have coordinated collective efforts, developed political resources, and offered strategic expertise in navigating complex political waters. They have also been conduits of civic information, producing newsletters and pamphlets describing issues and positions, hosting interpersonal meetings, and providing

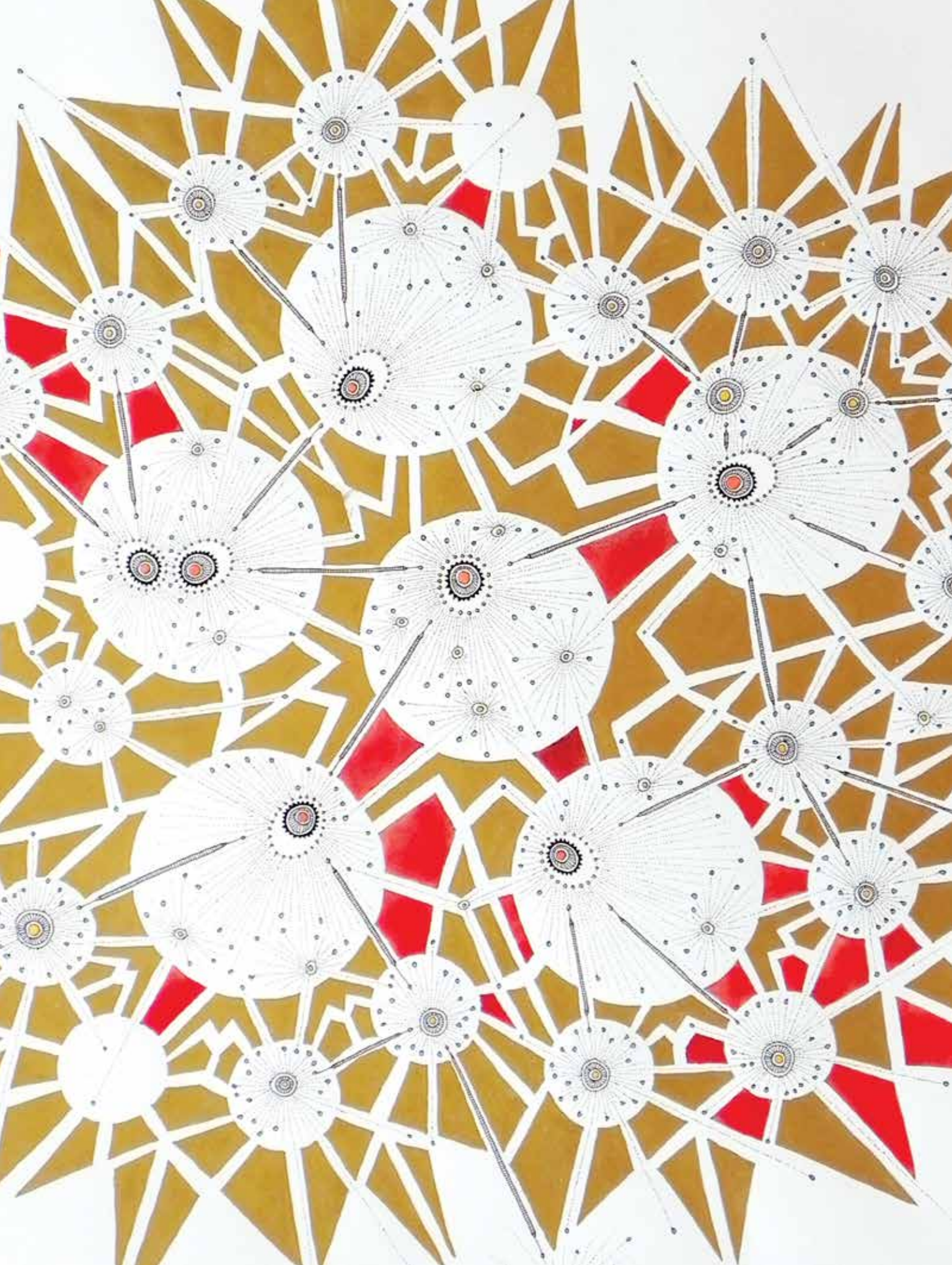
CHRIS WELLS is assistant professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His research agenda includes topics in political communication such as youth civic engagement, new media, political organization, and computational methods.

Questions that will be answered in this article

- What does style of communication have to do with the civic engagement of young people?
- What does your communications culture signal to young people? Are you aligned with their communications preferences?
- What are the various communication styles of organizations in the digital age, and what effect do those styles have?
- How can you track, understand, and make good use of substantive online participation?

How you might want to make use of it

- If your organization is concerned about engaging young people in its work and in civil society, this article can provide a great base for discussion of possible changes your organization can make. Use it to spark discussion at a retreat, a board meeting, or among staff.



[A] paradigm shift in the logic and structure of the information system is underway, which may entail a period of disjuncture as institutions of democratic society lag behind (especially younger) individuals' preferences and habits with respect to how they interact with civic information.

interpretation of information from journalists and other sources. Given these essential roles, it is hard to imagine the future of public engagement without such institutions. Over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, however, these institutions declined and their work changed.

A Paradigm Shift

A number of explanations have been offered for the decline,¹ and while not contradicting any of these, the framework of civic information styles that this article advances adds a new perspective.

We argue that a paradigm shift in the logic and structure of the information system is underway, which may entail a period of disjuncture as institutions of democratic society lag behind (especially younger) individuals' preferences and habits with respect to how they interact with civic information. The framework's communication-centered view suggests that part of the disjuncture may be attributable to civic organizations' adaptation to the "media politics" of the late twentieth century, in which their communications became driven by the need to compete in a highly competitive, mass-mediated political communication environment.² Organizations' needs for active member input were lowered, as they relied increasingly on experts to frame both policy and their public face, and the costs of member input were raised, as the risk of members' actions or communications disrupting the carefully honed message of the communication officials increased.

This falls in line with Theda Skocpol's analysis of participation in civic organizations, in which she notes a shift in organizations' structures from "membership" organizations rooted in small, personal gatherings to "management" conglomerates aggregating the resources—often simply financial—of disparate individuals into a strategically directed political force.³ These management organizations offer a citizen–communication relationship increasingly in conflict with the participatory preferences that have been developing over the past several decades, and the rapid dispersion of digital communication technologies in the last decade, in particular, has spurred

scholarly interest in how changes in communication technology might be reshaping—and possibly reinvigorating—citizens' opportunities and inclinations for engagement. In addition, research has especially focused on the engagement of young citizens, a population historically underengaged and among the most active users of digital media.⁴

This article, too, concentrates on young people and engagement; however, unlike much recent work on digital media and civic engagement, it does not cover the myriad ways in which digital media enable novel forms of decentralized and personalized social movements or activities. As exciting as these new forms of political communication are, this study makes the case that it would be a mistake to neglect how digital media are transforming the relationship between citizens and the major civic organizations that have guided American civic life for the past 150 years.⁵ This article's aim, therefore, is to reconsider the faltering civic engagement record of young people through the lens of the communication relationship between citizens and civic organizations, and to consider how that relationship is changing—and has the potential to change—with the introduction of interactive digital media.

The article proceeds in two steps. First, building on earlier work on changing civic identities,⁶ it develops a framework of two civic information styles at play in contemporary Western societies. We then apply that civic information framework to reconsider the relationship between major organizations of civil society and young citizens.

Two Styles of Civic Information

Two bodies of thought inform our framework of civic information styles. The first is research on the shifts and challenges affecting youth civic engagement wrought by social changes of the last half century. The second considers the norms and practices of "digital culture."⁷

The notion of civic information that we employ here is a broader and more inclusive term than "news." It views the news as a particular form of citizen–information relationship based in the modern society of the mid-twentieth century—one that privileged rationality, division of labor, and a relatively clean separation between the

public and private spheres of life. For citizens of the “high-modern” era of journalism, keeping abreast of the public and political world meant getting the news via professional reporters and newscasters. For many citizens, this is no longer their civic information experience; they now receive news about any topic from a variety of sources that include credentialed journalists but also bloggers, friends, and a host of others—and at any time of day.

Social Change and Civic Identity

Scholars emphasize that whether and how young people become engaged must be considered in light of the sociopolitical context in which their civic identities develop.⁸ The last half century has been a period of profound change in those contexts. The rise of the “network society”⁹ has been characterized by specialization and globalization of the industrialized economies and other processes that decrease opportunities for forging strong interest-based social organization on a traditional, local level.¹⁰

This change is a marked departure from the “modern” social order that mid-twentieth-century citizens experienced, in which economic, social, and political well-being was organized through formal social groups. W. Lance Bennett offers a two-part typology of civic styles to describe the citizenship emerging under the new conditions. In his reading, young people’s citizenship is increasingly characterized by personally resonant forms of action organized through personalized networks—leading to activities such as political consumerism, “lifestyle” or “post-materialist” politics, and nonpolitical but civic activities such as volunteering. Bennett terms this emergent civic orientation “self-Actualizing,” and contrasts it with the “Dutiful” orientation of older citizens.¹¹ The dutiful-actualizing framework of civic styles is the starting point for the civic information-style framework we develop here (see table 1, following page). However, that civic identity is an insufficient conceptualization of how younger citizens’ information styles diverge from those of the previous information

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[There] has been an emerging expectation that communication will come with participatory opportunities—opportunities to contribute one’s own ideas and meanings to the texts circulating through society.

Table 1. Two paradigms of civic information, contrasting the preferred mode of interaction and bases for interpreting and assessing information by the dutiful and actualizing civic information styles

	Older/dutiful	Younger/actualizing
Mode of interaction with information	Centered on reception of information from news and key civic leaders	Expectation of participation in production and sharing of information
Interpretation and assessment of information	Guided by membership/identification with social groups, parties; authoritative sources key to credibility	Driven by individual interests and trusted networks; credibility based on relevance and reliability

era. To complete the picture, it is necessary to examine the norms of digital culture, in which the trends of civic identity find expression and reinforcement.

Technological Change

As has been widely observed, many younger citizens have an affinity for communicating via digital media.¹² Mark Deuze examines the “set of values, norms, practices, and expectations shared by [. . .] those inhabitants of modern societies most directly affected by computerization.” One characteristic he noted was participation: the notion that across many domains of life, from television to gaming to politics, people were “increasingly claiming the right to be heard rather than be spoken to.”¹³ That is, there has been an emerging expectation that communication will come with participatory opportunities—opportunities to contribute one’s own ideas and meanings to the texts circulating through society.¹⁴

A second characteristic of digital culture—bricolage—describes the process of assembling a perception of reality from a variety of sources.¹⁵ Bricolage is the information-gathering norm of a network logic—the equivalent of rigorously following an authoritative newspaper or credible opinion leader in the group-based society. This process occurs at the level of the individual, who designs a communication environment using tools such as Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds and social media, and at the level of a media or civic organization, which collects content to share with readers. In this way, civic organizations become information nodes, connecting users to sources in a wide network rather than within a single institution.

Two Eras of Civic Information

We have argued that a shift in civic information style is deeply rooted in social changes, and that those changes both informed the development of and are expressed through the norms of information exchange becoming known as digital culture. These changes point the way toward a framework of civic information styles that contrasts the emerging information style with the one that preceded it. Table 1 summarizes the contrast between these information styles in terms of two key elements of civic information use: the user’s mode of interaction with information, and the bases for interpreting and evaluating that information.

First, in the dutiful era, the good citizen interacted with civic information—preferably from certified journalists and authoritative civic leaders—by consuming it. In contrast, the actualizing citizen rejects a purely consumerist orientation toward information: this citizen has grown up in an era in which political events are not limited to any formal time; rather, the development and competition of opinion is relentless, and communication acts themselves represent a continually available avenue for participating in that activity.¹⁶

Second, we noted within the actualizing information style a preference for networked information seeking, or bricolage. For younger citizens who embrace this model of information, the declining credibility of news organizations and other sources of civic information is giving way to new patterns of information interpretation and assessment based on reliability rather than authoritativeness.

Reinterpreting the Decline of Organized Civic Association

The civic information-style framework just described gives us a fresh opportunity to understand the gap between younger citizens and politics.¹⁷

The Possibilities of Organizational Communication Online

The digital revolution stands out starkly against the backdrop of late-twentieth-century management politics, because a communications technology that some see as reversing this dynamic is now standing alongside a civic order of highly professionalized communications and a dispirited citizenry, and organizations old and new are experimenting with novel ways of engaging citizens.¹⁸ Bruce Bimber uses the notion of “post-bureaucratic political organization” to describe the weakened need for highly structured organizations to facilitate collective political action and, in their place, the rise of more flexibly organized opportunities for collective action.¹⁹

Building on this idea, in “Modeling the Structure of Collective Action” Andrew Flanagin et al. offer a conceptualization of organizations’ approaches to engagement and communication with links to the styles of citizen information preference developed above. They describe two modes by which organizations attempt to engage their supporters: one “institutional,” in which organizations structure and prescribe the nature of supporters’ engagement with the group; and one “entrepreneurial,” “in which participants have a high degree of autonomy and may design collective action in ways that are not sanctioned or controlled by a central authority.”²⁰

These two forms of organization-supporter relationship describe the same tension between autonomous information sharing and dutiful consumption that the civic information framework captures at the individual level. Both posit a shift toward a citizen or supporter role that involves substantially more participatory—or entrepreneurial—opportunities for citizens and requires more flexibility and accommodation on the part of organizations. Part of the recent attractiveness and success of the entrepreneurial action forms described by Flanagin

et al. is surely their openness to active participation and expression that resonate with the actualizing style of civic information. Indeed, evidence from studies of young people in the context of school-based civic learning demonstrates a notable preference for active decision making and self-expression over conventional, rote civics curricula.²¹

Communication Styles of Organizations

These observations raise the core questions of this study: To what extent are major civic organizations willing and able to adapt to a communicative relationship with young people that suits their information preferences? And which are most and least likely to do so? Recent work on the evolution of organizations and digital media offers some guidance on these questions.

David Karpf argues that a new class of organizations is emergent, largely responding to the new opportunities afforded by digital communication. Viewing MoveOn as an archetypal member of this class, he illustrates the new model of organizational membership and communication on offer: citizens’ participation in groups is defined less through dues payments and clear boundaries between members and nonmembers and more through flows of communication and networked actions enabled, for example, by a MoveOn e-mail action alert. Further, he anticipates a shift in the ecology of interest groups, as traditional brick-and-mortar organizations struggle to contend with the opportunities for fundraising and rapid, dispersed mobilization pioneered by MoveOn and its ilk.²²

Connecting these organizations’ patterns to the collective action theory developed by Flanagin et al., Bimber et al. show that MoveOn members have a more entrepreneurial experience within the organization than do members of the American Legion or Association of American Retired Persons (AARP).²³ This suggests that a certain class of organizations—operating only online, with limited investments in physical infrastructure, permanent staffs, and formal membership, and that are unlikely to have existed before the inception of the World Wide Web—may be likely to outperform others in offering communications attractive to citizens with actualizing preferences.

[David Karpf] anticipates a shift in the ecology of interest groups, as traditional brick-and-mortar organizations struggle to contend with the opportunities for fundraising and rapid, dispersed mobilization pioneered by MoveOn and its ilk.

Older organizations are likely to experience organizational inertia—organizational patterns and memory of an era of media politics that make them protective of messages and resistant to sharing their message making with supporters. These organizations may find it challenging to embrace a communication relationship rooted in the norms of digital culture.

On the other side, organizations that did exist before the Internet, and that remain heavily invested in offline programs, are likely to be different. Older organizations are likely to experience organizational inertia—organizational patterns and memory of an era of media politics that make them protective of messages and resistant to sharing their message making with supporters. These organizations may find it challenging to embrace a communication relationship rooted in the norms of digital culture.

This distinction, between organizations with roots in the offline world and those that have been created to take advantage of the unique norms and opportunities of digital culture, formed a hypothesis for testing: that a greater portion of the status updates of online-only organizations—those without substantial ties to the offline world—would include actualizing communication characteristics than would the updates of organizations based offline.

Other Considerations

Leaving aside online-only organizations, several other factors may affect an organization's adaptation to new information norms. In particular, organizations in different positions within the community and with different orientations to the civic world may experience distinct configurations of incentives for experimenting with innovation, risks of failure, and constraints based on members' expectations.

One dynamic worth investigating is how an organization's role in formal politics affects its willingness to engage in actualizing communications. There are several reasons to suspect that this may be inhibiting: an organization engaged in political contention has a great deal to lose from being associated with content offensive to a key constituency or otherwise failing to control the narrative of the campaign. Stromer-Galley identified the reticence to enable website interactivity as early as the 1996 and 1998 U.S. elections;²⁴ and Karpf illustrates this liability with the example of MoveOn's unfortunate experience with crowdsourcing TV advertisements in 2004.²⁵ Bimber similarly predicts that parties and governments should be less adaptable to new communication

styles than other types of organizations, because they have many more institutional barriers (and risks) to significantly modifying their style.²⁶

A study of civic learning websites in the United Kingdom documented such a pattern in that context. Stephen Coleman's U.K.-based study depicted a stark divide between websites offering formal civic experiences but highly "managed" interaction styles and those featuring "autonomous" communication environments but little by way of formal political content.²⁷ Wells showed a similar pattern in the U.S. context.²⁸

An organization's style of membership surely also plays a role in how it chooses to address supporters through social media. Organizations with memberships accustomed to consultation and participation in decision making may be more likely to adopt interactive communications in social media, whereas groups that have most fully internalized the management style may not feel they need to greatly involve supporters. The key question we explore at this juncture is, How will various kinds of offline organizations differ in their willingness to offer features of actualizing communication?

Organizations and Social Media: Facebook

We tested this question in the context of Facebook.²⁹ Facebook's rapid growth and features tailored to politicians, nonprofit organizations, and corporations have made it an attractive communications platform for those hoping to reach and develop communications relationships with people online.³⁰ More pertinent for our purposes, Facebook represents a test of how civic organizations will adapt to a communications platform where participation and networked information sharing are strongly established. While no longer a youth-dominated platform, over 50 percent of Facebook's users are still under thirty, and Facebook's history as a youth-driven site suggests that it embodies many of the digital culture norms. It also continues to be a nearly ubiquitous presence in young people's lives.³¹

To begin, we constructed a sample of active websites, assessed and selected for having a focus on youth and enhancing civic engagement,³² from organizations noted in previous research,³³ lists of

the largest nonprofit organizations in the United States,³⁴ searches for websites focused on connecting youth to civic engagement, and traffic counts derived from compete.com. We made sure to include in particular recently created organizations that exist exclusively online (these we termed “online only”), and offline organizations that varied in their goals of engaging youth. We settled on three categories of offline organizations: those closest to the locus of formal politics (parties, candidates, and government sites, which we termed “government”); those outside government but that aimed to engage youth in political activity (we termed these “interest groups”); and those without formal political goals but rather (broadly) civic goals (we termed these “community groups”).

After a process of elimination based on Facebook pages that were not found, were defunct, or produced no status updates during our three-month sample period (February 1–April 30, 2010), we were left with fifty-eight Facebook pages. We gathered status updates from the three-month period from each organization’s page. (We selected the three-month period to offer a reasonable range of time during which each organization created posts.) In compliance with Facebook’s Statement of Rights and Responsibilities, we gathered the data manually; to make the data gathering and coding tasks manageable under this condition, only one-third of status updates from more prolific organizations (those posting fifteen or more times per month) were included. From organizations

posting fewer than that, every status update was collected and analyzed. We corrected for the different rates of gathering in analyses.

To assess the degree to which each organization’s communications fell more in line with a dutiful or actualizing style of civic information, we applied two measures to each status update. The measures corresponded to the “participatory” and “networked information seeking” characteristics of emerging information preferences developed below.

In order to gauge the participatory inclinations of organizations’ communications, a first measure distinguishes what we termed “organization-driven” from “fan-driven” content. Organization-driven content occurs when an organization uses a status update to project information to supporters by stating facts or opinions, or actions supporters should take. This type of communication aligns with a dutiful civic information style, in which supporters consume information with clear signals from authorities. Fan-driven posts invite fans to contribute to the base of knowledge and opinion of the organization, and align with a more actualizing style. Following literature on civic education and socialization,³⁵ our study distinguished two forms of status update content: straight, informative messages, which we termed “knowledge”; and mobilizing messages calling fans to action, which we termed “action.” We thus assessed each status update for *organization-driven knowledge*, *organization-driven action*, *fan-driven knowledge*, and *fan-driven action*. Because status updates

Following literature on civic education and socialization, our study distinguished two forms of status update content: straight, informative messages, which we termed “knowledge”; and mobilizing messages calling fans to action, which we termed “action.”

Table 2. Measures of dutiful and actualizing civic information styles as operationalized for analysis of Facebook status updates

	Dutiful	Actualizing
Status update text: organization- or fan-driven knowledge and action	<i>Nonparticipatory, organization-driven definition and examples</i> News about an issue, description of what organization is doing, or encouragement to take a particular action: “Check out the article about us published in the nytimes!”; “Tell your congressman you oppose whale hunting!”	<i>Participatory, fan-driven definition and examples</i> Appeals to fans to share information, opinions, or action ideas: “What have you heard about the latest IPCC report on climate change?”; “What is your local community doing to reduce its carbon footprint?”
Link destinations: either internal or external	<i>Authoritative, centralized information presentation</i> Links to content on the organization’s own Facebook page or website	<i>Networked information sharing/bricolage</i> Links to content on the Facebook pages or websites of unaffiliated organizations

We used both the content of status updates—either organization- or fan-driven—and the destination of links—either internal or external—in comparing the communication styles of online and offline organizations and of different kinds of offline organizations.

can contain multiple clauses and valences, any combination of these four content types could occur in a given status update.

A second measure gauged the organizations' alignment with the networked information-seeking preferences of young supporters by evaluating the destination of each link provided with status updates. Links that directed inwardly to organizations' own content, either within the Facebook page or on their website, were considered "internal," and aligning with a more dutiful expectation of civic information style in which organizations present themselves as silos of expert-curated information. Links that directed outwardly to content from another source, such as another civic organization or a news site, were considered "external," and aligning with an actualizing information style in which the organization treated itself as one informational node among many. For young citizens constructing their own personally and socially curated information networks—by making connections to preferred individuals and sources of information—organizations acting in this mode can add value and thereby develop a new relationship with potential supporters.³⁶

We used both the content of status updates—either organization- or fan-driven—and the destination of links—either internal or external—in comparing the communication styles of online and offline organizations and of different kinds of offline organizations. In all, 1,844 status updates were collected across the organizations, for an average of just under 31 status updates per organization. Posting frequency ranged from two sites that posted only one status update each during the sample period to the Sierra Club, which posted 326 status updates, of which 109 were collected and analyzed. Organizations that posted more frequently were thus relatively more represented in the sample (correcting for this produces the same results). Organizations employed the full range of features available with status updates, including photos, videos, and links: 1,627 (88.2 percent) status updates contained at least one link. Status update text was typically short, well under the 420-character limit: the median update was only 137 characters long, although a few used the full allotted space.

Organization- and Fan-Driven Content

Four types of status updates offered by the four categories of sites were *Online Only*, *Government/Party*, *Interest*, and *Community*. Because organization-driven knowledge was so overwhelmingly common—occurring in all but twenty-two of all the status updates—its representation is the percentage of status updates that presented organization-driven knowledge and no other type of content. It became immediately clear that a strong majority of the status updates posted by organizations were simply conveying information—providing *organization-driven knowledge*; 63.8 percent of all status updates were of this type. The pattern is especially pronounced among government (75.2 percent) and interest organizations (68 percent), somewhat less so among online-only organizations (64 percent), and made up less than half of the posts of community organizations (44.1 percent). Examples of this type of message include a 4H message to click a link to read about a 4H robotics team at a competition; the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) promoting a Facebook post about privacy and cell phones; and Barack Obama informing his supporters about his Wall Street reform plan.

The next most common communication type is the other form of organization-driven content: *organization-driven action*. This was an interesting finding, given the research showing the importance of action opportunities in engaging youth with online content.³⁷

The type of content of greatest interest to us was that indicating an actualizing communication style: *fan-driven knowledge and action*, in which organizations asked supporters to weigh in on a topic or suggest ideas for actions. Overall, these were uncommon: only 5.6 percent of all status updates contained fan-driven knowledge, and we identified fan-driven action in only twenty status updates—a mere 1.1 percent of the sample. However, the low occurrence of fan-driven knowledge disguises significant variation among organizations of different types. Recall that we anticipated that online-only organizations would offer more fan-driven knowledge than organizations of the other three (offline) categories. For two of those categories, this was the case:

6 percent of online-only organizations' updates contained fan-driven knowledge, whereas only 3.6 percent of government organizations' updates and only 3.1 percent of interest groups' updates did.

Running counter to our hypothesis, community organizations provided fan-driven knowledge most often, in a notable 11.8 percent of their status updates—significantly more often than each of the other site categories. Although contradicting our hypothesis, this finding lends some support to our premise that organizations without specific political agendas may be more adaptable to actualizing communication than those with agendas: community organizations offered more fan-driven knowledge than the overtly political government and interest organizations.³⁸ Examples of fan-driven knowledge include the community group Beta Club asking fans to report on their experience at their state convention; the Boy Scouts asking fans to nominate a “leader who inspires you” for an online award; and the website Tolerance.org asking fans whether they have noticed racism in their community.

Across the sample, internal links were the more common variety. Eighty-four percent of links were internal, with only 16 percent directing to content beyond the organization itself. This meant that most of the time, when an organization used a link, it directed to content about itself—a striking finding in the face of the strong norm of sharing in the Facebook context, and one that suggests a strong degree of networking narcissism. Our prediction in this context was that online-only organizations would be most comfortable linking to content beyond their immediate purview, and online-only organizations' status updates were indeed most likely to include external links (19 percent did so). Interest and community organizations followed, with 14.7 percent and 13.5 percent, respectively. Government organizations were by far the least likely to offer external links (with only one status update in twenty doing so)—a notable finding given that government groups were most likely to add a link to a status update (only 4.7 percent had no link).

When we compared offline organizations, the results were not as simple as a political versus nonpolitical divide: community and interest

organizations offered external links at comparable rates, each substantially higher than government organizations.

Conclusions

Young citizens' experiences comprise fewer formal civic group memberships than in the past, while digital communications have permeated all aspects of life. An important consequence is that the relationship between civic organizations and young citizens will increasingly be based on digitally mediated communication. We might be hopeful that the new era will invite a communication relationship more in line with the participatory preferences of the younger citizenry, in contradistinction to the “membership” era of late-twentieth-century media politics. We might also be skeptical that civic organizations will easily adapt their communications to the new context. We introduced the framework of two civic information styles to examine this question.

We found considerable support for our expectation that organizations based wholly online would offer a more actualizing communication experience than organizations with strong roots in the offline world: online-only groups offered more participatory opportunities than government or interest groups, and they were the most likely by a significant margin to post references to a diverse array of content types through their links. These findings support the notion that the communication dynamics of civic engagement are undergoing a transformation, and that newer organizations being created to take advantage of online possibilities are most reflective of a set of norms endemic there.³⁹ They generally fall in line with studies finding resistance to incorporating interactivity into political communications.⁴⁰ The caveat here is that one specific type of offline group, the community category, offered participatory invitations even more often than online-only groups.

Meanwhile, on our other measure of actualizing style, interest groups joined community ones as more likely to offer links to external content; government groups used links to point to their own content 95 percent of the time (online-only organizations, of course, linked externally more

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Even within a social networking environment highly imbued with a digital ethos of participation and bricolage, organizations seemed to be aiming to establish narrow broadcast relationships with their audience—essentially employing the logic of a previous information paradigm within a medium potentially suited to the contemporary one.

than all categories of offline groups). Why did community organizations perform so strongly on the participatory invitations measure? And why did interest groups perform very poorly there, but more capably when it came to promoting external content?

We noted earlier that interest and government groups may be particularly attuned to risks inherent in inviting supporters' contributions to a public space;⁴¹ this appears to play a role in their low rates of participatory invitations. In contrast, something different is happening in community groups' Facebook use. While the present data limit our ability to specify what this is, future research might examine the role played by social media communications in the broader set of interactions between organizations and their supporters. The measures we used here were necessarily a subset of those exchanges and, as a result, are an incomplete picture of the activity networks—both online and off—in which organizations and their supporters are situated. One wonders whether community organizations have internal norms strongly oriented toward inviting member participation: this may thus be a natural pattern for page administrators to transfer to the Facebook context.

Ultimately, there may be different conceptualizations of the value of social media at work. In their survey of advocacy organizations, Jonathan Obar et al. report a variety of characteristics those organizations see as useful: these include reaching existing and new members and creating feedback loops.⁴² Our results imply that different kinds of groups may give very different priorities to these functions.

There may also be institutional legacies that have an impact on the styles of interaction that organizations seek to foster with supporters. In a recent analysis from a new institutionalist perspective, Esterling et al. examined the adoption of interactive features in the websites of newly elected U.S. congresspeople.⁴³ They found that the representatives do not appear bound to their immediate predecessors' choice of features, suggesting a degree of freedom from strict path dependence and an opportunity to take advantage of innovations. However, few did take full advantage of interactive

innovations, and their sites tended to reflect the patterns extant in Congress, a phenomenon the authors call "distributional path dependence."⁴⁴ Future research should consider whether a similar phenomenon is taking place among the types of organizations examined here.

As for why interest organizations offered links to external content relatively often, a closer look at external links suggests that this may be a product of their location within the political sphere. When they offer external links, interest organizations direct their supporters to web locations on which they can learn about current events on issues of concern, see what relevant institutional bodies are doing on the issues, and occasionally take action—for example, by leaving a post on a politician's web page or Facebook page.⁴⁵ Interest organizations' patterns of linking appear to be a function of the fact that their work takes place in a political environment in which different kinds of entities interact—government agencies, the press, other organizations—and in which they want to mobilize their supporters to engage with those entities. It is possible that because they are already at the center of much political decision making, parties and government agencies see less reason to connect their supporters to a wider web of resources.

• • •

This article proposed that major civic organizations might reframe their relationship to young citizens from one based on the check-writing logic of media politics to one more amenable to the preferences of young digital citizens. However, we found that the efforts of many civic organizations to communicate with young citizens were likely to fall flat. Most of the time, most organizations used their Facebook presences mainly to distribute newsletter-style notices to followers and offer links to consistently self-referential content. Even within a social networking environment highly imbued with a digital ethos of participation and bricolage, organizations seemed to be aiming to establish narrow broadcast relationships with their audience—essentially employing the logic of a previous information paradigm within a medium potentially suited to the contemporary one.⁴⁶

Where we did see more potential was among newly formed, online-based civic organizations. In line with our expectations, these groups appeared most adapted to an actualizing style of interacting with potential supporters. This should spur further interest in these types of organizations and their work in engaging young people. However, there are limitations to these kinds of organizations: Karpf, for example, despite celebrating the case of MoveOn, suspects that its loosely bounded membership structure and issue opportunism are not substitutes for the everyday connection building and advocacy of older-style civic groups.⁴⁷ Kreiss et al. similarly question the degree to which we should embrace postbureaucratic civic organization.⁴⁸ In the U.S. context, membership organizations have historically been major contributors to civic stability and engagement. The future of these groups, and their forays into networked digital communication, also deserve our continuing attention.

The era of digital media may hold the potential for civic organizations to reinvent their relationship with young constituents within the norms of the emerging information paradigm. Some pioneering organizations appear to be doing just that; what we also see, however, in the Facebook study, is that many organizations find this transition difficult. The communications documented fall more in line with our understanding of the civic information habits and preferences of citizens of the last century's mass-media era rather than those of contemporary young citizens. These results have significant implications for the study of youth engagement, the nature of civic information and communication in the digital era, and the practice of fostering engagement online.

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Reframing Issues in the Digital Age: Using Social Media Strategically

by Julie Sweetland, PhD, and Rob Shore

The framing,
or often
reframing,
of a social issue
must be
repeated regularly,
by many,
and in various
locations
for it to
begin dominating
the public's
understanding
of the issue; and
social media
is enormously
useful in
helping the
frame to "set."

ONE OF A SOCIAL ADVOCATE'S MOST CRITICAL ACTS is to frame an issue. In framing, a communicator uses language, metaphor, and other means to bring the community into the issue in a particular way. So, for instance, tobacco control advocates reframed tobacco from a "personal vice" narrative, in which the public discourse centered around individual choice and behavior, to a "defective product" narrative, in which the role of corporate malfeasance and the need for protective regulations became clear. Reframing an issue is hard work, as frames are socially shared and persist over time; but it is worth it, because public opinion and policy preferences are frame dependent. The stories nonprofit communicators tell have the power to make the public more or less supportive of positive

changes—for instance, in the way we support human health and well-being, distribute society's resources, and redress long-standing injustices.

Thinking carefully about the frames we reinforce or disrupt by virtue of our storytelling is all the more important in an era in which nonprofits possess more control than ever before over the means of diffusing ideas. The majority of nonprofit organizations now use social media tools to communicate with the public about the issues related to their missions—and for good reason. Evidence from the Pew Research Center's *Civic Engagement in the Digital Age* suggests that our public square is now largely virtual: the number of social networking site users grew from 33 percent of the online population in 2008 to 69 percent in 2012.¹ Many users say that their activity on social networking sites has prompted them to learn more about social issues and to take action on those issues. But what does meaningful issue engagement look like in the sphere of social media?

JULIE SWEETLAND, PhD (@jsw33ts) is a sociolinguist, educator, and director of learning at the FrameWorks Institute. **ROB SHORE** (@rcshore) is a filmmaker and the FrameWorks Institute's creative director.



If your Twitter feed reads
as if it were being run by
Chicken Little, it's time
to hand over the
password to The Little
Engine That Could.

Too often, nonprofits have mistaken self-promotion and “click bait” as meaningful contributions to the public conversation on complex issues. “Clicks,” “views,” and “likes” only mean so much if the story they carry isn’t helping people to understand the causes of and solutions to complex social issues. More and more, organizations tackling tough social justice issues are recognizing that not just participating in but also changing the conversation is essential to achieving and sustaining meaningful impact. Put another way, issue advocates are increasingly looking to engage more effectively in frame contests, shaping their messages to advance a more productive narrative on public issues through the selective use of the messengers as well as the language, symbols, visuals, and other elements of communication that impart meaning and structure understanding.

But can these two elements of a communications strategy reinforce one another? How can reframing social issues take place in social media?

At the FrameWorks Institute, these are questions we hear often in our professional learning opportunities for nonprofit leaders and other issue advocates. As we work together to build the communications capacity of their organizations, we explore answers using the perspective of Strategic Frame Analysis™, which roots communications practice in the cognitive and social sciences.² Our first answer is that framing is already happening in social media—because there is no such thing as frameless communication. The practical dilemma, therefore, isn’t whether or not to frame on Facebook but rather whether the frames already in the feed result in a narrative that will support the organization’s broader goals. By looking at the framing recommendations that emerge from FrameWorks’ original communications research—as well as at the work of leading scholars in the literature on social movements, social and behavioral psychology, political science, and other disciplines that diffuse new ways of thinking—we find evidence-based answers to such practical challenges facing nonprofit communicators as how to effectively talk about a complex issue in 140 characters or less.

Below, we highlight a few ways that social media efforts can go awry, and offer some suggestions for how to maximize the opportunity to self-publish the kinds of messages that support your organization’s overall communications strategy and, ultimately, your mission and vision. Our focus is on the framing of messages—the choices about what to emphasize and what to leave unsaid and the selection of the narrative, values, metaphors, and other elements that shape the understanding that results from the communication.

Are Your Posts Contributing to “Compassion Fatigue”?

If your Twitter feed reads as if it were being run by Chicken Little, it’s time to hand over the password to The Little Engine That Could. As media scholar Susan Moeller has shown—and numerous other social scientists concur—a steady stream of crisis messaging depletes people’s will and ability to engage with social problems.³ While crisis frames can generate clicks, the emotions and understanding they inspire tend to be either fleeting or fatalistic. On the other hand, framing problems so that underlying causes and public solutions are easy to understand offers people ways to appreciate how programming, policy, and civic engagement might make a difference.

By shaping social media posts to support a larger narrative emphasizing that there are solutions beyond problems, nonprofits can avoid draining the public’s “finite pool of worry” and begin replenishing supporters’ well of willingness to engage.⁴

Avoid: *Latest statistics on elder abuse are just heartbreaking—what if this were your grandmother? <http://samplelink>*

Advance: *Seniors are mistreated more often than we think. Some states made a difference with this commonsense approach: <http://samplelink>*

Are Your Posts Zooming In on Individuals, Leaving Systems Out of the Frame?

The conscientious reframing of issues is imperative for galvanizing public support and for establishing effective policy. Political scientist Shanto Iyengar has shown, for example, that how people think about poverty depends on the way the issue is framed.⁵ When poverty is framed structurally, people assign responsibility to society at large; when framed episodically, focusing on the circumstances of a specific poor person, people assign responsibility to the individual.

FrameWorks research shows that the American public tends to understand most issues in terms of individual actors, characteristics, and choices. For example, Americans model the education system through the “tangible triad” of students, teachers, and parents—leaving factors such as funding, curriculum, policy, and leadership all but invisible.⁶ Yet, people can also quickly grasp a systemic view with the help of frame elements such as metaphors, which allow them to take the working parts of something they understand and apply them to unfamiliar or abstract issues. (You can get social context into your social media without metaphors, of course, by eschewing tales of triumphant individuals or tragic figures in favor of more thematic stories that bring environments, systems, structures, and policies into the picture.)

Avoid: *Amazing #teachers will come 2gether to pour their hearts + minds into students this school year! RT if you love teachers!*

Advance: *Learning = construction project so teachers need strong scaffolding. This program <http://samplelink> offers critical support, an #edreform must!*

Is Your Social Media Feed Saying, “Enough about You; Let’s Talk about Me”?

While nonprofits must dedicate some portion of their external communications to building their visibility and reputation, recruiting for programs, and otherwise “keeping the lights on,” too much

self-promotion or fundraising can hamper rather than build public engagement. Useful and educational posts should vastly outnumber self-referential ones, so that when an opportunity for self-promotion arises, your audience feels that it has gotten good value for its attention and time overall. More importantly, organizations interested in creating social change also learn to take every opportunity to lift up a reframed perspective on their issue, even when doing something as mundane as announcing an event. Don’t be afraid to experiment with a stronger dose of advocacy messaging. Recent surveys of online behavior suggest that the public considers social networking sites an important means of receiving and posting news and ideas on sociopolitical issues.⁷

Less: *Our very own @executivedirector offered insight into our #issue on this exciting panel: <http://samplelink>*

More: *This (<http://samplelink>) gave us lots 2 think abt. @executivedirector: “We need the talents of all to be available to our communities.”*

Is Your Social Media Content Taking Too Much for Granted?

“Most people don’t think about most issues most of the time,” wrote Nelson Polsby and Aaron Widalvsky, in a famous analysis of American public opinion.⁸ The average person has little daily contact with most topics on the public agenda, and, as a result, the stories about social issues are often partial, inaccurate, or outdated. In a recent research project probing ordinary citizens’ thinking about threats to the oceans, FrameWorks found widespread confusion between carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide, leading people to conclude that climate change would cause mass suffocation.⁹ In another study on the social determinants of health, we found that few people could name influences on health beyond diet and exercise.¹⁰

Typical nonprofit messaging doesn’t help the public get smarter about issues; FrameWorks’ systematic reviews of nonprofit communications have revealed a ubiquitous “invisible process”

The average person has little daily contact with most topics on the public agenda, and, as a result, the stories about social issues are often partial, inaccurate, or outdated.

Once the broader communications goals and framing strategies are clear, social networking sites can become a channel for diffusing potent reframed messages into the community of followers and friends.

frame: how causes lead to consequences is left out entirely. Yet, our research has also shown that people can quickly grasp expert insights and begin to reason using research-based concepts, as long as they have a well-framed explanation using metaphors or causal sequences. Explanation is a worthy and important goal for nonprofit communications: it can help people to become more informed and more effective advocates for change. In this context, sharing news about a particular aspect of an issue can either help or hinder the public's understanding of how your issue works at the most fundamental level. If you imagine your social media posts as a set of mini-lessons for people who know little or nothing about your issue, how would you change your approach to them? If you think of your most important content as an overarching umbrella awareness campaign that teaches how the world works when it comes to your issue, what kinds of ideas should you share more often?

Avoid: @studyauthor's new report shows that atmospheric CO₂ concentration reaches 401 PPM: <http://samplelink>

Advance: Use of fossil fuels for energy causes rampant CO₂ to build up, trapping heat worldwide. Learn more from @studyauthor: <http://samplelink>

• • •

As the world of mass communications moves away from a broadcast model of information sharing to a networked, social engagement model, the tools of opinion making are now in the hands of advocates. But the medium is not the message, and the tools, if not used with care, can have little—or even harmful—effect. Every nonprofit's communications plan should consider the larger frames that attend to its issue and a strategy for reframing the issue, ideally looking to research that can help communicators understand which frames to advance and which to avoid—and why. Once the broader communications goals and framing strategies are clear, social networking sites can become a channel for diffusing potent reframed messages into the community of followers and friends.

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Two Masters of Communication Discuss the Branding (or Not) of the Nonprofit Sector

by the editors

A whole sector may
not be able to have a
“brand” per se, but it
can leave an
impression. Jon Pratt
and Jan Masaoka
discuss what exactly
that impression
might currently be.

A LONG WITH THE REST OF THE SECTOR, THE *Nonprofit Quarterly* has sat through any number of meetings where the subject of the odd, defined-by-a-negative nature of our sectoral name comes up—most often in relationship to the latest idea about how to convince the public of the overall value of nonprofits to communities, democracy, and the future of the world. So we decided to explore this issue of sectoral “brand” with two of the more outspoken and iconoclastic people we know: Jan Masaoka, CEO of the California Association of Nonprofits, former executive director of CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, and founder of *Blue Avocado*; and Jon Pratt, executive director of the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits.

If we think of “brand” as the commonly understood characteristics of the identity from which we address others, then “brand” is less what we

want people to know about us than it is what and how messages that we and others send are received. This means that forcing a change in perception can be difficult without a change in essence. On the other hand, there is the Johari window communication model, which takes as one assumption that there are things we know about ourselves that others do not know about us. Communicating authentically from our essence sends a message of integrity and trustworthiness—and, in fact, the nonprofit sector is in pretty good shape where those two characteristics are concerned.

Noting that industries very seldom have brands that they are in control of, Jan Masaoka wonders why so many of us keep torturing ourselves over the question of sectoral identity: “The coal industry keeps trying to talk about itself as the energy industry—but nobody is ever in control of their sector, though maybe they would like that to be



ALESSANDRA MARINONI

“Every couple of years, somebody says we need to change the name of the nonprofit sector. And he or she has a proposal, and it doesn’t stick, because it’s very hard to control language.”

different. I have relatives in farming, and there are constant arguments in the farming community. They say things like, ‘Oh, those almond people in Southern California! If they would just stop saying such and such, everybody would buy more almonds.’ You know, you can control what the almond cooperative board is messaging, right? But you can’t control the almond *industry*.”

Still, this does not stop people from trying, and Masaoka goes on to give some examples of things done around branding that *haven’t* worked—like the whole name thing: “Every couple of years, somebody says we need to change the name of the nonprofit sector. And he or she has a proposal, and it doesn’t stick, because it’s very hard to control language. It’s also very hard to influence language, right? Look at how hard the Kleenex people are trying to get everybody to say ‘facial tissue’ instead of ‘Kleenex.’ And Peter Drucker and Peter Hero both took on the naming game. Peter Drucker suggested that the sector be called ‘the human change sector,’ because it’s about changing people; but of course some environmentalists and some animal people said, ‘It’s not just about changing *people*!’ And then Peter Hero, who for many years was head of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, thought that we should change the name of the sector to ‘public benefit corporations,’ or PBCs for short. So, for a long time, during Peter’s tenure, if you were in Santa Clara County, everybody would say, ‘I come from a public benefit corporation.’ And then, of course, five minutes after Peter resigned, everybody stopped using that and went back to a word that everybody could understand: ‘nonprofits.’ And then Robert Ross, from The California Endowment, has made a very large effort to get people to say ‘the delta sector.’”

Even leaving names aside, Masaoka thinks that it might be difficult to be successful with intentionality on branding beyond an individual company or a group of companies, and suggests we think in terms of “impression” rather than “brand.” “People have an *impression* about the wine industry and about agriculture,” she points out—but neither one has a *brand* as a whole.

Jon Pratt agrees that in general there is no controlling a brand by force, but he thinks that

the impression can be guided and moved. The impression of the nonprofit sector that the public often seems to have, he says, is vague but positive, involving “well-meaning, unbusinesslike, low-resourced people who are motivated by good intentions and so can, for the most part, be trusted to try to do the right thing after extensive deliberation—though perhaps inefficiently.” This, according to Pratt, is not the worst news in the world; in fact, that the term “nonprofit” generally has positive associations for people ought to be celebrated. “The public has a higher confidence in nonprofits than in government or for-profit business,” he reminds us. “Mostly, people do not think we will violate them, although possibly some faker masquerading as a nonprofit may.” Adds Masaoka, “In California they even give nonprofits higher marks on job creation than government or for-profits, so we shouldn’t feel that our ‘brand’ or ‘impression’ is so terrible. It’s actually pretty darn good.”

“The word ‘nonprofit’ is the descriptor in state and federal law, and like it or not it is what these organizations are called,” says Pratt. “But what we could do is to increase public literacy about what these organizations are—and are not. American students get civics lessons in fifth through ninth grade and are taught about the structure and roles of business and government—but not of nonprofits. Going back to the question of our control or lack thereof over the public’s impression of nonprofits, I think in some ways it’s beside the point. If you’re worried about brand or communications, maybe you have other issues that you should be focused on. ‘Nonprofit’ is not a perfect name; and, in fact, my vote would be to call nonprofits ‘associations,’ which would emphasize the relationship nature of these organizations. But the time has passed. They’ve been anointed nonprofits.”

On the other hand, the image of nonprofits as slightly ineffectual with respect to things like financial management is widely held, notes Pratt, and may erode our credibility at times. “That assumption of weak financial management is a generalization that in most cases is not true and is probably just as true among business as it is among nonprofits, but the impression is there.

But if we understand that, it might be possible to take on one specific aspect of that kind of impression and do a drumbeat about the practical financial management skills we have in this sector and the difficult business models that we put them to work on, often quite successfully.”

Masaoka believes that the same kind of impression exists about boards—“yet almost every single reform for corporate boards that was enacted into law through Sarbanes-Oxley was a reform that was already in place and long-term standard practice in nonprofit boards.” Nonprofits often respond to these kinds of assumptions, says Pratt, by sending out messages touting standard ratios for fundraising costs as well as overhead ratios that all too often have been manipulated in some pretty inventive ways—a practice that has the unanticipated consequence of implying that the one organization is an exception and stands above its slacker colleagues. Instead, Pratt thinks nonprofits need to get behind bold affirmations that the sector agrees the public should recognize as descriptive of nonprofits as a whole, suggesting that a lesson might be drawn from the rebranding

of small business that started during the 1950s, when small businesses were seen as “the people who couldn’t cut it in the big business world—think *Death of a Salesman*—and the businesses that just could not go any further. And they turned it around to ‘businesses with main street values,’ ‘people with entrepreneurial spirit,’ and ‘job creators.’”

In the end, Pratt and Masaoka agree that, as discussed at the start of this article, the sector’s reputation/impression/brand is the cumulative aggregation of all the contacts between us and others, as well as the messages received over a period of time about us—and not just from this sector, but from everywhere. Understanding the impressions (or lack thereof) that the public holds as a result of all of this provides us with some traction to build communications strategies, but the message must be authentic and believed by nonprofits themselves.

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Our Boards in Our Brands: *An Aspiration*

by Jeanne Bell

One of the oft-mentioned roles of nonprofit or philanthropic board members is as ambassadors, but that entails a lot more than memorizing the mission statement or an all-purpose elevator speech.

ONE OF THE MOST USEFUL NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT books of this year is *The Brand IDEA: Managing Nonprofit Brands with Integrity, Democracy, and Affinity* by Nathalie Laidler-Kylander and Julia Shepard Stenzel.¹ As an executive director working systematically at the re-branding of the organization I lead, the authors' insights into the particular value and role of the nonprofit brand could not be timelier. What I didn't expect was how much the book's concepts would challenge me to think differently about the composition and focus of the nonprofit board of directors,

JEANNE BELL is CEO of CompassPoint Nonprofit Services.





What if each board member took on the core identity of the organization as his or her own leading up to, during, and well beyond board service?

including my own. I serve on multiple boards, have numerous boards as clients, and report to a board of directors, yet struggle to define and tap the full purpose of a nonprofit board. I am certainly not alone. Many have written eloquently in these pages in search of the board's value beyond the fiduciary—David Renz and Judy Freiwirth, to name just two governance thought leaders. Though Laidler-Kylander and Stenzel did not set out to write a governance book, their elevation of the significance of nonprofit brands and their nonprofit-specific framework for brand management may yet provide a very useful way to think about who serves on our boards of directors and what orientation they can best bring to that most ephemeral of leadership roles.

To explore the power of brand as an organizing principle for boards of directors, I have selected three of *The Brand IDEA*'s core concepts and considered their implications for how we compose our boards and orient their individual and collective work, finding the conceptual elements of brand and brand management to be strikingly germane to what the board as a collective and its individual members need to embody, continuously understand, and extend broadly across an organization's constituencies.

1. Brand Definition

"An identifier and concept that imparts information and creates perceptions and emotions."²

2. Brand Value

"We [. . .] have observed [. . .] a paradigm shift in the way nonprofit actors perceive and understand brand. This shift has led to a view of brand not as a fundraising tool but as a critical strategic asset, one that embodies the organization's mission and values and supports broad participative engagement and collaborations that maximize impact."³

3. Distinction between Nonprofit and For-Profit Brand Management

"The brand IDEA differs from for-profit brand management in three fundamental ways: first, brand is focused on the mission rather than on consumers; second, positioning is used to gain organizational clarity and to support collaboration rather than to

gain competitive advantage; and third, control is replaced by participative engagement."⁴

Brand Democracy and the Board's Purpose

The authors describe brand democracy as in place when "everyone develops a clear understanding of the organization's core identity and can become an effective brand advocate and ambassador. Every employee and volunteer authentically and personally communicates the essence of the brand."⁵ How much time have we wasted in our sector helping board members memorize mission statements, or, more typically, lamenting how long and unmemorable they are? What if, instead, the request of board members was to deeply understand the current and aspirational brand of the organization and to be the über-ambassadors for it? What if each board member took on the core identity of the organization as his or her own leading up to, during, and well beyond board service?

That is the essence of brand democracy: being part of the core identity of an organization is no longer limited to specific people on an organizational chart or to finite term limits—it can't be contained that way. So instead of reading reports at monthly meetings about the *staff's* communications efforts, for instance, board members would be a part of the data set: blogging, tweeting, and making public appearances themselves. In this vision, the board is an invaluable multiplier of the staff's voice, and because its members' skillful ambassadorship is volunteer based, it has a special credibility and resonance all its own. Taking this idea to its fullest, the monthly or quarterly board meeting as the core place where board members "show up" becomes increasingly anachronistic. If board members are the agents and models of brand democracy, their true value is out in the field every day. Perhaps board meetings become focused primarily on equipping members for their fieldwork ahead.

Brand Identity and the Board's Composition

The authors write, "When the brand is anchored in the mission, values, and strategy, the identity becomes the internal reflection or collective

perception of *everyone* in the organization, and captures the very nature or *raison d'être* of the organization itself [*italics mine*].”⁶ If we really mean everyone—not only paid staff—then the implications of brand identity for board composition are significant. It’s my experience that many potential board candidates will feel aligned with the mission of an organization—able to say with conviction that they care about climate change or youth access to the performing arts, for instance. But what if the request of board members is something much deeper than that? What if the request is not only that you care about the cause but also that you embody the organization’s values and can discern and articulate the particular value of its chosen strategies? If it is the latter, I suspect the potential pool of appropriate board members for a given organization gets quite a bit smaller, and, moreover, I suspect the board candidate screening approach becomes more similar to that of senior staff in the depth of alignment sought than to the classic board recruitment matrix, with its requisite attorneys, accountants, and community power brokers.

Indeed, Laidler-Kylander and Stenzel spend considerable time on the centrality of values to brand and brand identity: “This idea of living the values is connected to how authentic an organization and its brand are perceived to be.”⁷ This suggests two things: first, that organizational values have to come “out of the closet” and mean something every single day to everyone in an organizational system; second, that a frank discussion of values has to be the *first* conversation with potential board members—and non-alignment a deal breaker for service—rather than arising from the orientation processes for already appointed directors. I can imagine a more cautious interpretation here—the argument that organizational values are distinct from personal ones. But from the perspective of board members as the ultimate brand ambassadors, I disagree. If an organization’s values feel academic at best or anathema at worst to a board member, how can she embody and express the brand’s identity in all of her organizational ambassadorship? I don’t think she can. If they are academic to her,

she will likely avoid any explicit expression of values in the course of her ambassadorship; if they are anathema to her, she might even actively contradict them in the course of her ambassadorship. In either case, the organization’s brand is fundamentally undermined.

As a leader in the midst of re-branding at a forty-year-old organization, to me the authors’ assurance that it is not uncommon for the external image of an organization’s brand to lag behind its more rapidly changing internal brand identity is comforting.⁸ But here again, from a board composition perspective, what if board members were chosen especially to shorten that lag? What if, in board recruitment, we sought people who were so attuned to the aspiration of the brand that their board membership accelerated the closing of the gap between internal identity and external perception? Given how many organizations across all fields are in states of mild to severe disruption, this becomes an exciting board recruitment criterion: how credibly and enthusiastically would this candidate embody and extend the aspiration of our brand? Imagine the real danger of the alternative scenario: the staff continues to craft the new internal identity and the board propagates itself with members identified with a brand gone by. Given typical board member terms of six years plus, the *internal* lag in brand clarity could be seemingly interminable and have serious consequences for the board’s utility in strategic thinking and resource development.

Brand Affinity and the Board’s Judgment

The notion that a mission statement “keeps a board grounded” as it contributes to strategic thinking and decision making is in dire need of replacement, and I think brand is extremely useful here. This quote from one of the authors’ interviewees resonated immediately: “We are becoming much more explicit about Breakthrough’s methodology, about our approach, and not just the issues we care about and our end goals, but being clear with ourselves and with others about who we are and how we think, that this is our methodology, this is what we

The notion that a mission statement “keeps a board grounded” as it contributes to strategic thinking and decision making is in dire need of replacement, and I think brand is extremely useful here.

I would place my bet on a brand-embodiment board member over a dispassionate power broker to identify and cultivate brand-aligned donors, who logically would be more likely to become lifetime donors.

want to do.”⁹ We gather that their mission, per se, has not changed, but how they approach it has, and thus how they want to be understood has. That is brand. I think of the implication for the board as having to do with the quality of their strategic judgment individually and as a collective.

The authors explain brand affinity as having two elements: “Brand Affinity comprises two sets of actions. First, armed with a clear understanding of the theory of change and brand identity, the organization identifies partners, reaches out, and uses brand to attract them. Second, brand Affinity includes using the brand to enhance the effectiveness of these partnerships in achieving mission and maximizing impact.”¹⁰ If a critical element of a board’s job is to identify new partnerships (and here I would include identifying long-term donors and future board members, as well as collaborators), the board members’ judgment in parsing which potential partners are a brand match is essential. I have seen far too many executive directors managing relationships forced upon the organization by a board member who doesn’t respect the notion of nonprofit brand. The request of board members is more nuanced in this vision; their entire network of relationships couldn’t possibly be brand aligned. So the request is that they are continuously discerning what relationships they can forge or steward for the organization that optimize brand affinity.

What about the Money?

I can imagine resistance to this notion of brand as the organizing principle for the board, especially where it concerns money—namely, who is going to raise it and who is going to oversee it. If we are disciplined in composing our boards to brand, will we have enough people to participate in fundraising and to exercise the board’s fiduciary responsibility effectively? Like the board meeting as the board’s primary venue for “showing up,” the beliefs that only power brokers can raise money and only certified professional accountants can achieve real financial literacy are outdated. To be clear, if a power broker or CPA is brand aligned, that’s

wonderful, and he or she can be invaluable to an organization; but the idea that status or professional skills should trump brand alignment is, I believe, a costly compromise that organizations have been making for far too long. To take the critically important issue of fundraising, for instance, what Simone Joyaux has written persuasively in the *Nonprofit Quarterly* is that we are looking for long-term donors: individual giving success is measured in the lifetime value of a donor, not in “one-and-done” gifts.¹¹ I would place my bet on a brand-embodiment board member over a dispassionate power broker to identify and cultivate brand-aligned donors, who logically would be more likely to become lifetime donors.

• • •

Looking back over the work my colleagues and I have done together to evolve our organization’s programming and brand, I see all of the elements of *The Brand IDEA* in play, though of course we didn’t have the authors’ very helpful language for what we were doing. As I write, the board members who have stayed and changed with us are in the process of recruiting a new cohort of board members. *The Brand IDEA* has given us a powerful framework and inspiration to invite people onto our board with as much passion as we have not only for our mission but also for the particular ways we aspire to achieve it—that is, for our brand.

NOTES

1. Nathalie Laidler-Kylander and Julia Shepard Stenzel, *The Brand IDEA: Managing Nonprofit Brands with Integrity, Democracy, and Affinity* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014).
- 2.–10. Ibid., 35; 19; 29; 11; 66; 71; 81; 101; 100.
11. See, for instance, Simone Joyaux, “‘Donor Fatigue’ an Excuse for Poor Fundraising Practices,” *NPQ*, March 15, 2013, www.nonprofitquarterly.org/management/21961-donor-fatigue-an-excuse-for-poor-fundraising-practices.html.

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Attention Philanthropy:

The Good, the Bad, and the Strategy

by Chao Guo, PhD, and Gregory D. Saxton, PhD

Amid the cacophony of information about social projects, how do we call public and philanthropic attention to our cause? As this article explains, organizations must build and leverage an actionable audience, and the best framework for this is a three-stage pyramid model of social media-based strategy: *reaching out to people*, *keeping the flame alive*, and *stepping up to action*. But, warn the authors, do not chase attention at any cost: if we focus too much on gaining the public's attention, we risk losing sight of our mission and accountability.

"MAY YOU LIVE IN INTERESTING TIMES." This purported Chinese curse captures the nature of the information environment in which nonprofit organizations find themselves. The worldwide proliferation of information and communication technologies has ushered in a new age characterized by a twenty-four-hour news cycle, powerful Internet search engines, and near-countless social media outlets. Most nonprofit organizations make an appearance on social media and have websites that show all their good work, and people are not limited to the organization as their primary information source: they can obtain information through multiple venues—from voluntary web-based transparency and disclosure by the

organizations themselves to intermediaries such as GuideStar, rating agencies such as Charity Navigator, and decentralized "word of mouse."

Yet, this abundance of information comes with a price. As Nobel laureate Herbert Simon noted some forty years ago, "[T]he wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of [. . .] the attention of its recipients."¹ Due to people's limited information-processing capacity, their attention to any particular cause or organization is necessarily diluted. As a result, they often fail to notice organizations or causes that are not constantly in their faces in a flashy way.

The challenges are particularly salient when nonprofits begin embracing social networking technologies. In addition to print media, radio, and television, a typical organization now has a website, uses e-mail, and avails itself of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, and such custom-made mobile applications as Check-in for Good, Donate a Photo, I Can Go Without, and YMCA Finder, among many others. Recent research

CHAO GUO, PhD, is an associate professor in the School of Social Policy and Practice at the University of Pennsylvania. GREGORY D. SAXTON, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Communication at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York.



Attention philanthropy presents opportunities for nonprofit leaders to experiment with new ways of reaching their target audiences. Attention, if properly managed, can be a powerful marketing tool for nonprofit organizations.

shows that the great majority of large and medium-sized nonprofits are using these information channels.² The problem is, if everyone is doing social networking, who is paying attention to your nonprofit? There seems no first-mover advantage to adopting these technologies, and just the mere fact of having a Facebook profile is not enough to make your organization unique.

In this altered informational landscape, attention has become a scarce organizational resource. Philanthropy and charity work are increasingly driven by attention, a commodity that nonprofit organizations must acquire in order to attract—and sustain—their donors, volunteers, and supporters. Welcome to the age of attention philanthropy.

What Is Attention Philanthropy?

We define attention philanthropy as the *challenges, opportunities, and responses associated with the phenomenon in which all players in the philanthropic and charitable sector (for example, donors, funders, supporters, nonprofits, and so on) are potentially overwhelmed by information overload and a dearth of attention*. What is behind this phenomenon? The surge in computerization and digitization over the past three decades has led to a sharp increase in the number of information channels, as noted above. The decentralized and participatory aspects of digital media have also led to an explosion in the number of information producers, intermediaries, and third-party providers. Almost anyone can be an online journalist, blogger, or nonprofit analyst. The increase in information producers and channels has in turn led to an explosion in the amount of available information. In short, the information environment of nonprofit organizations has changed. It is markedly richer yet more difficult to navigate. With so much to look at but a limited information-processing capacity, there is an “attention deficit” problem: donors and supporters can have difficulty knowing where to direct their attention, and organizations can have difficulty grabbing and holding that attention.

This attention deficit problem possesses at least three characteristics that have possible broad implications for nonprofit organizations.

First, people’s attention is fleeting. Today, they are reading about the infamous terrorist group Boko Haram kidnapping hundreds of Nigerian girls; tomorrow, a massive earthquake in Latin America holds their attention. Thus, whatever attention the public gives an organization is unsustainable: people notice an organization, like it (or hate it, in some cases), and then forget about it.

Second, people are drawn to drama. Donors and supporters are more likely to notice dramatic stories and spectacular events, such as natural disasters and crises. While these catastrophes certainly deserve attention, they tend to divert support from smaller yet still important local causes. Attention philanthropy seems to exacerbate the issue. This tendency is consistent with and related to the observation that nonprofits often rely on anecdotal, personalized stories and narratives to describe their function rather than highlighting organizational qualities like careful program design and systematic evaluation.

Finally, people crave the new. They are more likely to pay attention to new programs, projects, and activities than to old ones.

The scarcity of attention has thus initiated changes in philanthropic practices that present notable opportunities and challenges for nonprofit organizations. Below we outline the positive and negative aspects of these implications before turning to potential organizational strategies for thriving in this new information environment.

The Good

Attention philanthropy presents opportunities for nonprofit leaders to experiment with new ways of reaching their target audiences. Attention, if properly managed, can be a powerful marketing tool for nonprofit organizations. For example, TOMS Shoes, a company with a charitable mission (“With every pair you purchase, TOMS will give a new pair of shoes to a child in need”), has developed a grassroots marketing approach that entails a series of attention-grabbing events, such as the “One Day Without Shoes” campaign, instead of relying on formal channels of advertising. Its clever, attention-getting strategies have attracted numerous people to the company’s “One for One” message and helped establish a wide network of

supporters crucial to the company's business and philanthropic success. Since TOMS launched in 2006, it has given over ten million pairs of shoes to children in more than sixty countries.

Sometimes, the amount of public attention an organization attracts is not even the result of its deliberate strategy. One such example is a Facebook campaign by supporters of the Susan G. Komen foundation. In October 2010, a viral Facebook posting of unknown origin encouraged women to say where they like to leave their purses when they come home. The provocative statements—"I like it on the floor" and "I like it on the kitchen counter"—got people talking. The "I like it on . . ." meme—like the "bra color" status updates that swept Facebook a little earlier—was intended to bring attention to Breast Cancer Awareness Month (October). The tactic apparently funneled 140,000 new fans to the official Susan G. Komen Facebook page that year. Komen did not take credit for the phenomenon, but it certainly enjoyed the free publicity. "We think it's terrific," a spokeswoman for Komen commented. "It's a terrific example of how little things get started on the Internet and go a long way to raise cancer awareness."³

More broadly, attention philanthropy potentially yields several positive developments for the nonprofit sector. For instance, it provides a more level playing field, and allows for a more decentralized, bottom-up participatory approach to solving social problems. Gaining attention relies as much on creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship as it does on financial resources. And, as seen in the above examples, the size and resourcefulness of an organization's wider constituent network play a key role in the success of a fundraising or public education campaign. A greater emphasis on the public's attention may also benefit the vitality of the nonprofit sector by concentrating its focus on external constituents.

The Bad

Yet, attention can cut both ways. In the case of Susan G. Komen, good publicity quickly turned bad when, in January 2012, the nation's leading breast cancer charity "quietly" decided to cut funding to Planned Parenthood, the nation's leading provider of health services to women. When Planned Parenthood not

so quietly announced the news on its Facebook page, shocked and outraged people lavished their support on Planned Parenthood—not just in the form of Facebook "likes" and Twitter followers but also in donations; at the same time, they expressed damning criticism of Komen through social media. The negative attention led to heavy public scrutiny of Komen's programs and finances—and, as it turned out, Komen was not as much "for the cure" as its name suggests: it was found that, in 2011, the "pink ribbon" organization spent 15 percent of its donations on research awards and grants, down from 29 percent in 2008; in contrast, 43 percent of donations were spent on education, and 18 percent on fundraising and administration.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, public attention tends to latch onto the flashier organizations, programs, projects, and activities. For instance, research shows that in crowdfunding appeals, certain types of organizations (for example, environmental and health organizations) were more likely to attract money than others (for example, organizations for the homeless).⁴ Evidence shows, too, that nonprofits make crowdfunding appeals largely for new, tangible projects (buying a new building, making a film, and so on), and that none make crowdfunding appeals for such mundane projects as program evaluation or human resources training. Such prosaic yet essential goals simply do not grab attention. Energy more easily swings toward marketing, public relations, stakeholder relations, and capital projects. Within each organization, in turn, efforts tend to shift to those programs that are more attention grabbing. It's the same for certain projects; for example, building a new clubhouse receives more attention than refurbishing an existing one.

Perhaps more importantly, an organization can become lost when it obsesses over getting attention at the expense of its mission, as the Greg Mortenson controversy illustrates. Mortenson, cofounder and executive director of the nonprofit Central Asia Institute (CAI), used his best-selling books *Three Cups of Tea* and *Stones into Schools* to promote the CAI cause. In them, he recounts the story of the founding of his nonprofit, and tells of the struggles CAI faced while fulfilling its mission of providing education to

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What is an organization to do in these interesting times? A first step is to recognize that attention is an informational, communicative, message-based phenomenon that implies a series of sender → receiver relationships. . . .

girls in remote areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The books brought Mortenson a large fan base and extensive media attention. Until a few years ago, his constant presence had ensured a steady flow of donations to CAI that enabled him to vastly increase the size and scope of its operations. In 2012, however, Mortenson came under heavy scrutiny for alleged inaccuracies in his books, gaps in accounting, and possible exaggeration of the number of schools his organization had built. Unfortunately for Mortenson, regardless of whether or not these allegations are true, the controversy has seriously damaged his reputation and challenged the legitimacy of his organization.

Finally, sometimes an organization can suffer from negative secondhand attention due to its affiliation with someone who is in the spotlight. Take the Livestrong Foundation (formerly known as the Lance Armstrong Foundation) as an example. Established by the world-famous cyclist Lance Armstrong, in 1997, to help cancer survivors and their families, the success of the foundation had been closely associated with its founder, president, and single largest donor. Because of Armstrong's celebrity status, the foundation was able to garner tremendous attention and support from donors, corporate sponsors, and the public. This secondhand attention backfired, however, when Armstrong appeared on the *Oprah Winfrey* show in January 2013 and admitted to having used banned substances to improve his cycling performance.

The Strategy

What is an organization to do in these interesting times? A first step is to recognize that attention is an informational, communicative, message-based phenomenon that implies a series of sender → receiver relationships, with the organization being the sender and the public the receiver. As a result, organizational leaders need to become comfortable with designing appropriate messages and targeting relevant audiences.

Organizations should recognize that certain types of messages are more likely to receive attention than others. Here we present several insights from nonprofits' use of social media that provide an excellent context in which to see the immediate

audience reaction to organizational messages. Not only are the insights valuable, given the ever-increasing use of social media tools, but they can also be generalized to other communication channels, such as websites and traditional media.

Our research suggests that, on Twitter, targeted messages (those seeking to connect to other users), messages including images, and messages tapping into preexisting networks through the use of hashtags are more likely to receive audience reaction. Just as importantly, those organizations that communicate frequently and those with larger audiences are more likely to receive attention.⁵ This observation makes intuitive sense. You need an audience that not only reads your messages, "friends" you on Facebook, and/or follows you on Twitter but also makes donations or signs up to volunteer; if you can make it "captive," you will be more successful in the long run. Yet how do you build a captive audience? You need to build a network and communicate with it.

So how can an organization build and leverage a captive audience that is actionable? Our research suggests that the best framework for building an online network is a three-stage pyramid model of social media-based strategy: *reaching out to people, keeping the flame alive*, and *stepping up to action*.⁶

The first stage, *reaching out*, involves making new connections and getting the word out through the continuous sending of brief messages to followers. These tweets are largely informational, and the focus is on getting attention. One interesting practice on Twitter is what might be called "celebrity poking" or "fishing," as in the following attempt by Public Counsel (@PublicCounsel) to target Oprah Winfrey:

@oprah in tribute video to Elie Wiesel: "you survived horror without hating"

Celebrities have tremendous network powers, in the sense that their tweets almost immediately reach audiences of hundreds of thousands—even millions—of followers. If a nonprofit can capture the attention of a celebrity, the payoff, in terms of geometrically increasing the diffusion of an organizational message or call to action, is enticing.

The second stage, *keeping the flame alive*, involves deepening and building emergent ties.

The focus is on preserving attention: enhancing and sustaining communities of interest and networks of supporters. The two types of community-building tweets are *dialogue* and *community building*. First, there are tweets that spark direct interactive conversations between organizations and their public. An example is the following tweet from ChildFund International (@ChildFund):

Change a childhood #childfundcac event starts now. Give us your best tweets on child rights. Rules @ <http://www.childfund.org/twitter>

Second, there are those tweets whose primary purpose is to say something that strengthens ties to specific users (via @user mentions) and discussions (via hashtags) in the online community without involving an expectation of interactive conversation. The following message from Make The Road New York (@MaketheRoadNY) offers a good example of this type of community-building tweet:

Great work everybody! MT @LICivicEngageTks for pledging to reg. voters this year! @naacp_ldf, #local1102, @32bj_seiu, #liia, #carecen

The third stage, *stepping up to action*, involves mobilizing supporters. The focus is on turning attention into action. Tools such as hyperlinks and hashtags are frequently used in conjunction with mobilizing messages. For instance, the following call-to-action tweet from the National Council of La Raza (@NCLR), a large U.S. Latino civil rights and advocacy organization, contains two hashtags:

Today we are storming the Supreme Court to highlight the injustice of #SB1070. Join us and demand #Justice4AZ

You can employ similar messages to mobilize constituents to donate, volunteer, attend an event, or indeed do anything that will help the organization meet its mission.

Of course, these examples represent just one model for how an organization can approach its audience. The key takeaways from the model are: (1) audience precedes attention, as attention is unlikely to grow if there is no audience; (2) audience needs nurturing; and (3) by all means seek to attract attention, but know that it is a means and not the end. Keep your mission in sight and

leverage attention to produce more-substantive outcomes.

• • •

The age of attention philanthropy presents opportunities as well as challenges for nonprofit leaders, who must be vigilant in innovating new ways to reach their target audiences if they hope to gain support for their organizations. Yet, when they focus too much on gaining the public's attention, they risk losing sight of mission and accountability. They must clearly situate their quest for attention within the organization's mission and strategy. Attention is in many ways a new form of currency for nonprofit organizations. And, just as you would not want to chase dollars with harmful strings attached, be sure not to chase attention at any cost.

NOTES

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[By] all means seek to attract attention, but know that it is a means and not the end. Keep your mission in sight and leverage attention to produce more-substantive outcomes.

Who Brands Your Nonprofit?

Who Tells Its Story, and How?

by Carlo M. Cuesta

Our identity within the sector is shaped by the stories we tell about ourselves, but it is also shaped by the stories told about us by others. As the author explains, the evolution of communication in a socially connected world has shown that there is little patience for audience constraint. Instead, audiences' contributions to and shaping of the narrative have become a necessity, and in no way is it a bad thing—opening the door, as it does, to cocreative engagement.

Editors' note: This article was originally published on NPQ's website, on April 9, 2014.

NARRATIVE THERAPY PIONEER DR. DAVID DENBOROUGH says, "Who we are and what we do are influenced by the stories we tell about ourselves [. . .] We take certain events and link them together into a plot or theme. And this plot or theme about our lives then shapes our identities."¹

In his book *Retelling the Stories of Our Lives: Everyday Narrative Therapy to Draw*

CARLO M. CUESTA is the managing partner of Creation In Common, a national consultancy helping nonprofit organizations enhance their power to engage the public.





Public ownership of a cause or organization is not often stronger than what we are seeing today. The evolution of communication in a socially connected world has demonstrated that there is little patience for audience constraint.

Inspiration and Transform Experience, Denborough explains that self-image is deeply influenced by how we frame events in our past: “If we tell stories that emphasize only desolation, then we become weaker. Alternatively, we can tell our stories in ways that make us stronger, in ways that soothe the losses, in ways that ease sorrow.”² This process requires deep reflection, through which one is able to see his or her own storyline, discover inspiring themes, address negative assumptions, and rewrite deeply held scripts.

Organizational identity within the nonprofit sector is also shaped by stories. Unfortunately, the very makeup of the institution and the demands to prove the value, relevancy, and effectiveness of its work creates the need for a simplified narrative—one that veers away from the complexity of addressing difficult, sometimes unsolvable issues and toward a heroic journey that leads to proof of success. As these types of narratives have proliferated, nonprofit storytelling has become homogenized, with organizations making use of similar plotlines, structures, and conventions in order to express impact. But how can we strengthen our identities if we only project a one-dimensional portrait that is controlled through a single point of view?

When management at the Minnesota Orchestra locked their musicians out over a contract dispute, each side tried to control the message. Eventually, a frustrated and angry public voice began to be heard, applying a new kind of pressure to the negotiations. Town hall meetings were held and new coalitions were formed, independent of both groups. What was considered a world-class orchestra was now the subject of weekly letters to the editor in the major daily that shared the public’s side of the story and offered unsolicited opinions and strategies to both sides. Even after they settled, during the orchestra’s first concert back audience members yelled during the opening speeches, calling for the return of the orchestra’s beloved music director and the firing of the organization’s president.

Public ownership of a cause or organization is not often stronger than what we are seeing today. The evolution of communication in a socially connected world has demonstrated that there is little

patience for audience constraint. Instead, audiences’ contributions to and shaping of the narrative have become a commonplace necessity. Particularly within the nonprofit sector, stories—and thus an organization’s identity—exist within the public domain. Through storytelling, when effectively guided, both internal and external publics are given the opportunity to lend to the creation of a meaningful narrative. A stronger bond is formed when our participants, donors, and community members—along with staff and volunteers—see themselves less as stakeholders and more as story shapers.

On a breezy winter day in Tacoma, Washington, the staff and board of Associated Ministries sat in a large circle in a church gymnasium. The day’s agenda focused on (1) deconstructing the mission; (2) aligning with impact; (3) raising voices; and (4) sharing stories. As members of the group began to articulate their experiences working with individuals and families in poverty, the stories came forth unfiltered. In one instance, a client was stuck in a cycle of bad relationships. Another was seeking a last chance at some stability for her family. In all, none of the stories had pat endings. What was revealed, in Shakespeare’s words, was “the quality of mercy.” Through subtle yet moving moments, these stories conveyed the humanity of both the story’s main character and the storyteller. It presented the challenges Associated Ministries is tasked to address, and it framed the impact of its work within the ambiguity of the lives of the people its staff and board serve. As the day came to a close, a cocreated narrative began to emerge; this larger story spoke to a deeper purpose of their work, but also to how it could be improved and become more effective at meeting need. Here, through deep reflection around mission, impact, and the power of the individual and group voice, Associated Ministries strengthened its identity—because, in the end, the larger story was owned by everyone in the room.

Harnessing the power of cocreation requires letting go. Particularly with organizational identity and messaging, there is an inherent need to control every word. Consistency is often valued over accessibility. Researchers at Harvard

University's Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations found that successful nonprofit brands have elements of democracy baked into them, trusting that the "story shapers" mentioned earlier have an understanding of the organization's core identity. If organizations want greater community ownership of the cause, then they need to allow staff, volunteers, participants, and the greater public a true opportunity for ownership.³ Here are a few examples:

- Recently, the American Craft Council led a series of conversations exploring the identity of craft in America. Participants were asked questions about their experiences making, sharing, and buying craft. What was not asked was, "What is craft?" That would have provoked a divisive argument, when the goal was to bring people together. Instead, the organization went in search of shared values, knowing that this would serve as the glue needed to strengthen a growing community of people.
- Creative Care for Reaching Independence, a Moorhead, Minnesota-based provider of services for people with disabilities, encouraged one of its care providers to make a video of clients and staff with members of the Moorhead community dancing to a Taylor Swift song and inviting the young pop star to their upcoming walk event. The result, after being posted on YouTube, went viral. The low-budget video is filled with joy. Above all, it is authentic. Creative Care's executive director, Shannon Bock, put it best: "It's our principles in action."
- On the donor wall of the Commonwealth Theatre is a creative reminder of public ownership. Sitting on rows of shelves are mason jars filled with mementos provided by supporters, symbolizing each supporter's own particular story, no one jar more important than the other and together expressing the vitality of this theater's audience.

Whereas the impact of Creative Care's "viral video" might seem like luck, the organization was able to successfully leverage the passion of its community members to cocreate a narrative

that illustrates what Creative Care stands for. In short, the organization figured out how to pivot from telling a story to sharing a story. This is an important distinction. When we share a story, we craft a context and structure to which others can relate and to which they can contribute. Telling a story creates a reaction; sharing a story creates a relationship. The former is a promotional tactic, the latter a means of making mission impact possible. Organizations that recognize the difference are able to create space for the public to engage in collaboration to shape and address a relevant and meaningful cause. In addition, as the sector addresses the challenges of measurement and proving the effectiveness of each theory of change, a narrative context that is cocreated and utilizes data as key plot points advances credibility. Within the public domain, stories are vetted and assumptions challenged, making an even stronger case for engagement.

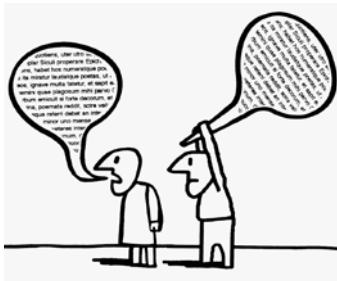
In order to tell our own stories, we need to listen to and embrace the stories of those we wish to reach. A story is a gift, not a donor-acquisition strategy. Stories bind us together by allowing us to glimpse the other. And when we glimpse the other, we seek to understand it in all its nuances. It overtakes and ripples across our consciousness, forcing us to reconcile what we are experiencing with what we think we already know. Slotting what we do into the homogenized, one-dimensional portraits we seem almost tacitly to have decided best express our impact diminishes the story of our work and closes us off from the kind of cocreative engagement we should be doing our utmost to achieve.

NOTES

1. David Denborough, *Retelling the Stories of Our Lives: Everyday Narrative Therapy to Draw Inspiration and Transform Experience* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2014), 3–4.
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Telling a story creates a reaction; sharing a story creates a relationship. The former is a promotional tactic, the latter a means of making mission impact possible.



Dr. Conflict

by Mark Light, MBA, PhD

If you find yourself frustrated with your board, ask yourself two questions: "What are the core duties of a board?" and "Am I doing my best to help my board carry them out?"

DEAR DR. CONFLICT, Our executive director loves standing committees. These committees comprise sitting board members, past board members (once they are on a committee they don't always leave when they leave the board), people from outside the board, the executive director, and usually a staff member or two.

Several issues repeat themselves year after year. The ED has each committee redefine itself, its purpose, and its goals annually, usually at the first meeting, so that new committee members (who have no real idea of what the agency does) make all kinds of suggestions. Since the members have no clue about the history, policies, or activities, the ideas can be in conflict with, or are already, current practices. Ninety-nine percent of the committee "goals" are, of course, staff work-related, and it becomes difficult for staff members to redirect the committee (the ED doesn't), resist the need to say "we already do that," or appear to be anything less than cooperative and enthusiastic without coming across as naysayers.

Hundreds of hours have been spent by staff preparing reports researching activities suggested by committee members that this agency has never had the ability or mission to carry out—usually something like providing consulting or creating a new service model that would require the investment

of millions. If that weren't frustrating enough, similar ideas pop up every few years (with new members), and the work repeats with the same conclusions.

By the way, the ED has abdicated staff evaluations to a standing committee, so staff members are leery of contradicting committee members or correcting the ED. Instead they simply do the work, since it will be noted on the annual appraisal: "she seems not to be open to suggestion"; "he does not like input"; "staff does not take direction"; "staff needs to be more positive." (Should I mention that significant portions of information provided to the committee by the ED to start the work are just plain wrong?)

If I may add one more wrinkle to the situation: the executive director has been known to invite individuals (usually family members of past or present clients, who are highly antagonistic toward the agency and with a history of unpleasantness to staff) to sit on the standing committee, under the concept that willingness to expose our operation is in the interest of "visibility."

Not Standing for It Anymore

Dear Not Standing for It,

Dr. Conflict can't speak to the issue of your executive director's loving standing committees, as love may have nothing to do with it: an agency's bylaws often codify such matters. When bylaws are

not explicit on the matter, however, many organizations trend toward an ad hoc committee approach. These task-specific committees have the benefit of preset deadlines and a beginning and end to their jobs, and that tends to work well for busy volunteers. Standing committees, on the other hand, tend to stagnate without an immediate need for product (and sometimes even with an immediate need). Dr. Conflict likes the idea of having non-board members on the committees. Outsiders bring valuable insights, and often become emissaries. Inviting former board members to attend keeps their wisdom around—if, in fact, they are wise.

Even in the case of standing committees, Dr. Conflict likes the annual practice of having each committee redefine itself. It is just good basic management. Moreover, it can be an excellent way to orient new board members. As you said, most board members haven't a clue, and on-the-job training can be a very good thing. Even better, sometimes the best ideas for new ventures come from people like new board members, who know enough but not too much.

That said, Dr. Conflict is concerned about staff spending hundreds of hours preparing reports that go nowhere. If a standing committee meets four times a year for two hours, and staff spends forty hours supporting each meeting, it can easily add up to four weeks of work. Multiply this by six unnecessary committees,

and you have a half-time position. Appalling as this may be, Dr. Conflict has seen many such situations.

Being on a board is hard work and carries significant responsibility. Dr. Conflict cannot abide make-work for board members. Believe Dr. Conflict: no board member (other than a masochist) looks forward to attending committee meetings that add no value.

That's not to say that all committees are worthless. Whatever you call them—standing committee or not—some board-level committees should meet regularly. By board-level committees, Dr. Conflict means ones that help the board do its job (staff-level committees help the staff members do theirs).

The number of board-level committees an agency should have depends upon many variables, including the age and size of your agency. If you're going through a tough time with finances, you'd expect more finance committee meetings. A good rule of thumb is that committees should meet only as necessary—in other words, only if it adds value.

Another rule of thumb is that the fewer standing committees, the better. That tends to push work upward to the full board, which addresses two of the oldest complaints about boards: no red meat on the table, and boring meetings.¹

Dr. Conflict does not think it good practice for the executive director to abdicate staff evaluations to a standing committee. The ED should handle these evaluations directly, but if he or she wants to have board members riding along—for whatever reason, including feedback and counsel—that's a matter of personal preference.

Finally, Dr. Conflict does not know enough about how recruiting is done at your agency to weigh in on your concerns about inviting family members of clients to join the board. Federal grants,

for example, often require that a percentage of the board be clients.

So, what now? What are the next steps?

First, your executive director should work with the board to revisit its structure in general and job description in particular. Many organizations are playing with new designs, and the board may wish to think about some of these. Boards often unwittingly become dysfunctional because they don't know any better. This is especially true given that many executive directors are novices, resulting in the blind leading the blind.

When it comes to the job of the board, there are usually just three major duties: setting direction, monitoring performance, and delegating effectively—beginning with the board itself and stopping at the executive director.

Once done with the structure and job description review and honoring the rule that board-level committees should only help the board do its job, your agency likely needs a governance committee to deal with recruiting and onboarding new members. It definitely should have a finance/audit committee to assess performance. Some boards will empower an executive committee to help with delegation issues related to the executive director.

Relative to what most boards do, the three most popular committees are governance/nominating (83 percent); finance, including audit (83 percent); and executive (78 percent). Fundraising is a distant fourth (55 percent), followed by the also-rans of plain audit (27 percent), program (27 percent), and marketing/communications/PR (26 percent).²

Where's the development function to raise money? Where is the advocacy piece that builds allies? These are board *member* jobs, not board jobs. Boards don't raise money, and boards don't champion the agency to the community;

board members (and staff members) do. Remember that boards only exist when they are in session—at all other times they must do their work by delegating to others.

Second, you need to check your attitude. You have choices about how you conduct yourself with board members. Generally speaking, board members recognize that they can only do their job effectively if people like you enable them. Stop sitting on the sidelines and crying about how bad things are. You have the ability to courteously speak up and guide your board members to better performance. Pick yourself up and become the governance content expert for your agency. Keep in mind that “to be irrelevant would be a step forward for many boards,”³ and ask yourself what you can do to help move your agency's governance to excellence.

NOTES

1. Richard P. Chait, Thomas P. Holland, and Barbara E. Taylor, *Improving the Performance of Governing Boards* (Westport, CT: American Council on Education/Oryx Press, 1996), 1–2.
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DR. CONFLICT is the pen name of Mark Light, MBA, PhD. In addition to his work with First Light Group (www.firstlightgroup.com), Light is executive in residence at DePaul University School of Public Service, where he teaches strategic management, human resource management, and ethical leadership. John Wiley & Sons published his most recent book—*Results Now*—in 2011.

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People as Pendulums: Institutions and People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

by Tamie Hopp

Aggressive deinstitutionalization has caused more harm than good—people with mental illness now make up a good part of the population in this nation’s prisons and jails and on the streets. There is a lot at stake for past and present proponents of community integration—not least, the risk of losing future funding. But, as the author points out, where is our concern for the individual in this debate? While wholesale institutionalization was never the right answer, nor is the current lack of access to necessary supports.

Editors’ note: This article was originally published on NPQ’s website, on July 16, 2014.

DISABILITY ADVOCACY OVER THE PAST three decades has resulted in a largely decentralized, de-specialized system of care that has left many individuals with profound intellectual and developmental disabilities without adequate services, in spite of the valiant efforts of family advocates and the nonprofit organizations that represent them. These families, organizations, and others have widely distributed this article, recognizing their own story within its words and affording them credibility, because it was published by a well-respected organization that has no real skin in this complex and often emotional issue.

“People as Pendulums” has been posted, tweeted, blogged, cited, and shared with state law- and policymakers and with Congress. In time, it is hoped that the themes within “People as Pendulums” will help to repair what has become a fractured, fragmented, and sometimes

self-interested world of nonprofits purporting to advocate for the individual rights of all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, or I/DD. Due in part to our infighting, law- and policy-makers either persist in a state of inaction—loathe to take sides—or embrace the law of the majority, which sometimes does a tragic disservice to individuals with profound developmental disabilities. For some in this minority within a minority, a lack of access to necessary supports can be and has been a death sentence. Real progress—individualized choice and care according to the law—will not be achieved until we all come together.

• • •

Willowbrook State School: A Case Study

Willowbrook State School was a New York State-run institution that for forty years serviced people with

mental disabilities. Eighteen years into its operations, in 1965, then-Senator Robert Kennedy toured Willowbrook and offered this grim description of the individuals residing in the overcrowded facility: “[They are] living in filth and dirt, their clothing in rags, in rooms less comfortable and cheerful than the cages in which we put animals in a zoo.”¹

The atrocities of Willowbrook ushered in a generation of advocates, nonprofit organizations, providers, and professionals who successfully pushed for massive reform, beginning in 1971 with the development of Medicaid Intermediate Care Facilities for Persons with Mental Retardation (ICFs/MR), later renamed ICFs, for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ICFs/IID).

Families and advocates alike applauded this infusion of federal funding, licensing, and oversight for a program specifically designed to meet the needs of individuals with intellectual

and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

Still, as the ICF/IID program grew, so did calls for housing alternatives. Critics emerged, claiming that the ICF/IID federal standards of care promoted a non-individualized, inefficient model of care, and, due to federal financing incentives, discouraged states from developing alternate service options.² In 1981, Congress responded by providing for small (four-to-fifteen-person) ICFs/IID and a Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waiver, to allow states to “waive” certain ICF/IID requirements.

These early reforms were quite properly motivated by the need for a system of care and supports that responded to the very individual and diverse needs of the entire population of people with I/DD. These reforms, however, also set the stage for decades of ongoing deinstitutionalization, resulting in the elimination of specialized housing, employment, and education options for people with I/DD, leaving some to question the price of “progress.”

The Pendulum Swings

Even though initial reforms were motivated by a lack of service options (an over-reliance on the ICF/IID program), it was not long before efforts to “rebalance” our system of care shifted from the expansion of options to the dramatic reduction of ICFs/IID and other specialized options.

In 1999, the Supreme Court handed down its landmark *Olmstead v. L.C.* decision, which should have settled the deinstitutionalization debate. The Court expressly cautioned against forced deinstitutionalization—the “termination of institutional settings for persons unable to handle or benefit from community settings”³—finding instead that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) only requires community placement when an individual’s treatment professionals determine community

placement is appropriate, such placement is not opposed by the individual, and the placement can be reasonably accommodated, taking into account the resources available to the State and the needs of others with disabilities.⁴

However, masterful messaging by nonprofit organizations and federally funded lawyers with mission statements and funding aimed squarely at eliminating all “institutional” options quickly (and incorrectly) characterized *Olmstead* as a deinstitutionalization “mandate” requiring “community integration for everyone.”⁵ While deinstitutionalization proponents had successfully closed many ICF/IID homes by 1999, the time of the *Olmstead* decision, the decision has only further fueled their efforts in the years that followed.

Has the Pendulum Swung Too Far?

According to Samuel Bagenstos, former principal deputy assistant attorney general in the Obama Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division, and a key litigator in deinstitutionalization cases, the population of state institutions for I/DD now stands at approximately 16 percent of its peak.⁶

The exit of ICFs/IID from the service landscape created a vacuum that lured nonprofit and for-profit providers into the business of human services. Between 1977 and 2010, the number of residential settings that served people with I/DD increased by a remarkable 1,598 percent, with most of these new settings being small and privately operated. In 2010, non-state agencies served 98.5 percent of people living in places with six or fewer residents. The number of home- and community-based services recipients outpaced residents receiving specialized Medicaid licensed ICFs/IID by 676.1 percent, while the number of people receiving ICFs/IID care decreased by 63 percent.⁷

As early as 1993, then-U.S. Representative Ron Wyden (D-OR) pointed to the problems created by an unchecked expansion of providers rushing in to fill a need. “Increasingly, millions of Americans with these lifelong handicaps are at risk from poor quality of care, questionable and even criminal management practices by service providers, and lackluster monitoring by public health and welfare agencies,” wrote Wyden in a March 22, 1993, report in his capacity as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Regulation, Business Opportunities, and Technology of the U.S. House Committee on Small Business.⁸

In 2000, the *American Prospect* magazine reported similar problems in its article “Neglect for Sale,” by Eyal Press, which investigated a disturbing trend of large for-profit corporate providers capitalizing on what was then \$22 billion (now more than \$40.5 billion) in government spending on services for people with disabilities, turning care for individuals with I/DD “into a major growth industry.”⁹

“It should not be surprising,” Bagenstos wrote, “that the coalition of deinstitutionalization advocates and fiscal conservatives largely achieved their goal of closing and downsizing institutions and that deinstitutionalization advocates were less successful in achieving their goal of developing community services.”¹⁰ State officials were not keen on investing in the development of adequate community services after being told that closing ICFs/IID would save them money, resulting in inadequate funding and compromised care. Bagenstos acknowledges that adequate investment in community services, especially due to the cost of quality staffing, will meet or exceed the cost of ICF/IID care.¹¹

The predictability of these outcomes make them all the more tragic. The failed deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill should have been an important lesson

learned. “As events played out, large state institutions [for the mentally ill] were indeed shut down in the 1970s, but the promise of high-quality community-based care collided with the fiscal cutbacks of the 1980s,” wrote Press.¹² Homelessness, incarceration, and violence raise questions about “whether society’s concern for the constitutional rights of people with mental illness has led to their abandonment.”¹³

Predictable Tragedies as the Price of Progress

Even if some license is afforded to “hope”—a “hope” that history would not repeat itself when deinstitutionalizing individuals with I/DD—there is no excuse for continuing down a path that has led to repeated, widely reported tragedies in small settings for people with I/DD.

More than 150 media reports in more than thirty states since 1997 reveal systemic concerns in small settings for people with I/DD, including deaths, abuse, neglect, and financial malfeasance. In November 2011, the *New York Times* wrote that more than 1,200 people with I/DD in the past decade have died in group homes due to “unnatural or unknown causes.”¹⁴ U.S. Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) has called for a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General investigation to “focus on the prevalence of preventable deaths at privately run group homes across this nation and the widespread privatization of our delivery system.”¹⁵

Georgia offers a particularly poignant example of the extremes by which “success” is defined by proponents of forced deinstitutionalization. An October 2012 federal settlement calls for the transition of its I/DD residents from ICFs/IID to community settings. In 2013, the state’s own reports showed that 10 percent (forty people) of those transferred to community settings in 2013 had died.¹⁶ Yet, United

Cerebral Palsy, a national nonprofit organization, ranked Georgia fourth in the nation for its successful community inclusion of people with I/DD.¹⁷

Other symptoms of failed deinstitutionalization are less obvious but no less harmful to people with I/DD. Waiting lists for I/DD services now number nearly 317,000 people,¹⁸ emergency rooms have become de facto urgent care clinics for people with I/DD, and correctional facilities are replacement treatment centers for some individuals who experience both mental illness and developmental disabilities.

Conclusion: Why Does This Continue?

The original goal of deinstitutionalization, to provide opportunity to individuals not appropriately institutionalized and “rebalance” the system, was shared by advocates. We have passed the 50 percent mark in most states—that point of “balance” when half the Medicaid funding for people with I/DD was spent on HCBS options and half on facility-based (“institutional”) options. In fact, United Cerebral Palsy reported that “38 states now meet the 80/80 Community standard, which means that at least 80 percent of all individuals with ID/DD are served in the community and 80 percent of all resources spent on those with ID/DD are for community support.”¹⁹

As advocates marched toward “balance”—and in most states exceeded it—tragedies followed and seem to have become more widespread. These tragedies, which should have been a wake-up call, have done nothing to stem aggressive deinstitutionalization. State-level fiscal conservatives still loathe spending money, yet safely serving people with complex needs requires adequate funding. Proponents for “community integration for everyone”—advocates, nonprofit organizations, federal agencies and providers—have a lot at stake, past and present. To

change paths now is to admit failure and risk future funding.

Lost in this debate is concern for the individual. Person-centered planning, which is held up as the ideal by advocates, nonprofit organizations, and government alike, is shortchanged by system-change advocacy to eliminate specialized care options for those who need it. Instead, we must figure out ways to meet individual needs versus wholesale approaches to providing care that end up being as bad as or worse than an institution’s being the only option.

The legal framework is in place to support individualized care and choice. Advocates must set aside efforts to eliminate options for care and work together to expand options. This begins with a commitment to serving each individual: true person-centered planning.

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5. “Olmstead: Community Integration for Everyone,” Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act, accessed July 7, 2014.
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for Persons with Developmental Disabilities: Status and Trends through 2010 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Research and Training Center on Community Living, Institute on Community Integration, 2012), ix.

8. Select Committee on Small Business, Subcommittee on Regulation, Business Opportunities, and Technology, H. R. Rep. 103-8 (1993).

9. Eyal Press, "Neglect for Sale," the *American Prospect*, November 30, 2000.

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11. Ibid., 43; compare to Kevin K. Walsh, Theodore A. Kastner, and Regina Gentlesk Green, "Cost Comparisons of Community and Institutional Residential Settings: Historical Review of Selected Research," *Mental Retardation* 41, no. 2 (April 2003): 103-22. ("Findings do not support the unqualified position that community settings are less expensive than are institutions and suggest that staffing issues play a major role in any cost differences that are identified.")

12. Press, "Neglect for Sale."

13. Stephanie McCrummen, "Behind the Yellow Door, a Man's Mental Illness Worsens," the *Washington Post*, June 28, 2014.

14. Danny Hakim and Russ Buettner, "Abused and Used: In State Care, 1,200 Deaths and Few Answers," the *New York Times*, Nov. 5, 2011.

15. U.S. Senator Christopher S. Murphy to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Inspector General Daniel R. Levinson, March 4, 2013.

16. Andy Miller, "Transfers of Disabled Patients Still a Problem," *Georgia Health News*, June 23, 2014; see also Alan Judd, "Mentally Disabled Suffer in Moves from Georgia Institutions," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 21, 2014; see also "Widespread Abuse, Neglect, and Death in Small Settings Serving People with Intellectual Disabilities," revised July 2014.

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18. Ibid., 7.

19. Ibid., 6.

TAMIE HOPP is the director of Government Relations and Advocacy with VOR, a national nonprofit organization advocating for high-quality care and human rights for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. For more information, visit www.vor.net.

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Community Foundations and the Compound Republic

by Olivier Zunz

There are many obstacles plaguing the recent public-private partnerships that have formed in response to Detroit's imminent bankruptcy, but it is hard to imagine a place more in need of such coalition than that beleaguered city. Such engagement may also help to pull local donors out of their special areas of focus and into the larger arena of public policy issues.

Editors' note: On the one-hundredth anniversary of the first community foundation, Olivier Zunz, author of *Philanthropy in America: A History* (Princeton University Press, 2012), looks at the unique value a community foundation can bring to a troubled locality, and uses the example of Detroit to discuss how a community foundation can activate citizen-fueled change with much more power than the sum of its parts would suggest.

IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE A PLACE WHERE a community foundation or other locally committed philanthropic institutions might be needed more than in bankrupt Detroit, where despair and municipal dysfunction abound. A collapsed local government is only the most obviously broken link in the chain of intertwined state-civil society organizations. As a result, although the efforts of the community foundation and other foundations have been nothing short of exceptional, it is clear that philanthropy alone is not a substitute for a mixed political economy that combines public and private funds for the common good. Much depends on creative partnerships between governments and the nonprofit sector.

A History of the Community Foundation

This difficult situation contrasts with the role of community foundations in the

years immediately following Frederick H. Goff's establishment of the first such institution, the Cleveland Foundation, in 1914. A century ago, Cleveland had a prosperous and growing middle class to support the new institution; in today's Detroit, the middle class has fled a city where violence and poverty abound.

It is not so surprising that a Cleveland banker and attorney was the first to come up with the idea of a community foundation. Cleveland was then steeped in philanthropy. It was home to the Rockefellers, as well as the birthplace, in 1913, of the first community trust—the forerunner of the United Way. Goff himself had worked as an attorney for the Rockefellers, and his wife had served on the community trust's founding committee. But Goff imagined something new: an institution that targeted midlevel fortunes. Advising his clients on how to write their wills, he suggested they designate

as the beneficiaries of their estates not “mankind,” as the Rockefellers had done, but their immediate community. Community foundations have often competed with institutions of mass philanthropy for dollars from very modest donors, and they have also solicited extremely large gifts, but they have remained focused on middle-class donors committed to supporting their locality.

Originally, community foundations had limited goals and operated independently of government, but as they grew the federal government took notice. In the “associative state” of his years as secretary of commerce, Herbert Hoover was first to try to integrate the efforts of self-financing local voluntary organizations with government agencies—and then, in his ill-fated attempt as president, to enlist private philanthropy in containing the Great Depression. Community foundations obviously lost many

of their assets after the stock market crash, and even if they had not, they would not have been equal to the challenges of the Depression.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his “relief czar,” Harry Hopkins, took a completely different approach, insisting on full autonomy for the federal government to distribute its own resources across the country and, to that end, excluding much of civil society from New Deal federal-state relations. Hopkins and FDR enforced a separation between public and private spheres that continued to prevail in the postwar period. But in the Great Society programs of the 1960s, President Lyndon B. Johnson re-created a public-private partnership by injecting massive amounts of federal funds into nonprofits at the local level. His mixed political economy survived the Reagan era of federal retrenchment, and it could be said that then-President George W. Bush was putting a new face on the Great Society when his faith-based initiative invested federal dollars in the heart of American voluntarism on behalf of compassionate conservatism. But this was most likely the last gasp. The Great Society paradigm is effectively dead, and the time has come to reinvent the “compound republic,” as James Madison once called it—a task where community foundations have an important role to play.

Drifting from Goff's Dream

This task may involve reimagining the community foundation. Community foundations as Goff conceived of them were premised on a vital urban middle class living within the community's political boundaries. This assumption made sense in his day; Cleveland's city limits and its population were expanding, and its urban middle class sought reform and beautification. But by the 1920s,

sociologists and statisticians began documenting the shift to the metropolitan community. By 1970, most Americans had moved to the suburbs, even though they still commuted to work in a nearby city. By 1990, most Americans not only lived but also worked in the suburbs, losing their significant connection to their cities' cores.

This metropolitan fragmentation has posed a challenge to community foundations. Some have transformed themselves into suburban entities. Others have adapted to the regional scale. In 1986, the Detroit Community Fund (dating from 1915) joined the seven-county Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan (CFSEM), created in 1984, so as to maintain its ability to reach a middle-class funding base.

Another issue is one of governance. Goff wanted to give the community foundation full ability to respond to current needs. He made it clear that he was worried about the “dead hand” of the donor. Decision making in the new institution, he insisted, rested with a representative committee of citizens. As he explained it to the Walsh Commission on Industrial Relations investigating the Rockefellers in 1915, “[D]onors may indicate a desire for a certain period of time to have the income from their trusts expended in a certain way, but there is lodged with the committee on distribution the power to do otherwise should it see fit.”¹

This was a very important part of Goff's program. His sense of an elite local leadership that could speak in the community's name, however, was already unrealistic during the period of rapid industrialization and mass immigration in which the Cleveland Foundation was formed. It has become even more elusive today, and the big question of how to formulate policies for the common good never ceases to resurface.

Making It Work in Detroit

All these challenges come to play in Detroit, which ironically was one of the first cities to benefit from a public-private partnership. In 1931, Detroit had already come dangerously close to defaulting. Mayor Frank Murphy assigned responsibility for the city's welfare problem to Henry Ford. The company paid no Detroit taxes because its Rouge plant was outside the city limits, but its laid-off workers were clogging the welfare rolls. After Henry Ford came to the rescue at the very last minute with a low-interest loan, Murphy went to Washington and convinced the federal government to complete the rescue of the city. This Hoover did in creating the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, and Detroit became the first city recipient of a federal grant initially channeled through the state, initiating a lasting federal commitment to local affairs. But we are now in the days of sequestration, and the few calls for federal intervention have fallen on deaf ears.

The current response to financial collapse, which significantly preceded the city's requesting a bankruptcy court, has been a massive mobilization of the local philanthropic sector consisting of the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, large independent foundations that include Ford, Kresge, and W.K. Kellogg, and smaller local foundations. Out of this partnership has come an impressively large \$100 million New Economy Initiative devoted to training young entrepreneurs throughout the region. The community foundation contributes to this fund and administers it. It is also heavily invested in parks, trails, and bicycle rides, a challenging enterprise in a low-density city with about eighty thousand abandoned buildings and a huge amount of garbage-filled abandoned land.

The Kresge Foundation took the lead in funding, in partnership with other foundations, a strategic framework for

Detroit's redevelopment. In contrast to the Regional Survey and Plan for New York that the Russell Sage Foundation conducted in the 1920s with experts and professionals, Detroit Future City solicited the views of over one hundred and sixty thousand ordinary citizens in the planning process. The same philanthropic actors are launching with business leaders a rail system (heretofore unheard of in the Motor City) in the hope of revitalizing the midtown area. They break ground this year after orchestrating eight different pieces of legislation. Still other local donors, like the Skillman Foundation, underwrite not business development but neighborhoods and schools in the absence of a strong local government presence. All this tremendous work is the outcome of strategic philanthropy, but it will only be effective in the long term if it is a prelude to a new mix of private and public efforts.

New partnerships between the state government and nonprofits are becoming reality in the tense and controverted atmosphere of lifting Detroit out of bankruptcy. In late January 2014, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder asked the state legislature to match an unprecedented financial pledge from a consortium of nine large foundations (with Michigan ties) designed to help save both city-owned art from the Detroit Institute of Arts and the city's pension plan. The deal, between the state, the city, the foundations, the museum, several unions, and city retirees, locally known as the "grand bargain," has now been approved by all concerned parties save city bondholders. If finalized in bankruptcy court this fall, it will protect the city-owned masterpieces from ever being put on the market for sale and simultaneously provide the city with needed cash to avoid drastic cuts to the pensions of Detroit retirees.²

In addition to partnering with other nonprofits, the community foundation has special potential for finding new synergies in addressing the crisis. The community foundation is by design in contact with donors from all walks of life. Its challenge is in fostering a continuing and strong sense of civic engagement among them.

CFSEM currently administers over four hundred donor-advised funds ranging in size from just a few thousand dollars to millions. At CFSEM, the annual payout from these funds is about 18 percent.³ Donor-advised funds have been around since the 1930s, but have exploded in recent years. They have been hailed as great tools for donors' investment in the charity of their choice, and many community foundations have lowered the bar to facilitate entry into their pool of such funds.

Critics point out that donor-advised funds are also used for dumping unwanted assets in exchange for an immediate tax deduction. They complain about delayed charitable payments, some calculated to create rainy-day funds or charitable activities for donors' children. These criticisms are reminiscent of those the Treasury Department leveled against family foundations in the 1960s, and were a big part of the tax revisions of 1969.

The Need for Policy Engagement

Despite these obstacles, I see these funds as an opportunity for philanthropy professionals to involve an active citizenry in major policy debates. Troubling to me are the results of an older survey of all community foundations in the Chicago metropolitan region that Kirsten A. Grønberg of Indiana University conducted in the mid-1990s.⁴ She reported the puzzling fact that most small donors showed little awareness of larger policy issues, or else they

were reluctant to talk about them. They would rather focus on their special area of giving. That was, of course, at a time when the older, mixed political economy still held sway. But the current need to reinvent it is surely putting an end to this narrow perspective.

Community foundations as public charities should imaginatively do all they can to bring their donors into the fold of large public debates over our future. In Detroit, they cannot look the other way.

NOTES

1. Commission on Industrial Relations, Final Report and Testimony, S. Rep. No. 64-415, at 8111 (1916).
2. For more on Detroit's "grand bargain," see Rick Cohen, "The Foundation Tally of Detroit's Unprecedented Grand Bargain," *NPQ*, July 7, 2014, nonprofitquarterly.org/philanthropy/24460-the-foundation-tally-of-detroit-s-unprecedented-grand-bargain.html, and "Two Qualms regarding Detroit's 'Creative Solution,'" *NPQ*, November 18, 2013, nonprofitquarterly.org/policysocial-context/23252-two-qualms-regarding-detroit-s-creative-solution.html.
3. As per written communication from CFSEM to the author on July 2014.
4. Kirsten A. Grønberg, "Foundation Legitimacy at the Community Level in the United States," in *The Legitimacy of Philanthropic Foundations: United States and European Perspectives*, Kenneth Prewitt et al., eds. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), 163.

OLIVIER ZUNZ is the Commonwealth Professor of History at the University of Virginia.

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NPQ’s NEW ONLINE FEATURE:

“What a Tool! Tuesdays”

This article is a sample of a new weekly online column authored by various experts and providing practical management tools for use by readers. It was originally published on NPQ’s website, on February 25, 2014.

“A lot has changed in the decade since I wrote the third edition of *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*,” writes Patton. Here the author outlines ten highlights that sum up the state of qualitative evaluation methods identified while working on the fourth edition of his book, and looks ahead at some emerging challenges and opportunities.

Michael Quinn Patton’s Top Ten Developments in Qualitative Evaluation for the Last Decade

by Michael Quinn Patton

TO HELP PUT TOGETHER THIS LIST, I CONSULTED THREE QUALITATIVE COLLEAGUES ABOUT their sense of the major trends: Sharon Rallis, editor of the *American Journal of Evaluation* and coauthor of two books on qualitative evaluation, and Leslie Goodyear and Jennifer Jewiss, cochairs of the American Evaluation Association (AEA) Qualitative Methods Topical Interest Group (TIG) and editors of the book *Qualitative Inquiry in Evaluation: From Theory to Practice*—and they, in turn, consulted their colleagues and students, though they bear no responsibility for the final list I’ve constructed.

So, here are my top ten developments in qualitative evaluation inquiry over the last decade:

10. Powerful qualitative software

Software features and capabilities have expanded greatly, but the learning curve remains steep. There is also confusion that qualitative software actually analyzes data: it doesn’t. Software is a data management tool. Human beings still have to organize, interpret, and make meaning from the data.

9. **Social media as a qualitative tool increasingly used for both data collection and sharing findings**

The rise of social media in every aspect of modern life is a hallmark of the information age. Qualitative inquiry is already being profoundly influenced by social media opportunities as social media becomes a tool both for data collection and communicating results.

8. **Abundant ethical challenges**

The in-depth, engaged, interactive, and interpersonal nature of qualitative fieldwork increases dramatically the challenges of creating and following appropriate ethical standards. Institutional review boards are struggling to determine how to apply traditional ethical research standards to qualitative designs that are emergent, naturalistic, and dynamic. Issues include:

- Anticipating impact on participants;
- Confidentiality with small sample sizes;
- Appropriate compensation—particularly in circumstances where participant involvement is more than simple data collection. Where does the principle of reciprocity lead us? and;
- Lack of qualitative expertise and experience on review boards.

7. **Mixed methods valued but hard to integrate**

The former qualitative-quantitative debate has realized rapprochement around the triangulated value of mixed methods. However, in actual implementation, mixed methods manifest more as parallel play (like two-year-olds not yet able to play together) than as genuinely integrated inquiry and analysis.

6. **Data visualization increasingly expected**

Qualitative inquiry is rapidly incorporating a variety of data visualization techniques and tools. The two most recent issues of *New Directions for Evaluation* (Issues 139 and 140, Fall and Winter 2013) are devoted to data visualization. The year 2013 saw the organization of a Data Visualization and Reporting TIG. Dr. Stephanie Evergreen, the founder and past chair of this TIG, has led the American Evaluation Association (AEA) in pioneering data visualization as a key competency for evaluators.

5. **Qualitative inquiry developments driven by evaluation practice and users' demands**

Historically, qualitative inquiry has been driven by epistemological, ontological, paradigmatic, and philosophical traditions and debates. Evaluation has brought to qualitative inquiry generally a pragmatic, utilitarian orientation. The intersection of evaluation and qualitative inquiry is being shaped by:

- Short, tight timelines;
- Large multisite studies; and
- Demands for speed.

However, qualitative evaluation is only realizing a fraction of the potential contributions of in-depth qualitative field methods:

- Observation is vastly underutilized; and
- Interviewing dominates—and shorter interviews, at that.

4. **Qualitative evaluation being used intentionally as an *intervention*; a high degree of *process use***

“Process use” refers to the impact on people and organizations from engaging in evaluation and learning to think evaluatively as distinct from using evaluation findings. Because qualitative data gathering methods and reporting approaches can be made accessible to nonacademics (a.k.a. ordinary people), and because engaging in qualitative evaluation involves learning in multiple ways at multiple levels, process use is increased through evaluation approaches that often incorporate some aspects of qualitative inquiry, such as:

- Participatory or collaborative evaluation;
- Feminist evaluation;
- Empowerment evaluation;
- Transformative evaluation; and
- Developmental evaluation.

These terms mean different things to different people but share a commitment to involving the people in the setting being studied as co-inquirers, at least to some important extent (though the degree and nature of the involvement vary widely).

3. **Increased value of deep contextual understanding, enhancing demand for and appreciation of qualitative evaluation**

- The ascendance of realist evaluation has made contextual sensitivity paramount;
- “Contextual Intelligence” is being understood as “A Critical Competency;”¹ and
- Evidence-based effective principles require contextual adaptation (as opposed to the high-fidelity emphasis of best practice models).

2. **Qualitative evaluator as the *instrument* (experience, expertise, and cultural competence matter)**

The focus in quantitative methods is on the validity and reliability of the data collection instruments and analytic procedures. In qualitative inquiry, the experiences and capabilities of the qualitative evaluator *as a person* remain central to credibility: who does the work matters. In this regard, the following lyric by country music legend Waylon Jennings is germane and insightful:

*Old age and treachery
Always overcomes[sic] youth and skill*

1. Increased *purposeful sampling* options

Purposeful sampling involves selecting information-rich cases to study—cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the evaluation question being investigated. Perhaps nothing better illustrates the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods than the different logics that support sampling approaches. The third edition of *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (2002) discussed sixteen purposeful sampling options. The new, fourth edition (forthcoming November 2014) presents and discusses thirty-five options. This development of more-nuanced and targeted purposeful sampling applications captures, for me, the key to the increased utility of qualitative evaluation methods over the last decade. In the end, whatever conclusions we draw and judgments we make depend on what we have sampled. *To be more strategically purposeful about sampling is to be more strategically purposeful about evaluation.*

Looking Ahead: Four Challenges and Opportunities

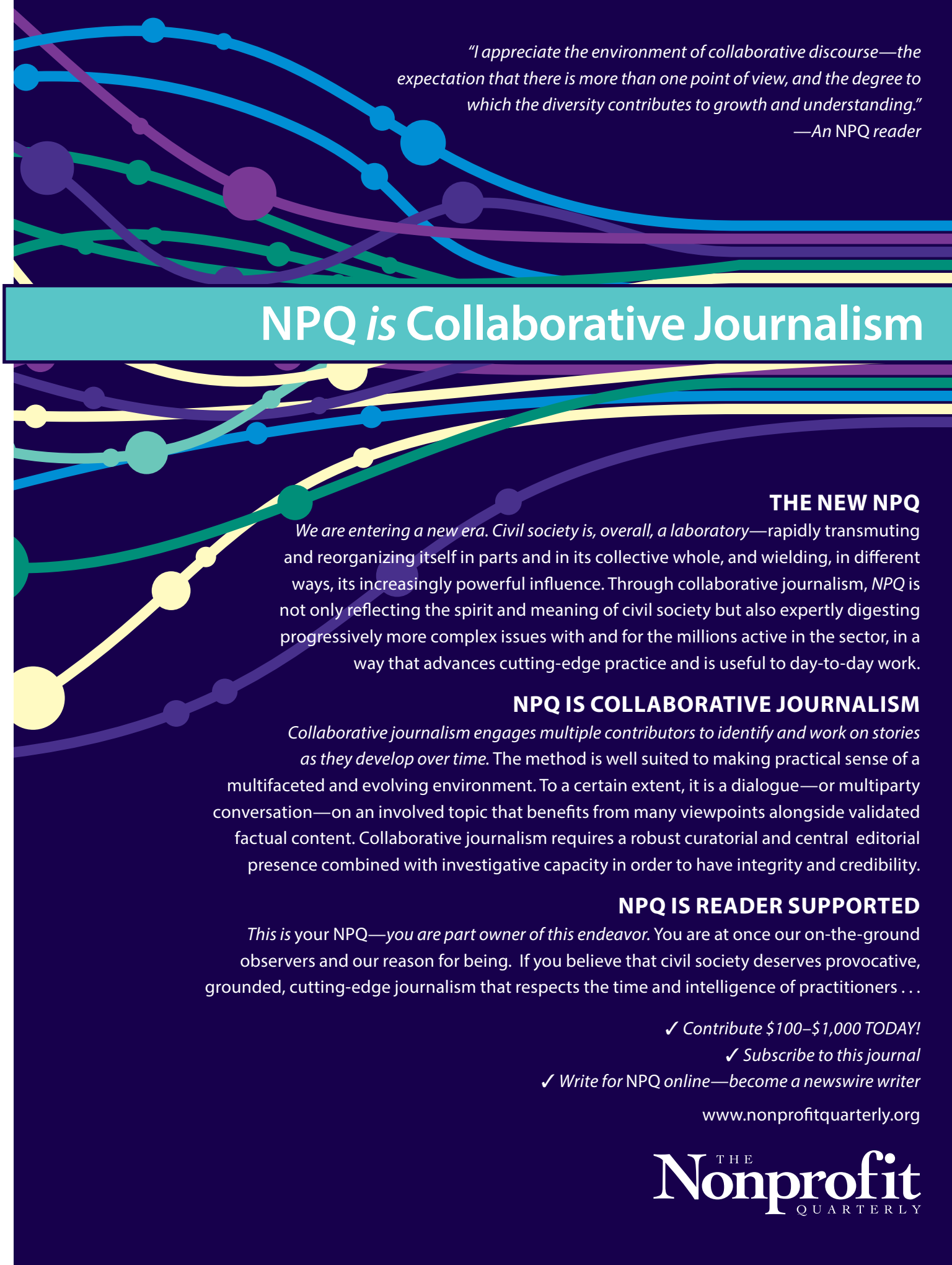
1. *Building qualitative inquiry capacity.* Global efforts are underway to strengthen evaluation capacity. Strengthening quality inquiry capacity needs to be part of that effort.
2. *Increasing interest in and attracting resources to do serious, triangulated, in-depth qualitative, multi-method evaluations.* As noted in the top ten trends, observation and in-depth fieldwork are underutilized; interviewing and short site visits dominate.
3. *Deepening evaluators' commitment to inquire seriously into unintended consequences and take emergence (complexity) seriously.* Lip service and rhetoric give the appearance of attending to unintended consequences, but most evaluation designs devote the entire budget to assessing planned implementation and goal attainment. The kind of open-ended fieldwork needed to turn up actual consequences and emergent dynamics remains rare.
4. *Cumulative-longitudinal integration at the case and context levels.* Long-term, in-depth case studies, with purposeful sampling that is sufficiently diverse to capture contextual variations, remain an ideal too rarely realized in practice.

NOTE

1. Matthew R. Kutz and Anita Bamford-Wade, "Understanding Contextual Intelligence: A Critical Competency for Today's Leaders," in *Emergence: Complexity & Organization* (E:CO) 15, no. 3 (2013): 55–80.

MICHAEL QUINN PATTON is former president of the American Evaluation Association. He has written six evaluation books, including *Utilization-Focused Evaluation* and *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (SAGE Publications, 2008 and 2002, respectively), and *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use* (The Guilford Press, 2011).

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