

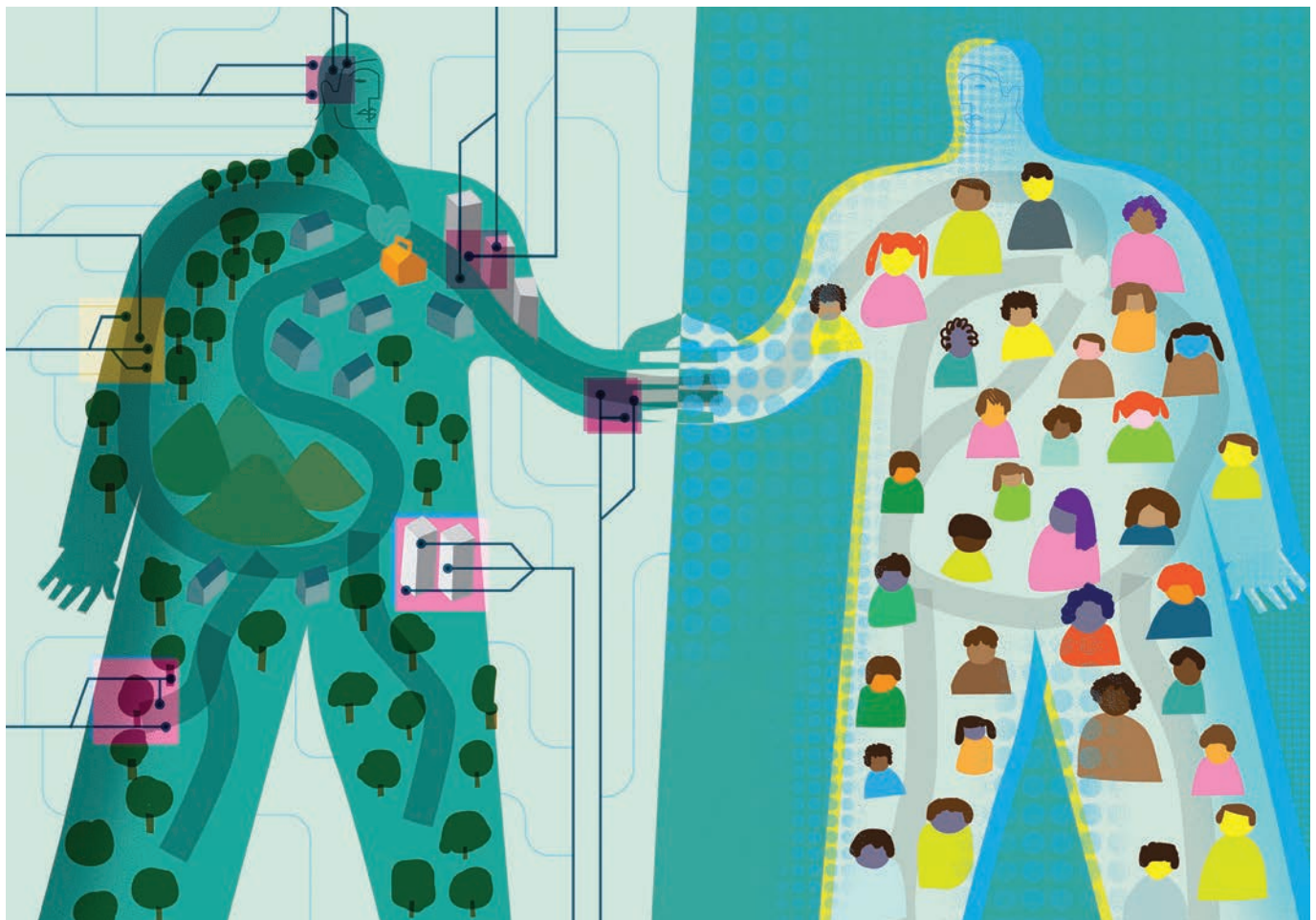
# Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION<sup>Review</sup>

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***Technology for Change Supplement***  
**Data-Driven Connections for a Better World**  
By Adrienne Day

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# Data-Driven Connections for a Better World

For nonprofits to succeed in a transformed world, they need to use technology and data to create and sustain relationships with the people who believe in them.

BY ADRIENNE DAY

**I**n terms of establishing brand identity, few nonprofits can claim the success of UNICEF and its once-ubiquitous little orange donation boxes. If you went trick-or-treating as a child, chances are, along with Snickers and M&Ms, you also collected pocket change for the social-welfare organization, which was founded in 1946 and now works in 192 countries.

Yet for many people, awareness of the nonprofit ends with that orange box, says Shelley Diamond, chief marketing officer at UNICEF

USA, one of many national organizations around the world that financially support the global parent entity.

That failure to grasp the scope of UNICEF's efforts persists despite the fact it "does more than any other children's humanitarian organization around the world in saving the lives of kids," she says. And things aren't getting any easier for global nonprofits. A larger shift underway is impacting many international humanitarian groups. The political landscape in the United States and elsewhere has changed

dramatically, economic inequality has reached remarkably high levels, and global crises—from the degradation of the environment to the COVID-19 epidemic—are posing huge challenges. Organizations of all types find themselves struggling more than ever with their own financial and operational health, compelling them to worry more often about protecting themselves rather than supporting others.

Diamond points out that schools once led the drive for UNICEF's trick-or-treat fundraising, but now their budget concerns have forced them to focus on raising funds for their own projects. More broadly, individual giving in 2018 declined by 1.1 percent from the previous year, according to Giving USA. The decrease is 3.4 percent when adjusted for inflation, despite a relatively robust economy. And the proliferation of GoFundMe and similar sites to raise money for a variety of causes has splintered donations further, with people now spreading their support across numerous organizations rather than two or three.

"In the world of philanthropy, if you ask people where they give money, what they care about, generally speaking, it's organizations that

deal with health, or your church, your synagogue or your university, and then community organizations,” with humanitarian organizations at the bottom, Diamond says. “The propensity to give reduces the further away it is from what is personally relevant to you. We live in a world where we are protecting our own civil rights, and people are very focused on their own communities. We are competing for ‘share of heart,’ and that’s really tough to do.”

The data backs her up. Seventy-nine percent of the nonprofit fundraising professionals surveyed in Salesforce’s 2020 *Nonprofit Trends Report* said that recent political changes have reduced the funds available for their organization. At the same time, 75 percent reported an increase in demand for their programs. To top it off, nearly three-quarters of nonprofits report that constituents’ desire to be involved in their organization’s work has risen over the past five years—an increase of 16 points over the previous year.

More than ever, individual donors are important. Nonprofits that fail to create and sustain a relationship with the people who believe in them may lose their support and fail in their mission.

### THE JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

If your slice of the pie is shrinking, what can you do to keep the funds coming? According to the *Nonprofit Trends Report*, 85 percent of respondents say they “use insights from marketing and engagement data to target outreach efforts and tailor communications.” To create awareness and effectively communicate with constituents, many nonprofits tailor messages to each individual and meet people “on the channels where they live,” the report says. Yet just over half of respondents say that they measure donor or client satisfaction, and 34 percent take no action on the feedback they collect.

If competing for funding in an increasingly fragmented donation environment is more and more difficult for most nonprofits, then to keep funding streams strong, most nonprofits need to find ways to forge meaningful connections with new and longstanding supporters. That can’t be accomplished without personalized and real-time information to identify potential donors, engage with them, convert them to becoming donors, and, ideally, create an ongoing relationship with them, Diamond says. UNICEF has mastered this art of deep, authentic, and fine-tuned connections by collecting and using the data they have on their supporters. For example, the organiza-

tion tests its donation pages by the minute, enabling the team to make quick tweaks based on user behavior.

Andy Rhodes, who oversees technology, digital, and data strategies at UNICEF USA as its chief information officer, calls this relationship with donors the “journey of a lifetime.”

This journey might begin in high school or college, a period of time when people tend to become more civically active. Ideally, the connection is maintained for the rest of that person’s life. This theoretical lifetime donor, Diamond says, “trick-or-treated and then they went to college and became a small donor, then they made a lot of money, and they became what we call our ‘next gen.’ Then they IPO their tech firm and made a real lot of money, and they gave us \$5 million to [support] orphanages, and then, sadly, many leave us in their will.”

Rhodes’s team provides Diamond and her colleagues with the data they need to connect with donors and potential donors for this journey. Actions taken along the journey will, in turn, create more data, which Rhodes’s team can use to accrue deep knowledge of what their donors really care about. Armed with that information, Diamond can answer questions about how and where to engage supporters, and how to measure efforts to do so.

“In this world where maybe 1 percent of the population cares about an international humanitarian organization, having data to find those people at a zip code level, and find content that they care about—that’s magical,” she says.

### BUILDING TRUST

According to the *Nonprofit Trends Report*, “transparency and trust are still the keys to success,” with 69 percent of the surveyed nonprofits indicating that the demand for transparency around funding has increased at least moderately over the past five years.

In order to earn that trust, however, it is important to make clear what any donor is going to get in exchange for their time or money, says Alva H. Taylor, faculty director of the Glassmeyer/McNamee Center for Digital Strategies at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College.

“If I give you a dollar, or if I allocate an hour of my time to spend with you, what do you promise I’m going to get out of it?” Taylor says. “What is your clear promise to your customers, your clients, your constituents? And that [promise] builds the foundation for everything else that you do.”

That promise varies depending on the community an organization is working with, he notes. It should be as simple as possible, even if the strategy behind it is complex.

“If you’re an educational nonprofit, your promise might be, ‘We’re going to increase your test scores’ or ‘we’re going to decrease your dropout rate.’ If your focus is on health care for children, the promise to parents might be, ‘You’re going to be better prepared to take care of your child,’” Taylor says. “Often, these organizations come up with these things that have all these big words about synergies and productivity and disruption [and lots of other] jargon, but they don’t really tell you what your promise [is], and what it is you do that is different from anybody else.”

Eric Dayton, the manager of digital infrastructure for the education nonprofit buildOn, expands on that concept, saying that a nonprofit ideally should tell donors the impact of their dollars immediately and over the duration of a project, a difficult but not impossible undertaking.

“We send out a unique link to a donor that is only that donor’s data,” he says. “When they log in, they can see, ‘Okay, there’s the money I gave. Here’s where it went, and this is what is happening long term.’”

To realize transparency with its supporters and the trust it engenders, UNICEF’s 13,000 people in the field provide real-time information on the status of the organization’s myriad programs.

“How we spend your money is a key element in building trust, and we want to lay out as clearly and succinctly as possible how much of the money you donate goes to programs,” Diamond says. “So if you want to make sure that the money you gave is ensuring that kids have safe drinking water, we actually have people on the ground, who are ensuring that we have that information in real time to provide to the people who have trusted us with their money.”

Finely tuned data is a critical element in crafting those messages. UNICEF also collects information about each engagement with each of their constituents, and then uses that data to tailor experiences that, by being relevant to individual needs, help create trusting, life-long connections.

“Trust is something that’s earned by consistent relevancy and consistent delivery of messages that are timely and important,” Rhodes says, but the communication is about more than just money. “Some years it might

mean making a donation, other years it might mean writing a letter to a congressman.”

And when communication goes awry by pinging supporters with information that doesn’t resonate for them, Rhodes’s team can quickly observe the misfires and rectify them.

“If click-throughs aren’t happening on a specific topic, we know to back off on that topic, either at an individual level or at a population level,” he says. “But that’s the granularity of data we’re looking at these days, and our digital team has only gotten better at using that data.”

#### POINTS AND PLOTS

For all of the power that data can bring to bear on creating lasting and meaningful relationships between organizations and their supporters, it still isn’t enough. Donors’ demands for deeper connections require not just real-time and personalized information, but also moving stories about the good that the nonprofits they support are doing in the world. Technology can help here, too.

“It’s the stories that draw people in, and technology is at the heart of that,” says Aparna Kothary, director of technology operations at Global Citizen Year, a nonprofit that helps organize gap year study-abroad programs for high school seniors. “You can really build the tools to be able to collect those stories, with more frequency and more quality.”

The nonprofit’s website features fellow stories, blog-style updates by overseas participants in the program. It also provides alumni stories, multimedia packages about Global Citizen alumni that include videos.

At UNICEF, such stories are numerous and delivered on its website and over social media. A couple of the campaigns include airlifting midwives to help pregnant women give birth in conflict zones in Nigeria and turning harmful plastic waste into plastic bricks to build schools for children in Côte d’Ivoire. In response to COVID-19, the organization is using chatbots to provide evidence-based information to millions of young people across 42 countries.

By combining powerful data with engaging stories, organizations can execute what the *Nonprofit Trends Report* refers to as a “comprehensive engagement strategy” that ensures deep connections between nonprofits, beneficiaries, donors, clients, and partners. And by creating and strengthening those rich relationships, the collective goal gets closer, one story and one data point at a time: a better world for all. ●

# Invading the Darkness of Child Sex Trafficking

How Shared Hope International uses digital tools and meaningful grassroots experiences to activate support.

BY MARISSA GUNTHER

**F**or the past 20 years, Shared Hope International has been working to bring justice to vulnerable adults and children who have survived and overcome sex trafficking. Our small but powerful team of 18 staffers has managed to secure a global network and reach, leading prevention strategies, restoration programs, and justice initiatives to combat trafficking in the United States and abroad.

One of the main ways we have been able to provide our life-changing services is through the passionate and generous support of our advocates, volunteers, and donors. But in 2016, we noticed a declining trend in donor support. We knew we needed a solution to reengage with supporters and strengthen our reach within our community. By leveraging the power of our technology systems, we have been able to transform, grow, and deepen our relationship with our supporters, and ultimately extend our efforts to raise awareness about the realities of child sex trafficking in communities across the nation.

#### SUPPORTERS MAKE PROGRAMS POSSIBLE

Shared Hope’s three-prong approach to battle sex trafficking—awareness and prevention training, restoration and empowerment for victims, and justice through legislative advocacy—is changing the way society recognizes and helps sex trafficking survivors. Training equips professionals and advocates in the field with skills to increase the identification of people who are vulnerable to and exploited by trafficking. We provide a range of restoration services to victims—both directly and through support from other service organizations—that include safe homes, medical care, education, vocational training, therapy, outreach, and intervention services. In addition, our team of attorneys works with legislators at both the federal and state level to accelerate policy actions that protect victims and hold offenders accountable.



MARISSA GUNTHER

A national network of supporters raises money and works alongside Shared Hope to make these programs possible. One-hundred percent of our financial backers are private donors, and many of our donors have been with us since day one, 21 years ago.

Due to the increase in anti-trafficking organizations opening their doors, many of which Shared Hope provided training and support to, we experienced a severe decline in our number of supporters between 2014 and 2016. In order to survive as an organization, we urgently needed a strategy to restore relationships. After a deep dive into our supporters’ profiles, we quickly recognized that we needed tools to get to know them better, offer more meaningful engagement, and target them with bespoke strategies. When we realized our customer relationship management (CRM) system wasn’t meeting our needs, we turned to Salesforce. It had just what we needed: scalability, the ability to customize, and compatibility with a lot of other technologies that we wanted to use.