"Are We Making a Change?"

The Data and Research Needs of Toledo Area Non-Profit Organizations

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Summary

How do nonprofit organizations use data and research? What challenges do they face in conducting research and managing data? In spring of 2004, 80 nonprofit organizations returned a survey on their research and data needs and practices. In addition, leaders of seven regional funders were interviewed regarding their perspectives on the data and research practices and needs of nonprofit organizations. The major findings are:

- Nonprofits collect data on a wide variety of topics, but only 23 of the 80 organizations collect data at the neighborhood level. Consequently, among nonprofits in general, community development organizations will suffer some of the greatest information hardships.
- The average nonprofit in the survey has five employees and 4 volunteers who, together, spend 56 hours per week collecting, managing, and reporting on data. Less than two thirds of the organizations report using the data they collect in any one category, so potentially 18 hours a week of data management work is wasted effort.
- Most nonprofit data is still stored in paper files, making it difficult to store and to analyze. Less than one-third of all data is backed-up electronically.
- Data collected by individual organizations is not widely shared. On average, each organization shares data with only four other groups.
- Few organizations indicated a need for data, but more than half indicated a need for training on how to conduct evaluations, how to use data management software, how to conduct research, and how to find funding. Such training may lead to new data needs as nonprofits better understand how to target, gather, and analyze information.
- Nearly half of the organizations have no staff or volunteers with formal research training. The others have only one or two people with formal research training.
- Funders see a need for better research on community needs, but believe that research should not be the sole responsibility of nonprofits. They, too, lack the resources to conduct some of the needed research.
- Funders are looking for nonprofits to think more theoretically about their work—considering the relationships between their models, strategies, and context.
- Funders are looking for ways to improve evaluation, with the goal of helping nonprofits enhance the delivery of programs and services.

Three things stand out in this research:

- There are many data and research needs that neither the nonprofits nor funders have the capacity to fill.
- There is a strong demand for research training among nonprofits, and in some cases funders, to *better* collect, manage, and analyze the data for which they do have the capacity.
- There is a need for further discussion around the questions of what kinds of research models and support are needed to establish needs and options on the front end, and outcomes and impacts on the back end of projects.

Introduction

> "The thing groups want to know is 'are we making a change? Where is it most strategic to make change?'" (Toledo area nonprofit funder)

Of all the capacity issues facing nonprofit organizations in the United States, perhaps none has been so neglected as their information needs. There are numerous training and technical assistance resources for various programming areas, organizational development, and information technology. But the crucial area of collecting, managing, and analyzing information is almost entirely neglected. And that is a serious neglect. Grant proposals, evaluations, fiscal monitoring, resource allocation, and overall project planning are all dependent on good information management. And the types of information being managed can range from census data to client case data to census data to all varieties of specialty data for different nonprofits, making information management a highly complex and time-consuming part of nonprofit work.

The lack of focus on nonprofits' information needs has real consequences. This research project began as an outgrowth of the author's experience conducting evaluation research with a local neighborhood organization. As we attempted to collect outcome data for the organization, we realized how little data there was, and how difficult it was to fill the data gaps. We then gathered together a group of nonprofit organizations for a focus group to explore whether this was a common problem. The focus group assured us that it was. At that point we set out to gather detailed information on the depth and extent of Toledo area nonprofits' research and data needs. The first step was to establish a research core group representing a cross-section of Toledo community organizations (see Appendix 1).[1] This core group of seven members met monthly through the six months of the project. They participated at every stage of the research, shaping the questions we wanted to ask in the survey of nonprofits and the interviews of funders, recruiting nonprofits to complete the survey, going over the survey results and a rough draft of this report to contribute to the data analysis, and shaping the planning event growing out of this research.

We decided early on to focus on small to medium size nonprofits—excluding large health and education nonprofits—believing that the smaller organizations would be most in need of resources to collect, manage, and analyze information. We also decided to maintain a special focus on those organizations that serve distinct geographic areas such as neighborhoods—community development corporations or CDCs—since we had already learned that neighborhood-level information is extremely difficult to collect and maintain. Neither government nor non-geographic social services manage their data in such a way to make it easily analyzable for an individual neighborhood. In addition, neighborhoods are a crucial geographic unit. Healthy neighborhoods provide the immediate, necessary support for family systems,

[1] While it may seem like using a core group model limits participation to only a few members of the total possible research participants, it actually enhances overall participation. The challenge facing most participatory research projects is not having too many participants, but having too few. Establishing a core group, in this case with a $100 honorarium per person, establishes a committed group of research participants who can actually draw others into the process. The core group probably increased the survey responses by about 20-25 percent over what we would have otherwise obtained. For more on using core groups, see Stoecker, Randy, Research Methods for Community Change, Sage Publications (forthcoming).

convenient services, and youth activities, and may be the single most important point of intervention for improving safety, security, and happiness.[2] Particularly when the neighborhoods are as well-defined as they are in Toledo, they also become a source of identity and, when they are healthy, pride.

Methods

This research was conducted using a modified participatory research process.[3] The goal of participatory research is to engage those affected by the research into the design and conduct of the research itself. Ideally, research participants will have input at every stage of the research process: choosing the research question, designing the research methods, collecting the data, analyzing the data, and developing action plans based on the data.

We used such a model in the implementation of three basic methods: a focus group of nonprofit organizations; a survey of nonprofit organizations, and in-depth interviews of local funders.

1. Focus groups of nonprofits

Early on in this project we conducted a 90 minute focus group of seven nonprofit organization directors in late 2003. In addition, six monthly one-hour meetings of the core group added to the existing data by providing an array of nonprofit interpretations of the data we were receiving through the surveys and interviews described below.

The initial 2003 focus group was organized to test the viability of a research project focused around the research and data needs of nonprofit organizations. At the time, we did not know if this was an important issue to many organizations, and we did not know the dimensions of the issue (how diverse the data and research needs might be, what related issues might be, etc.). The focus group helped establish the outlines of the research project, and also provided data that is incorporated into the analysis below.

2. Survey of nonprofits

We created a list of small to medium-size nonprofit organizations in the three-county Toledo metropolitan area using a list from the University of Toledo Urban Affairs Center and another

[2] Joah G. Iannotta and Jane L. Ross. 2004. *Equality of Opportunity and the Importance of Place: Summary of a Workshop*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences. http://www.nap.edu/books/0309084679/html/

[3] For more on participatory research, see Randy Stoecker. 1999. "Are Academics Irrelevant?" Roles for Scholars in Participatory Research." *American Behavioral Scientist* 42:840-854. Also see Peter Park, Mary Brydon-Miller, Budd Hall, and Ted Jackson (eds.) 1993. *Voices of Change: Participatory Research in the United States and Canada.* Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey.

source. After eliminating large nonprofits with 100 or more employees, and combining nonprofit programs managed under a single sponsor, we had a list of 432 nonprofit organizations. Five requested to be removed from the study, and eight could not be contacted, leaving the final survey pool of 419 organizations.

We used multiple methods to attempt to increase the response rate. For those organizations with e-mail addresses, we sent an e-mail invitation to participate in the survey, with a Microsoft Word version of the survey attached, as well as brief instructions for how to complete a web survey. 153 organizations had listed e-mail addresses, but 27 of those addresses bounced, and three organizations requested to be removed from the study, leaving an e-mail accessible pool of 123 organizations.

We contacted another 83 organizations by fax (including 22 organizations whose e-mail addresses had bounced), of which 62 were successfully sent.

Of the 21 organizations not accessible by either means, 13 could be contacted by phone and were added to the postal survey. We used postal mail to send paper surveys with postage-paid reply envelopes to 234 organizations, also offering them the option to complete the survey on the web.[4]

We sent two follow-up e-mails to the e-mail pool, and two follow-up postal mailings to both the fax and the postal mail pools.

We received 33 surveys via the web form, 8 via fax, 12 via e-mail, and 27 via postal mail. We suspect, but cannot be certain, that most if not all of the web and e-mail surveys were returned from organizations contacted via e-mail. The total response was 80 organizations—a response rate of 19%. This is an acceptable response rate given that the survey took 15 minutes to complete.[5] The survey is included in Appendix C.

3. In-depth interviews with local funders

It was important to know not just the data and information needs of nonprofits, but also the expectations of funders. Funders often evaluate both grant applicants and grant recipients on the

[4] Using different survey mediums does not seem to produce different response distributions except around questions concerning information technology, where it may even increase the overall response by appealing to different respondent preferences. See Mathew Parackal, 2000, Internet-Based & Mail Survey: A Hybrid Probabilistic Survey Approach, http://ausweb.scu.edu.au/aw03/papers/parackal/paper.html; and Gi Woong Yun, 2000, Comparative Response to a Survey Executed by Post, E-mail, & Web Form, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol6/issue1/yun.html.

[5] Low response rates are increasingly common in the survey industry. See Kim Sheehan, 2001, E-mail Survey Response Rates: A Review, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol6/issue2/sheehan.html. But low response rates should still provide accurate data when the demographic characteristics of the respondents are roughly representative of the population in general, which they are in this case. See Neset Hikmet and Shaw K. Chen. 2003. An investigation into low mail survey response rates of information technology users in health care organizations. International Journal of Medical Informatics. Volume 72: 29-34.

basis of the information they provide in grant applications or project reports. We therefore wanted to know what kinds of information and data funders expected from both applicants and recipients, and how satisfied they were with the information nonprofits provided.

To address these questions, we interviewed seven funders of Toledo area nonprofits. Four funders were private and three were government-based. Three of the funders made grants to community development corporations (CDCs), which comprised a particular focus of this research.

Each interview lasted an average of 45 minutes. Following each interview, a transcript was returned back to the interview participant for their editing, following the principles of participatory research. The edited transcripts were then incorporated into the report.

Analysis—Survey of Nonprofits

1. *Do the survey respondents reflect the Toledo nonprofit scene?*

While we attempted to get a strong representation of organizations focused on neighborhood development, we also wanted a broad cross-section of the Toledo area's nonprofit organizations. Table 1.1 shows that we achieved that broad cross-section. The heaviest concentration of organizations was in the area of youth services and programming, with more than a quarter of the organizations reporting. The second strongest area, however, was in neighborhood development, with nearly a quarter organizations, followed closely by organizations reporting that they provided housing or homeless services. Since we did not ask organizations to identify themselves, we do not know if all the CDCs returned surveys, but based on their self-identification of services provided, we believe all or nearly of the CDCs in the area responded.

Table 1.1: Types of Nonprofits Responding

Type	*Number Reporting*
Youth related, i.e. mentorship or skill development	25
Neighborhood development or community building	18
Housing or homeless services	16
Education, including GED or ESL	15
Food storage or distribution	15
Mental health	12
Drug or alcohol addiction prevention and recovery	12
Social justice advocacy, political causes	12
Culture, race, or ethnicity specific	10
Arts, ballet, theater or music related	8
Family transitions, i.e. adoption, foster care or divorce	7
Emergency relief services, i.e. crime victim support	7
Seniors*	7
Disability services, i.e. home repairs or accessibility	6
Legal services	6
Religious*	6
Medical or reproductive services	5
Nature or environmental efforts	3

*indicates write-in responses not included in original categories

Looking at the other categories, the core group estimated that the distribution of organizations responding to the survey more or less corresponds to the distribution of those types of organizations in the Toledo area, making the survey results generally representative of the region's nonprofit industry. To the extent that neighborhood-based organizations are over-represented in the survey, that is by design, given our concern with understanding the needs for geographically-focused data. The drawback of collecting data on such a broad cross-section of organizations, however, is that there are too few groups in any single category to allow for careful comparisons.

Another way to see the range of organizations responding to the survey is to look at the human populations that they serve. While some organizations also serve companion animals, service animals, or wildlife, they were asked to estimate the class composition of the people they interacted with through their programming. As one would expect, the average organization focused the majority of its efforts on people below the poverty line, shown in Table 1.2. It is important to note, however, that half of the organizations report that 50% or less of their client/participant population is poor, and 48 organizations report working with the middle class. This again reflects the diversity of nonprofits in the Toledo area.

Table 1.2: Class Distribution of Program Clients/Participants

Class category	*Average percent*
Below the poverty line	52%
Working or lower class	26%
Middle class	15%
Upper class	3%

A final way to look at the range of organizations responding to the survey is by the diversity of funding sources they tap. The responding organizations access all the possible funding sources, as Table 3 shows. Again the proportions are about what the core group expected, with fewer organizations receiving money from federations (United Way, Community Shares, or similar workplace fundraising groups) and corporate sources outside of the Toledo area. The number of organizations receiving grants from foundations outside of Toledo also shows that we were able to get responses from mid-size nonprofits who are more likely to know of and be selected for such grants.

Table 1.3: Revenue Sources of Responding Nonprofits

Type	*Number Reporting*
Individual donations	67
Private foundation grants *within* the Toledo area	41
Private foundation grants *outside* the Toledo area	36
Corporate donations *within* the Toledo area	35
Federal monies	33
County monies	31
State monies	29
City monies	21
Corporate donations *outside* the Toledo area	16
Tax Levies	12
Federation membership	11
Fees*	6
Churches*	5

*indicates write-in responses not included in original categories

These distributions provide confidence that the responding nonprofits are generally representative of the diversity of nonprofits in the Toledo area.

2. What kinds of information do Toledo area nonprofits collect?

Relatively few organizations collect data at the neighborhood level.

Community development organizations suffer some of the greatest information hardships.

Toledo area nonprofits collect data across many levels of analysis. It is interesting to note, however, that relatively few organizations collect data at the neighborhood level. In fact, organizations are more likely to collect data at the city and county level than at the neighborhood level, as Table 2.1 shows. Furthermore, 9 of the 23 organizations collecting information at the neighborhood level are those engaged in neighborhood development and community building activities. Both the nonprofit focus group participants and funders noted that neighborhood development requires comprehensive data from a variety of sources, including social service agencies who track some of the social ills with which community underdevelopment is associated. Given the lack of data collected at the neighborhood level, community development organizations will suffer some of the greatest information hardships.

Table 2.1: Level of Analysis at Which Nonprofits Collect Data

Level of Analysis	*Number reporting*
Individual level, i.e. children, youth or adults	72
Family level	44
Neighborhood/community level	23
City level	29
County level	28
Regional level, i.e. Northwest Ohio	19
State level	14
National level	9

The lack of data collection at the neighborhood level is probably due to the fact that it is relatively easy to collect data from individuals and families. In addition, we suspect that a number of nonprofits interpreted the meaning of "collect" broadly, and there is much data already available at the city and county levels that organizations can access and use. And while an organization will likely request a client or program participant to list their city, they will not ask them to indicate which neighborhood they reside in. And while such information could be entered based on street address, that is a time consuming task outside of the capacity of most nonprofits. Census tract and zip code-level data used by some groups poorly approximates neighborhood boundaries.

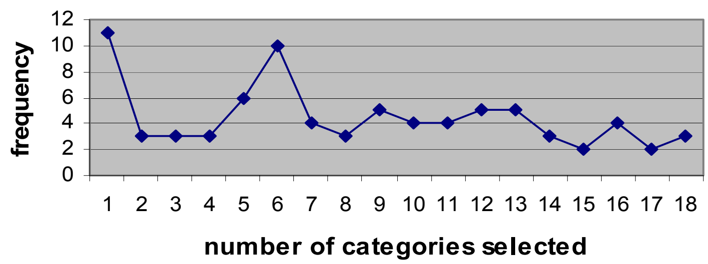
Table 2.2 Topics on which Nonprofits Collect Data

Topic	*Number Reporting*
Age	61
Sex	59
Race/ethnicity	52
Street/neighborhood-level address data	45
Family characteristics	35
Previous program participant	35
Employment status	34
Physical health conditions or disabilities	33
Education level	32
Client contact with other organizations	28
Mental health conditions	26
Funding resources	25
Transportation needs	22
Native or non-native English speaker	21
Criminal record	19
School system for children	17
Religious affiliation	15
Drug/alcohol treatment	13
Leadership skill	6

Toledo area nonprofits also collect data on a wide variety of topics. Table 2.2 shows just how wide the topics are. Approximately three quarters of the organizations collect basic demographic data. In addition, over half collect some neighborhood level data, though we suspect that most of the respondents interpreted this question as asking whether they collected address information from clients and participants. Beyond that, however, there is no standard data collection pattern. This makes it difficult for organizations to share data and, as we will see, data sharing among the groups is in fact limited. The lack of organizations that collect data on leadership skill points to another information gap for CDCs, who need such information to build strong resident participation in neighborhood development activities.

There is also wide variation in the number of categories for which organizations collect data, reflecting a nearly flat curve, shown in Graph 2.1. The graph shows how many organizations say they collect data for only one of the categories listed in Table 2.2, or for two categories, or three categories, up to those organizations which collect data on 18 of the 19 categories of information in Table 2.2. No organization collected information on all 19. Half of the organizations collected data in seven or fewer categories. Most interesting, the most common response was to collect data in only one category, which is true of 11 organizations.

Graph 2.1: Number of categories for which Organizations Collect Data



3. How do Toledo area nonprofits handle information?

One of our main concerns in understanding nonprofit data and research needs is how they handle the data that they currently collect. The picture that emerged from the survey is that nonprofits spend enormous person-hours collecting data that is seldom used. The average nonprofit organization has 5 employees and 4 volunteers who have some involvement with data collection, entry, and storage on a day to day basis. Combined, those 9 people spend 56 hours per week, over six hours per person, on data management. That is more than a full-time position just for data management. And while it may seem like a lot of time, remember all the possible kinds of information collection and management involved in nonprofit

The average nonprofit organization has nine people spending 56 hours total per week on data management.

Table 3.1: How Nonprofits Store Data

Method of data storage	*Percent stored using method*
Saved in paper files	61%
Saved on floppy disk	13%
Saved on computer hard drive	38%
Saved on a server	28%
Saved in e-mail accounts	3%
Saved in backup electronic storage	30%

management, from logging phone calls to managing budgets to tracking client contact hours. So, given that most of the staff in a nonprofit are collecting data on clients or program participants, the lack of a standard system for data management could create information chaos.

And Toledo nonprofits have piles and piles of data. As Table 3.1 shows, 71 of the 80 organizations store data more than three years. On average, 61% of the data is saved in paper files, likely creating both space and data recovery issues for many nonprofits. Data in paper form cannot be easily databased or analyzed.

On the other hand, it's a good thing all that paper is kept because the table also shows that well less than half of the organizations use any kind of electronic backup. And while we did not ask nonprofits whether they had firewalls or up-to-date anti-virus software protecting sensitive data on hard drives and servers, if Toledo nonprofits are typical they likely do not.[6] In addition, 28 of the 80 responding organizations indicated they had lost data due to document misfiling or computer-related problems. That figure is not as high as we had feared, but higher than it should be.

61% of nonprofit data is saved in paper files.

Only 30% of the data has an electronic backup

That data also accumulates from former employees. As Table 3.2 shows, when an employee leaves a position, their data, both paper and electronic, is left where it is or handed off to their successor. Only tiny fractions are deleted or archived. We do not know how much of this data is presented to successors in an organized and understandable way, or whether new employees start from scratch, with their own data filing system.

Table 3.2:

How Former Employee Data is Handled

Method	*Number using method for paper data*	*Number using method for electronic data*
Left in the employee's area or computer	67	21
Discarded, deleted, or destroyed	41	16
Photocopied or put on disks/CD-ROMs	36	12
Given to the employee's successor	35	11
Made accessible to employee's supervisor	33	6
Made accessible department-wide	31	5
Transferred to organization archives	29	5

Perhaps an indication that the data is not transferred in the most useful way can be gleaned from the survey responses on the question of how much organizations actually used the data that they collect. Table 3.3 shows that Toledo area nonprofits do not make much use of all that data that they spend so much time collecting and managing. If we take the data presented earlier, in Table 2.2, and add a column showing how many organizations actually use the data they collect, we can see that, in most cases, less than two-thirds of the organizations use the data that they collect

[6] NPower Michigan (http://www.npowermichigan.org/index.htm, which provides information technology support and services to nonprofit organizations, hosts regular anti-virus vaccination days, as they have found that nonprofit computers often lack adequate anti-virus or other security protection.

in any one category. It could be argued that two-thirds is actually pretty high usage, but if we go back to the finding that the organizations are spending an average of 56 hours a week managing data, then more than 18 hours a week is wasted effort, adding up to 970 wasted hours in a year. The focus group identified funder-driven data collection as an important issue. Some of this wasted data collection is likely the result of funding source requirements. Some may also be due to legal requirements, and it is also possible that some nonprofits have developed inefficient data collection habits over the years as well.

Table 3.3
Topics for which Nonprofits Collect, Use, and Need Data

Topic	*Number Collecting data*	*Number Using data*	*Number Needing data*
Age	61	41	10
Sex	59	39	8
Race/ethnicity	52	34	12
Street/neighborhood-level address data	45	30	10
Family characteristics	35	20	13
Previous program participant	35	23	9
Employment status	34	20 (26)*	9
Physical health conditions or disabilities	33	21 (24)*	9
Education level	32	19	7
Client contact with other organizations	28	17	11
Mental health conditions	26	14 (17)*	6
Funding resources	25	15 (18)*	19
Transportation needs	22	17	11
Native or non-native English speaker	21	12	8
Criminal record	19	10 (13)*	7
School system for children	17	14	10
Religious affiliation	15	10	3
Drug/alcohol treatment	13	7	10
Leadership skill	6	3	7

*numbers in parentheses indicate organizations that use data beyond those that also collect it

As some of the earlier survey results have intimated, not only does a lot of data go unused by the organizations themselves, it is not widely shared among organizations. Taking just a raw average, any single nonprofit shares information with only seven other organizations. But that figure is inflated by the inclusion of two organizations who said they shared data with more than 100 other groups. If we remove them from the calculation, the average falls to just four other groups that each organization shares data with. This may also be overstated if the groups interpreted the question as asking about receiving data from others as well as providing their data to others. Eighteen organizations, nearly a quarter of the total, share data with no one. Thirty-nine organizations, nearly half of the total, share data with two or fewer organizations. This may be partly a consequence of limited collaborations among Toledo nonprofits. But it is probably also likely due to a lack of standard data collection that would make data sharing easy. The focus group participants noted that variations in funding often cause their data collection processes to

On average, each organization shares data with only four other groups.

be inconsistent, and realize that makes the data unreliable and thus less worth sharing.

Most puzzling are the results for the question asking nonprofits to indicate the categories in Table 3.3 for which they needed information. We suspect that the question was interpreted differently than we meant it, as a number of organizations who indicated that they collect data in a category also said they needed data in that category. But if that was a common interpretation of the question, the results are more troubling, as very few organizations indicated a need for any category of information. Fewer than a quarter of the organizations indicated a need for data in any category, with the greatest need being expressed for funding data (by 19 organizations). This finding is consistent with the data on lack of use. While collecting data may be required by funders and the law, using it is often a higher order activity available only to those groups not already completely overstretched just doing their work.

The question is whether the lack of perceived need for data indicates that it is not important to the work of nonprofits or reveals a lack of knowledge about the roles of data in nonprofit work. We suspect it is the latter. As we will see next, the nonprofits do indicate a need for increasing their data and information capacity. Later in this report, we will discuss what funders have to say about the data and information needs of Toledo area nonprofits.

4. The Need for Increased Information Capacity among Toledo Area Nonprofits

Table 4.1:
Nonprofit Training and Education Needs

Training Topic	*Number Indicating a Need*
Education on program evaluation	59
Funding	56
Training on computer programs or software	55
Training on spreadsheets	47
Education on research methods	47
Community-wide database for a tracking system	44
Education on statistical analysis	39
Training on GIS (geographic information systems)	35
Training on accounting/budget management	35
Data confidentiality and security	31
Training on legislation, such as HIPAA (privacy laws)	28
Pending legislation	28

The survey also focused on the nonprofits' information and data strategy needs. One of the ways to judge those needs is by the number of organizations who report that they are required to conduct evaluations for funders. Nearly half, 36, are required by funders to conduct evaluations of their programs to receive continued funding. But there is more going on here than simply meeting a funder requirement. In fact, 49 of the 80 respondents indicated that they conduct annual evaluations, and another 19 conduct semi-annual evaluations. However, 23 organizations indicated that they do not conduct *formal* evaluations, leading us to believe that at least some of the 68 organizations saying they evaluate their work, do so in only a cursory fashion. On the other hand, 24 organizations use outside consultants in their evaluations—a surprisingly high number and an expensive proposition for a small to medium size nonprofit. We must keep in mind, however, that number may not reflect the Toledo area nonprofit industry in general, as we suspect that the nonprofits responding to the survey may be

Nearly half of the organizations have no staff or volunteers with formal training in research.

those who are already attuned to some of the issues of data collection and analysis.

Nearly half of the nonprofits are required by funders to conduct evaluations. Nearly two-thirds conduct regular evaluations regardless.

If we move beyond evaluation to the overall research and data management skills of nonprofit staff, we see more clearly the capacity issues facing the organizations. We asked the organizations to tell us how many staff had training in research at the undergraduate, graduate, or professional level, as well as being self-taught. None of the averages even reached one staff person. Nearly half, 38 organizations, have no staff or volunteers with formal research methods training. Of the remainder, most indicate having one or two people with research training. And remember, the average nonprofit organization in this survey has 9 people spending a total of 56 hours per week on data management.

The nonprofit focus group prepared us to find a strong need for research and data capacity enhancement, and the survey confirms what they told us. Table 4.1 shows that, when asked about their information and data needs wish list, at least one-third of the organizations responded affirmatively to every choice on the list. More than half indicated a need for training in program evaluation, funding, computer programs in general, spreadsheets, research methods, and a tracking database. Just under half indicated a need for training in statistical analysis, geographic information systems analysis, and accounting and budget management. There is important overlap between this list and a list of research and training needs compiled through the funder interviews and the nonprofit focus group, listed in Appendix B.

Funder Interviews

As uncomfortable as the relationships between funders and nonprofits often are, the two are nonetheless inextricably intertwined. Thus, we also wanted to find out as much as possible about the ways that funders thought about the data and information needs and practices of nonprofits. What is most striking from the interviews is how they echo and complement much of what the nonprofits say about their research and data needs. It may be reassuring to the nonprofits to know that funders are also struggling with how to best gather and manage data to make funding decisions with maximal impact. But funders also have a unique perspective borne of their contact with many nonprofits. Because there are relatively few significant funders of nonprofit organizations in Toledo, we were able to speak one-on-one with many of them. Their words will express better than ours the perspective they have on the research and data needs of Toledo area nonprofits.

1. On the Front End: Information Expectations for Grant Proposals

Funders have two main concerns in deciding how to distribute their funds. First, they want to target funds to the areas of greatest need. Second, they want to give funds to programs that will have the greatest impact. Of course, the question is how to determine what needs are the greatest and predict what programs will have the most impact. There is quite a diversity of perspectives on how to accomplish those two objectives.

On Needs Assessments

On the question of determining what the greatest needs are, there are two basic approaches. Some of the funders are strongly focused on conducting their own needs assessment research, or drawing on the research of others, to determine needs. This is partly because they understand how resource-stretched the nonprofits are already.

> "We're not asking the agencies to identify the need. They shouldn't have to do that. When I was an agency director I was so tunnel focused, and so short on resources, I did not have a big world perspective. I don't think we should ask agencies to expend resources to provide us with data."

A number of funders also have experience with nonprofits attempting to provide their own needs assessment research. In many cases, however, that research is not as helpful as it could be.

> "We look for the data in the problem statement, and not just national numbers but local conditions. We are moderately satisfied by the data they present. Sometimes they use needs assessment data."

> "They have not done very well when they have previously been asked to provide needs assessments to justify their funding request. Most of the information has been anecdotal. Part of the problem may have been we did not properly phrase our request. While we ask how many people are to be served, we don't know what the overall need is and what percent of that need the agency is serving."

On Data Collection

Recall that the survey showed that nonprofits focus much of their data collection energy on collecting demographic information from clients or program participants. Funders seem to agree that agencies are good at providing client demographic data. But they see nonprofits having difficulty going beyond that basic information. In some cases, the challenges of getting good information from nonprofits on needs extends to using available data, such as from the census.

> "One of the biggest problems they (nonprofits) have is getting really good numbers. They give you the whole census page, but they can't get the baseline

against which they will benchmark."

"The CDCs have a difficult time providing accurate information regarding their service areas because the CDC boundaries don't always match the census tract boundaries and the CDCs don't always retrieve the data at the block group level--they use census tracts as the basis of their information."

For those who do look to nonprofits to provide information justifying the need, there is wide variation in the level of their expectations. For some,

"We don't have a hard and fast requirement for information from grantseekers. We don't want to put everyone in the same box. They are all different and I like the fact that we have the ability to have nonprofits speak to us."

"I don't think we should give out that money just on a whim. I believe we should prioritize on needs. But we need a small pot that is more flexible."

Others, such as one funder discussing CDCs in the first quote, and another discussing nonprofits in general, are more specific in their expectations of the needs information provided by applicants:

"For operating support, we need them to provide census data and information about trends, and what they expect to happen. For projects, we look for marketing and outcome data. You want to do a project, what kind of lasting shift can you make? How much community involvement did you have? How did you pick a building? We need to think more transformationally."

"On the front end, it's really difficult [to keep funding someone] if they haven't demonstrated outcomes. When we had a lot of money to give out, we were more willing to try things. Now that funding is tighter, were much more interested in funding people who can demonstrate they can accomplish things. You get bonus points if it's a promising approach or best practice. We don't fund things that are based on ideas thought up in someone's office."

Regardless of whether funders have strict or loose information requirements for grant applications, however, they see a need for better information to better target programs.

"A good 50% hit the mark [of providing good information on their applications]. The remaining 50% are all over the map. Of the top 50%, only some really hit the mark."

"I sat on a funders' panel…. They were all continuation grants. And the information we got out of them was junk. And they all used different statistics to show the need."

"We met with some people in the community the other day who were going for a

> federal grant…. They wanted us to support their proposal. But our data showed there's a glut of [service providers in that area] already…. They had used labor market index data. "

On the Need for Theoretical Thinking

And the funders are looking for more than data. One of the unexpected findings in this research is how many funders are looking for nonprofits to think more theoretically about their work—considering the relationships between their models, strategies, and context.

> "There are two different data needs—statistical information and then the more subjective prose of telling us why [something does or does not work] and then putting a rational deductive argument behind that. It is amazing how apparent it can be that the organization hasn't articulated to themselves what they're doing."

That "subjective prose," however, needs to go beyond anecdotes. In many cases funders are looking for organizations to integrate careful research regarding the need with theories and models for addressing that need.

> "Additionally, many agencies don't look at how one problem relates to any other problem. And the applications don't address such issues. One agency had a need identified in 1984, but did not say why that is still needed today…. This year we asked about any program changes and program lessons. Most of the program changes were based upon anecdotal stories, not quantifiable information. When we ask them to look at outcomes they often could not make the connections to the theoretical."

And they are not talking about up in the clouds navel-gazing kinds of theory. For the funders, theory is quite practical as it helps inform strategy.

> "The front end [of application information] and back end [of evaluation information] go hand in glove. Some folks are able to articulate the why's of the program and how they know if they've succeeded. … We like groups to go beyond the numbers not just in a theoretical sense but also because it lets us do other things."

> "We're really not getting data on what they do. The providers will all describe using the same strategy, but are getting very different outcomes. We have one provider with an 80% success rate and another with a 5% success rate. So either they are not all doing the same thing, or it is a function of personnel, or something…. Grasping the relationship between cause and effect is something we're missing."

Among the "other things" good theoretical thinking allows is the development of better intervention strategy.

> "There is a theoretical framework you need to articulate. To ask programs that have been funded for 80 years to discuss their theory is seen as blasphemous…. In one example, a community looked at their immunization rates [for childhood illnesses]. They formed a committee, raised some money, and decided "parents don't know how important this is." That was their theory. So they spent all this money on advertising and a year later there was no change in the immunization rates. So they looked at their theory. Then they looked at their clinic hours and changed them and the immunization rate went up."

Funders are well aware, however, of what a luxury this desire for greater theoretical integration is:

> "At a meeting of foundation directors in another city, one CEO noted that "we as funders have the luxury of being paid to think", in essence recognizing that there are practical limitations on how much time we can expect the nonprofit executive to devote to theory when they are busy making sure they can deliver services to people on a day to day basis."

Consequently, many funders attempt to fill the research and theory gap themselves, hoping that their work will help enhance the capacity of low-resourced groups with good ideas—what are termed "diamonds in the rough."

> "Groups that don't have development staff have the most difficulty. Groups that submit for the first time, that's when they struggle, and that includes a lot of the grass roots organizations. Even in large organizations, when there is turnover, they have problems, but that is the exception. But just because grassroots organizations are not as sophisticated, we still listen. That's where it's connected to staff time. There are good proposals from bad organizations and vice versa. Our own research looks for those diamonds in the rough."

> "We do site visits because some people write better than others. A proposal that may not be written that well, once we go see what they are planning to do, we like it. We look for those diamonds in the rough."

And just like the nonprofits, the funders reach their limits of capacity and expertise as well, particularly when they are funding a variety of organizations. Even when they are doing their own needs assessments, they sometimes find it impossible to get good local information. It is often even more challenging to help fill in the gaps in needs information from the organizations they fund.

> "If they can document or substantiate [the need] through any available data it helps to make our work easier in terms of the grant review process—it makes our job easier in not having to verify it. We want to hear the problem but then verify that it is a problem. We would have to have our research staff get information

> about the problem. Someone might say that all the kids need sneakers but we don't know if that is true or if anyone else is already providing sneakers. We come in with an open mind but at some point we run out of labor. So we try to verify what they tell us as best we can. One of the other things is that, because of the nature of what we do, we are generalists here, so there's no way we could hold all the expertise we need. We don't go back to applicants to ask them for more information. It would be too difficult to do that with everyone and if we only did that with one applicant then what would we do with the others?"

> "In terms of reviewing grant proposals - We do what we call research but it wouldn't stand up to the test of scientific research. We usually sit down with a grant applicant because there are questions that can't be answered in the context of a proposal. And we can't be experts in all fields. We might be on the phone with someone who has expertise in areas that we don't. We try to keep a cadre of folks out in the community to inform us."

Funders, as we can see, face many of the same information issues as nonprofit organizations. They lack good needs assessment information. They lack time, and in some cases the necessary expertise, to conduct their own research. And they lack opportunities to discuss the theoretical issues involved in community development and service delivery with the agencies that they fund, which seems every bit as fundamental as the more data-driven information issues.

2. On the Back End: Information Expectations for Evaluation and Assessment

Improving Evaluation

After grants are given out, the next set of information issues facing funders is determining whether those grants had any impact. In many ways, the demand by funders for good evaluation is as much for funders to assess their own grant-making impact as it is determining whether any individual organization is fund-worthy. And it is often as challenging for the funders to come up with criteria to evaluate their grant-making as it is for nonprofits to evaluate their programming.

> "One of the things I am trying to do is communicate the results of our grants to our board members. Right now we have the groups answer a set of questions. I think our questions may need some work. It's not all on their side."

Both government and private funders recognize the need to better understand what they mean by evaluation and find ways to facilitate good evaluation and assessment research. For some this involves better training and even some templates:

> "We need training of our own staff to better understand the location of appropriate data and the data itself, as well as training for the agencies and their boards."

> "We're working on asking for 'did you accomplish what you said you were going to do.' We know their numbers of how many people they reached… I would like some written tools, some evaluation tools, just for some checks and balances. I do have to have some evaluation. I would like both a pre and post tool."

For others it involves better communication among funders, and perhaps with nonprofits too:

> "One barrier to good outcome measurement is if funders aren't requiring the same things. A program that we think has good outcomes was criticized by another funder that was looking for different outcome measures. Lots of funders now require outcome evaluations, but they give the outcomes to be achieved. We say come up with your own outcomes."

> "We have talked about a common reporting form for CDCs. It's never gotten very far because everyone wants something different. But now there might be energy for a common reporting form."

And, just like for needs assessment, funders recognize how stretched most nonprofits are. In fact, many funders also lack the staff capacity to assist groups in the evaluation process.

> "We attempt to assure that there will be an evaluation. Again, the groups are all over the map…. Evaluation and monitoring tend to be where we have the most difficulty. We spend a lot of time up-front before the money goes out. But we lack staff time to make sure the evaluation happens the way it is supposed to. Evaluation tends to be the thing that falls off the screen."

From Outputs to Outcomes

The question of evaluation is also becoming more complex as concepts like "logic models" and "outcome evaluation" become more widely known in the Toledo funder and nonprofit worlds.[7] Both are controversial ideas, because they require fairly dramatic changes in how organizations think about their work. One of the most important changes is the movement away from counting *outputs*—counting the amount of activity a group engages in such as the number of houses built for a CDC or the number of clients counseled for a service agency—to *outcomes*—an actual documentable (and, for some, quantifiable) change in some target measure such as increases in homeownership rates or reductions in drug abuse rates. Add to the mix that now we are also talking about trying to measure *impact*—longer time changes less directly tied to the activity itself—and it is easy to see how the research burden for evaluation could be substantial.

If the nonprofits could just blame funders for foisting this outcome evaluation model on them, at least there would be a clear target. But even the funders understand there are methodological and political issues that accompany this shift.

[7] See W.K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide, 2001, http://www.wkkf.org/Programming/ResourceOverview.aspx?CID=281&ID=3669. Also see United Way Outcome Measurement Resource Network, http://national.unitedway.org/outcomes/.

> "It [good information from groups] starts with us understanding what we're funding. There are some projects that don't lend themselves to outcome measurement... Anecdotes are useful to an extent because it helps communicate the human condition of an issue, but it's not the be-all and end-all. We still need to measure outcomes [as distinct from outputs]. When the rubber hits the road, outcomes need to be measured."

> "It's been easier to measure output. [But] It's harder to say what we know demonstrably. We've all learned to speak in proxies about outcomes. Most of us haven't had much pressure or time to go beyond that…. This question of outcome measures is seductive. Then there are the politics of outputs measures and how funders interpret them."

Finding ways to support organizations to use outcome evaluation, however, brings with it a wave of challenges. First is understanding the difference between outputs, outcomes, and impacts. One funder estimates that "probably 60% of the groups confuse outputs and outcomes." Even those who can make the technical distinction, however, have problems implementing the method.

> "Often organizations have difficulty identifying the appropriate kinds and number of outputs. They give us inaccurate measurement tools for specific objectives…. Some organizations had difficulty in defining specific objectives and quantifiable outcomes. They were either too ambiguous or did not appropriately match their objectives with quantifiable outputs/outcomes or appropriate outputs/outcomes. Their methods of evaluation were convoluted."

> "The catch-22 for us as a funder is that organizations say 'this is our first year measuring this because we don't have benchmark data.' Then the second year they say 'we changed what we're measuring because the original measures didn't work.' You don't want them to stick with something that doesn't work but you also need consistent measures."

> "People don't know how to evaluate the statistical significance of their programs. We don't know, if you did nothing, what would happen. We can't say that in most of the things we do. We need control group research, but neighborhood agencies can't turn people away and assign them to a control group. But we need some kind of comparative data. As local funders, we don't look for that level of sophistication, but at the federal level you often need to do that."

There are important reasons to show a program's effect on outcomes, however. Some of those are officially political, particularly if there are tax dollars being invested. But there are also unofficial politics at play, as more and more donors start demanding evidence that their contributions are making a difference. In either case,

> "Groups need to do comparisons over time, to show that the investment has been

> well spent. River East can show cause and effect, showing how property tax and sales tax changes. They talk about how much additional sales tax revenue the Docks has created, for example…. The ability to translate is important to the groups. They need to show value so that it becomes personal. The standards are 'so what; who cares; how does it effect me?'"

> "There's a growing body of donors that want to see outcomes. A large percentage of organizations were just going through the motions three years ago, but that percentage has shrunk. There are still those who state publicly that the donor isn't interested in outcomes, but they are getting fewer."

Addressing Capacity Issues

Designing and conducting outcome evaluations, particularly for organizations that operate beyond an individual level (where changes in collective measures, such as crime rates, measured over a geographic area, are important) are extremely complicated processes. They often require sophisticated triangulation models[8] and time-consuming original data collection. In addition, as focus group participants noted, it is often very difficult to determine whether a change in an outcome variable is a consequence of the planned intervention or some other variable, sometimes requiring detailed and sophisticated analysis. For organizations focusing on individuals, as one funder stated, it may be possible to conduct outcome research without adding staff as long as they are appropriately trained. It may also be possible, if an organization can stop wasting 18 of those 56 hours a week collecting data that is never used, to put that time to use in an outcome evaluation process. But funders generally recognize that capacity is a problem.

> "It's a lot of work to do the kind of evaluation that funders want now. I'm worried that gets layered on to all of the work they already do. I don't know if it's money for staff, or training, or more that's needed."

There are also organizational development issues that must be resolved before good evaluation research can be undertaken in many nonprofit organizations:

> "Program heads say "we can't make this work if we can't get the service level people to do it as well." It requires persistence and board endorsement. But some programs lack the computer skills--that whole education piece. It sounds overwhelming, this idea of outcome measurement."

Allies in Evaluation

Funders generally recognize that they are seen as bludgeoning organizations with this evaluation emphasis. But what bothers them the most is the lack of trust between funders and funded, and

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[8] Triangulation involves using more than one method to measure something, often because all the measures are less than optimal. See J. Brewer and A. Hunter. 1989. *Multimethod research: A synthesis of styles*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

one of the main reasons is because the lack of trust inhibits the communication of good information about what works and what doesn't work. Funders are every bit as committed as front-line service providers to doing what works, and see evaluation as a way to help figure out what works. But that means that organizations need to be honest about what doesn't work.

> "Some agencies have integrated outcome measurement into how they do business. One organization used the information from their outcomes measurement to change their curriculum. It's more important for you to show us you are using this data to improve your programs than to show outcomes. But we want to get to the point of being able to show outcomes."

The private foundations also approach social issues with the same entrepreneurial spirit as small community organizations, willing to try new things and go beyond "best practices" to new ideas. And interestingly, one of the things that holds them back from supporting even greater creativity is a lack of information about whether those new, bold, creative strategies work.

> "The beauty of a foundation is that we can make grants that are risky. Government and industry won't do that. The flip side is that hasn't been adequately communicated to the nonprofit community that it's OK to take a risk. They have this fear that if they say something didn't work, we won't fund them again. You almost have to force your hand to say that something failed. The bottom line is we want them to address what they said they were going to do in their proposal. We leave that door open to let the organization tell us what that means. It's not a statistical checklist—how did you do it, did it work, and what did you learn? It would be nice if they would say whether 'everybody should do this" or "for the bang for the buck, this is dumb.'"

Of course, they also recognize that overcoming the lack of trust among funded organizations is extremely difficult, because the risk is that saying something doesn't work could translate into less funding. The fear of losing funding by revealing what doesn't work was one of the biggest barriers to good evaluation discussed in the nonprofit focus group. Breaking through this barrier is difficult, but important.

> "We want the good, the bad, and the ugly, and we want to work with you. I'm not sure the trust is there to make that happen. Unfortunately, the grantor/grantee relationship is inherently unequal because one has the money and the other doesn't. It's a tough balance, and a challenge to work together as true colleagues when there's always the fear that what one says or does might result in fewer dollars for your organization."

Next Steps for Nonprofit Research Support

Three things stand out in this research.

1. There are many data and research needs that neither the nonprofits nor funders have the

capacity to fill.

Toledo is often seen as lagging behind in all kinds of areas, including the community and nonprofit sector. Using research to access and use resources is one of those areas. While there are some strides being made in some areas, such as the Homeless Management Information System, and the Data Evaluation Network, there are still many opportunities to do more. Toledo lags well behind in the development of a broad community indicators[9] research project, particularly one that can measure change at the neighborhood level. Such a neighborhood-based community indicators research project would go a long way toward supporting the needs of both funders and organizations for good outcome data. But such a labor-intensive project, requiring a great deal of original data collection, is beyond the current capacity of both the funders and the nonprofits. And in addition to providing good evaluation data, such a project would also help Toledo nonprofits better compete nationally for dollars they currently remain largely shut out of.

2. There is a strong demand for research training among nonprofits, and in some cases funders, to *better* collect, manage, and analyze the data for which they do have the capacity.

It is clear that there is a lot of inefficient data collection and management occurring in the nonprofit sector in Toledo. This is literally wasted time. And there is also wasted data—collected but never used because there is no extra time. Getting rid of the wasted time and using it to make the most of the existing data could help a lot in nonprofit's grant applications, evaluation practices, and program planning. At least some of this could be corrected by better training. The nonprofits have clearly expressed their training needs. Some of those could be met by the Nonprofit Resource Center, through its information technology training program. But those involving the use of particular research methods or data analysis strategies will likely require expertise from private research firms or universities.

3. There is a need for further discussion around the questions of what kinds of research models and support are needed to establish needs and options on the front end, and outcomes and impacts on the back end of projects.

This project has focused on the first layer of issues surrounding nonprofits' information needs and management. We have found challenges in collecting, managing, and using information. We have found specific training and capacity building needs. The next step is to develop specific strategies to meet those challenges and fill those needs. In order to do that, more work is needed.

First, nonprofits, funders, and potential data providers should be involved in developing a prioritized list of data needs. What databases would be frequently used across a variety of organizations? What needs and assets data would be most frequently used? The nonprofit

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[9] The National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership is a collaborative effort by the Urban Institute and local partners to further the development and use of neighborhood-level information systems in local policymaking and community building. They have manuals on how to develop neighborhood level information systems as well as links to those doing it. http://www.urban.org/nnip/

survey begins to answer those questions, but only in a superficial way, as Table 3.3 illustrates the relative lack of use of data, and the corresponding lack of perceived need. Our belief is that the lack of useful data in general, and the inaccessibility of the data that is useful, has lowered data expectations. When asked in focus group or interview settings, however, nonprofits and funders readily come up with a range of data needs, listed in Appendix B.

Second, non-profits need a better understanding of how to use data. Curricula needs to be developed around the nonprofit data and research training needs. In the realm of training, the nonprofits were much more clear about what they needed, and Table 4.1 shows a well-prioritized list. What is not yet clear is what the scope and schedule of such trainings should be. How in-depth should the training be? Should it be scheduled over a long or short period of time? Here again, nonprofits, funders, and potential training providers should be involved in answering these questions and creating some curricular outlines.

Third, all involved need better knowledge of the research and data practices of other cities. There are a wide variety of community indicators projects, certificate programs in research methods, and other strategies for building the research and data capacity of nonprofits and funders in other places. Knowing what works and does not work in other contexts can help custom-design strategies for the Toledo region.

Fourth, discussions need to occur among funders and nonprofits around some of the inefficiencies and controversies of doing research. Of primary concern is the question of data collection inefficiency. If the average nonprofit is wasting 18 hours a week collecting and managing data that is never used, are there ways to change the data demands of funders, and/or develop the data skills of nonprofits, to reduce that waste? It is important to focus on appropriate and quality use and understanding of the information currently being collected before generating additional data that may just compound the problem of "all this data, but no way or understanding of how to effectively use it." There is also the question of evaluating outputs, outcomes, and impacts. A frank discussion needs to occur among funders and nonprofits about the importance of doing evaluation research, conflicts over who should control the scope and method of such research, the lack of resources for doing such research, and the fears among nonprofits of admitting to failures. In addition, there needs to be broader discussion about evaluation models, particularly empowerment evaluation and participatory evaluation, which better protect organizations against admitting failure because the model actually helps organizations achieve greater success.[10]

Fourth, funders and data providers such as area universities need to provide or leverage resources to support the training, infrastructure building, database development, and other related activities necessary to meet the information challenges and fill the information needs of nonprofits.

[10] See David Fetterman, 2002. *Collaborative, participatory, and empowerment evaluation.* http://www.stanford.edu/~davidf/empowermentevaluation.html; Michael Q. Patton, 1997, *Utilization-focused evaluation: The new century text*, 3e. Thousand Oaks: Sage; Ricardo Millett, 1996. Empowerment evaluation and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. In D. M. Fetterman, S. J. Kaftarian, and A. Wandersman (Eds.) *Empowerment evaluation: knowledge and tools for self-assessment and accountability* (pp. 65-76). Thousand Oaks: Sage; Randy Stoecker. 1999. Making Connections: Community Organizing, Empowerment Planning, and Participatory Research in Participatory Evaluation. Sociological Practice 1:209-232.

Gathering and analyzing original data, especially at the neighborhood level, is a skilled activity that is time and labor intensive.

As a next step toward implementing such data support and training activities, a meeting is being organized for September, 2004, to create specific plans out of this research. Nonprofit, funder, and potential training and research providers are being invited for a half-day planning event. The result will be a planning addendum to this report, which will be used to solicit funds and resources and put the plan into motion.

Appendix A: Core Group Members

The core group members met monthly over a six month period. They were involved in every stage of the research project, from focusing the research questions, designing the nonprofit survey and the funder interview guide, interpreting early research results, revising the draft report, and organizing the final planning event. This project is indebted to them for their participation.

The core group members are:

Carlin Abbott, System Director, Toledo Homeless Management Information System

Morlon Harris, Executive Director, Chance for Change Foundation

Bob Krompak, Executive Director, Ottawa Community Development Corporation

Stephen MacDonald, Associate Director, Youth Opportunities Program, YMCA of Greater Toledo

Sheila Watkins, Executive Director, Northwest Ohio Community Shares

Marci Dvorak, Executive Director, NAMI of Greater Toledo

Anamaria Portillo, Programs Director, Adelante Inc.

Kelly Spivey also served as a graduate student assistant to the project, bringing her experience with Toledo nonprofit organizations and research design and analysis to the project.

Appendix B: Research and Training Needs

Compiled from Funder Interviews and Nonprofit Focus Group

Data Needs

- A city-wide market plan and study for housing.
- Research to help decide the appropriate areas of concentration for future funding.
- An interactive neighborhood database so agencies could find out individual pieces of information about their neighborhoods.
- Neighborhood level demographic data.
- Service overlap data
- Racial/cultural breakdown of who is receiving mental health services, and their language/cultural needs.
- Neighborhood perception data (what people in the community think is happening in the community)
- More complex homelessness data, not just how the number of homeless people are changing, but also how their characteristics are changing.
- Data on number and locations of dilapidated housing units.
- Mental health data for youth.
- A regular community issue census to find out what concerns residents have.
- Neighborhood level issue data, such as teen births by neighborhood rather than just by zip code.

Training Needs

- educating people about the data sources out there would be useful, such as AREIS, census data, etc.
- training in how to do research—how to cull through and find information yourself within the Internet, how to verify there is a problem, and who else is working on it.
- training in the logic model that went beyond the one-day workshop so people would emerge with some actual measures for their projects.
- training on identifying proper outputs, how to measure outputs, and then identify outcomes.
- training in understanding the importance of data and how it fits into nonprofit work.
- Training in how to critically think through what data is needed and then about interpreting it, things like trend data, indicators like foreclosures, free lunches, etc.
- Training in asset mapping and needs analysis. What are the relative costs and benefits of those two approaches?
- Training in data collection from individuals that involves significant security and confidentiality issues (feds) and privacy (HIPAA).

Appendix C: Nonprofit Survey Instrument

2004 Survey of Toledo Non-profits' Research Needs

2004 Survey of Toledo Non-profits' Research Needs

1. Which of the following best describe the type of services provided by the non-profit organization for which you work? *(Please check all that apply.)*
   a. Neighborhood development or community building [ ]
   b. Arts, ballet, theater or music related [ ]
   c. Social justice advocacy, political causes [ ]
   d. Mental health [ ]
   e. Drug or alcohol addiction prevention and recovery [ ]
   f. Housing or homeless services [ ]
   g. Education, including GED or ESL [ ]
   h. Nature or environmental efforts [ ]
   i. Food storage or distribution [ ]
   j. Youth related, i.e. mentorship or skill development [ ]
   k. Disability services, i.e. home repairs or accessibility issues [ ]
   l. Culture, race, or ethnicity specific [ ]
   m. Family transitions, i.e. adoption, foster care or divorce [ ]
   n. Medical or reproductive services [ ]
   o. Emergency relief services, i.e. crime victim support [ ]
   p. Legal services [ ]
   q. Other: ____ [ ]

2. What percent of your clients or program participants would fall into each of the categories below?
   a. Below the poverty line _____%
   b. Working or lower class _____%
   c. Middle class _____%
   d. Upper class _____%

3. Please approximate the number of employees and/or volunteers in your organization that handle data entry, data collection or data storage

   Employees: _______ Volunteers: _______

4. On average, how many hours per week do these people, taken as a group, devote to data entry, data collection or data storage?

   Hours per week as a group: _____

5. How long does your organization generally store data?
   a. Less than 3 years [ ]
   b. More than 3 years [ ]

6. With approximately how many other local organizations or agencies does your nonprofit share its programmatic data?

   Number of local organizations or agencies_____

7. At what level of analysis do you collect data? *(Please check all that apply.)*
   a. Individual level, i.e. children, youth or adults [ ]
   b. Family level [ ]
   c. Neighborhood/community level, i.e. designated set of streets [ ]
   d. City level [ ]
   e. County level [ ]

f.	Regional level, i.e. Northwest Ohio	[ ]
g.	State level	[ ]
h.	National level	[ ]

8. The following is a list of possible data collection interests. Please indicate which are most relevant and useful to your organization. (Please c*heck all that apply.)*

	Topic	*My organization*: *Already collects*	*Uses*	*Needs*
a.	Age	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
b.	Sex	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
c.	Race/ethnicity	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
d.	Family characteristics	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
e.	Street/neighborhood-level address data	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
f.	School system for children	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
g.	Religious affiliation	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
h.	Native or non-native English speaker	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
i.	Education level	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
j.	Transportation needs	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
k.	Employment status	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
l.	Drug/alcohol treatment	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
m.	Criminal record	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
n.	Mental health conditions	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
o.	Physical health conditions or disabilities	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
p.	Previous program participant	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
q.	Client contact with other organizations	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
r.	Leadership skill	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
s.	Funding resources	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
t.	Other: ______________________________	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
u.	Other: ______________________________	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

9. Please list the percentage of data stored in your organization under each of the following conditions:

	Method	*Percent of data*
a.	Saved in paper files	________%
b.	Saved on floppy disk	________%
c.	Saved on computer hard drive	________%
d.	Saved on a server	________%
e.	Saved in email accounts	________%
f.	Saved in backup storage, i.e. zip drive, CD-ROM, or USB drive	________%

10. Please indicate the percent of your data stored **only** off-site, i.e. at someone's home, an off-site computer, or in external databases. ________%

11. In your experience, what usually happens to the data and files of employees when they leave the job? (*Please check one in each column*)

	Possibilities:	*Paper data*	*Electronic data*
a.	Left in the employee's area or computer.	[ ]	[ ]
b.	Discarded, deleted, or destroyed.	[ ]	[ ]
c.	Photocopied or put on disks/CD-ROMs.	[ ]	[ ]
d.	Given to the employee's successor.	[ ]	[ ]
e.	Made accessible to employee's supervisor.	[ ]	[ ]
f.	Made accessible department-wide.	[ ]	[ ]
g.	Transferred to organization archives	[ ]	[ ]
h.	Other: __________________________	[ ]	[ ]

12. Have you ever lost important data due to paper document misfiling or computer-related problems that negatively affected your organization's ability to complete a critical task on time?

    [ ] Yes [ ] No

13. Which types of funding supports your organization? *(Please check all that apply.)*

a.	Federal monies	[ ]
b.	State monies	[ ]
c.	County monies	[ ]
d.	City monies	[ ]
e.	Tax Levies	[ ]
f.	Private foundation grants *outside* the Toledo area	[ ]
g.	Private foundation grants *within* the Toledo area	[ ]
h.	Corporate donations *outside* the Toledo area	[ ]
i.	Corporate donations *within* the Toledo area	[ ]
j.	Individual donations	[ ]
k.	Federation membership	[ ]
l.	Other ________________________________	[ ]

14. Do any of your funders require evaluations in order to receive funding?

    [ ] Yes [ ] No

15. How often does your organization conduct audits or reviews to evaluate past accomplishments or plan future programs (*Please check one*)?

a.	Semiannually	[ ]
b.	Annually	[ ]
c.	Depending on the request of funders	[ ]
d.	We do not normally conduct formal evaluations	[ ] *(skip to question 17)*

16. If your organization undergoes formal review or evaluation, who gathers and analyzes the data? (*Please check one in each column)*

		Gathers	*Analyzes*
a.	A department supervisor	[ ]	[ ]
b.	The executive director	[ ]	[ ]
c.	A multi-division in-house team	[ ]	[ ]
d.	Outside consultants	[ ]	[ ]
e.	Program funder or monitor	[ ]	[ ]
f.	Other: ________________________	[ ]	[ ]

17. Approximately **how many** employees and volunteers within your organization have research training?

	Type of research training	*# of Staff*	*# of Volunteers*
a.	One undergraduate class	______	______
b.	Two or more undergraduate classes	______	______
c.	One graduate class	______	______
d.	Two or more graduate classes	______	______
e.	One professional seminar	______	______
f.	Two or more professional seminars	______	______
g.	Self-taught	______	______

18. If you could describe your information and data needs wish list, which of the following would it include? *(Please check all that apply.)*

a.	Staff training on computer programs or software	[ ]
b.	Staff training on legislation, such as HPPA (privacy laws)	[ ]

c. Staff training on GIS (geographic information systems) [ ]
d. Staff training on spreadsheets [ ]
e. Staff training on accounting/budget management [ ]
f. Staff education on research methods [ ]
g. Staff education on program evaluation [ ]
h. Staff education on statistical analysis [ ]
i. Community-wide database for a tracking system [ ]
j. Data confidentiality and security [ ]
k. Funding [ ]
l. Pending legislation [ ]
m. Other: ____ [ ]

If you would like to be contacted for programs and trainings that will result from this survey, please provide the contact information requested below. Your individual responses to the survey will still remain confidential.

Name: ___________________________________ Phone number: ____________

Organization: _____________________________ Email: ___________________