

A Statewide FBO/NPO Digital Inventory

Is It Feasible?



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Community Solutions recently completed a study for the Ohio Governor's Office on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (GOFBCI) of how to develop a database of faith-based and community-based nonprofit organizations in the state.¹ The study analyzes the potential sources of data to build a statewide inventory that includes a variety of information about organizations so that it can be used to inform governmental and community leaders, as well as the nonprofit community, about the resources provided and the policies and actions needed to sustain and support them.

Background and Purpose

The mission of the GOFBCI includes improving the capacity of faith-based and community nonprofits to compete for public funding and encouraging partnerships among and between public agencies, faith-based organizations, and community-based organizations that share a common mission.

The GOFBCI commissioned two feasibility studies, one for the creation of a statewide Nonprofit Inventory of faith-based and community organizations and their services, and a second study that evaluates the feasibility of establishing a new Web-based tool that would better link organizations to one another and to funding and training opportunities. It is hoped that many of the organizations in the Nonprofit Inventory would benefit from the Web-based tool. Thus, though these two studies are somewhat independent, they share the goal of increasing the number of effective and appropriate partnerships among and between public agencies, faith- and community-based organizations.

Both of these projects were managed under a grant agreement with Community Solutions. The Web-based tool study was led by Vertices, LLC.²

The Inventory study addresses the question of whether development and maintenance of a statewide digital Nonprofit Inventory of organizations by the GOFBCI can be achieved given a reasonable expenditure of funds and a set of applications that are of significant benefit to the state, the GOFBCI, nonprofit organizations, and others. The study recommends that the Nonprofit Inventory be developed and suggests the approach and steps necessary to accomplish that goal.

The Need for an Inventory

Nonprofit service providers are recognized as important assets to the people and communities they serve.³ They are also important to the economic and community development of neighborhoods,

cities, and regions of the state. They lend support to workforce productivity through job training and family and health services, for example. Services that support youth development, prisoner re-entry, and public safety may reduce the costs of government in the long-term.

Nonprofit human service providers include secular and faith-based community organizations.⁴ Many faith-based organizations provide social services, and their presence is an important part of the social capital of a community. Other service providers include government agencies and for-profit businesses.

Currently, there is no comprehensive database that includes all nonprofit organizations in the state and the services they provide. Such a database would offer a variety of uses.

In its request for this study, the GOFBCI noted:

Civic and governmental leaders would be well served by a more comprehensive listing of the faith-based and community-based nonprofits throughout Ohio. This Inventory would be a useful tool for these leaders new to partnerships with the faith-based and community-based nonprofits... This strategic Inventory tool is intended to help political and civic leaders better understand where the interests and activities of their community's faith-based and community-based nonprofits align with local and state policy objectives. The statewide Inventory [would] provide these leaders with an easy-to-understand tool that provides a starting point for assessing potential collaboration with faith-based and community-based nonprofits.⁵

Additionally, the Nonprofit Inventory would enable nonprofit organizations to identify other nonprofit service providers in their communities, recognize potential overlaps or gaps in services, and seek potential collaborators. The Nonprofit Inventory would be accessible to faith-based and community-based organizations interested in partnering with other organizations to deliver services and to local, state, and federal agencies and/or offices interested in partnering with faith-based and community-based nonprofits.

Research with the database, if the data can support it, would include assessment and monitoring of shifts in the distribution of services vis-à-vis the population and its needs, both geographically and in types of services provided. Surveys of needs and around issues of the nonprofit community would be made possible with such an inventory. Individual organizations would also be able to assess their own situation vis-à-vis others both statewide and locally. Communication with and outreach to these organizations through a variety of media (mail, email, phone, meetings) requires such a database.

These uses would be particularly feasible if combined with the proposed Web-based tool because the tool would facilitate data collection and verification, sharing of ideas, and collaborations.

Given these advantages, it seems apparent that a digital statewide Nonprofit Inventory that includes reliable information sufficient to facilitate collaborations, capacity development, and analyses of their benefits and needs, would be very useful.

What It Might Include

To maximize its value, a statewide Nonprofit Inventory would include an easy-to-use digital database of faith-based and community-based organizations. Information on each nonprofit in the database might include some or all of the following:

- general contact information,
- mission statement,
- capacity assessment (i.e. large, mid-sized, or small),
- service-related programs (i.e. re-entry, mentoring, summer food sites, referral, etc.),
- issue focus (healthcare, public safety, re-entry, etc.),
- geographic location and scope of services, and
- public funding (yes/no, sources, amounts).

The Inventory would be housed within GOFBCI. It would also provide the necessary contact information for the Web-based tool.

Methodology

We used the following steps in the feasibility study:

- Conducted Internet searches for other nonprofit inventory systems, keying on a variety of search criteria;
- Identified possible data sources for Ohio;
- Contacted and acquired information about possible databases;
- Identified attributes, strengths, and weaknesses of each database;
- Compared and analyzed databases, identifying commonalities, differences, and issues; and
- Made recommendations.

Information about existing databases that might be used for a Nonprofit Inventory was developed by reviewing Website information about such sources, contacting the organizations that manage/provide the data, and obtaining samples of the data, record layouts, and descriptions. The following potential data sources were identified and considered:

- Guidestar,
- Ohio Secretary of State (SOS),
- Internal Revenue Service (IRS 990 form data),
- Ohio Association of Nonprofit Organizations (OANO),
- Statewide 211 project,
- GOFBCI,
- Commercial mailing list databases (e.g., InfoUSA), and
- Supplementary sources such as direct data collection through the Web-based tool or surveys.

Results

Our study concludes that such an inventory would be a valuable resource and that creating and managing it would require only a modest investment. We recommend a multiple-source approach, employing the data from each source that helps to build a more comprehensive database than any one source provides alone.

Major questions remain, however, since arguably the most important source – a statewide 211 system – is still in early stages of development and will not be fully available for a year or more. Furthermore, there remain important questions about what is to be included in the 211 database vis-à-vis the needs of the GOFBCI inventory. Our recommendation is either to wait until the statewide 211 system is sufficiently functional, or to start the inventory with a combination of data from those sources that are avail-

able and relatively inexpensive to use for the project. Once the statewide 211 database is created and content and access issues addressed, it would become a major asset to the inventory.

Read more about both the Nonprofit Inventory study and the Web-based tool study at www.CommunitySolutions.com.

References:

1. The study was done in collaboration with the Northern Ohio Data and Information Service (NODIS) in the Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University.
2. <http://www.vertices.com/>
3. See: Verdier, D. (2002) *Moving Money: Banking and Finance in the Industrialized World*. Cambridge University Press. p. 145; and "Drucker Wisdom: Leadership and the CEO." The Blake Project. 6/26/07 [<http://www.branding-strategyinsider.com/2007/06/drucker-wisdom-.html>].
4. The nonprofit organization exists solely to provide programs and services that are of public benefit. Often these programs and services are not otherwise provided by local, state, or federal entities. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-profit_organizations.
5. <http://jfs.ohio.gov/rfp/R89010973/RLB%20Final.pdf>

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The AIDS Funding Collaborative (AFC) partners with the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA) to raise community awareness about the importance of HIV testing. In recognition of National HIV Testing Day, over two dozen volunteers distributed information at designated RTA bus and rapid stops. This is one of two annual outreach efforts by the AFC and RTA.

For more information about this or other community events coordinated by AFC, contact Melissa Federman at mfederman@CommunitySolutions.com.