Do you have data in a variety of sources and are unsure of how to draw conclusions?

What is analytics, how can it help your nonprofit organization, and how can you get started?

INFORMS Pro Bono Analytics provides nonprofit organizations with volunteer analytics professionals to help them make better decisions with their data. If your nonprofit has a problem that would benefit from an analytical solution or if you would like to explore possible projects, please visit our website at:

www.probonoanalytics.org

Making evidence-based decisions from your data

Not everything that counts can be counted.

Nearly every nonprofit organization is collecting data, and a wide variety of data at that. They can be collecting data on themselves, the individuals they serve, their digital presence, their relationship with their community, funders, and staff to name a few. All of this information can be incredibly beneficial for making decisions, but only if you know which metrics matter most and when. Most nonprofit organizations lack the bandwidth or knowledge for truly analyzing their data and making impactful decisions – this was exactly the problem that Chalkbeat was having when they came to us.

Our partner, Chalkbeat, came to Pro Bono Analytics originally seeking volunteer help to evaluate the feasibility and practicality of developing a data warehouse/business intelligence system (DW/BI) for their organization. They were intent on making evidence-based decisions, but the evidence was spread across multiple systems and they were not clear on which “metrics mattered most.”

Chalkbeat is a nonprofit news organization committed to covering one of America’s most important stories: the effort to improve schools for all children, especially those who have historically lacked access to a quality education. They are mission-driven and believe that every child deserves an excellent education, and that a strong press is vital to making that happen. They report from and about seven locations: Chicago, Colorado, Detroit, Indiana, Newark, New York, and Tennessee. As a nonprofit, Chalkbeat’s support comes from a diverse mix of sources, including sponsors who pay for opportunities to share messages with our readers and donors who believe in our mission. As most local news sources shrink, creating more so-called “news deserts,” Chalkbeat is building a sustainable model that is local, substantive, and independent.

After helping Chalkbeat identify their analytical questions, our Pro Bono Analytics volunteer rolled up her sleeves and began fixing and creating report automation to help develop quarterly and monthly reports, extensive reports that were previously done manually by their team. The data for the reports came from a variety of sources like Google Analytics, Facebook, Facebook Ads, Mailchimp, Pardot, Salesforce, and Eventbrite. Our volunteer was also able to incorporate data from their newest media bureaus in Newark and Chicago into their automated spreadsheets, a long-term goal for Chalkbeat.

Chalkbeat had never seen their data so in-depth before, often distracted by the sheer process of simply gathering their data, and this project helped them realize that they still needed a solution to a larger problem – generating effective insights from their data. This lead them to begin seeking out paid consulting work to pair with our PBA volunteer’s technical abilities.

Result of the Project

They kept the volunteer focused on the technical aspects of getting the reporting automation up and running while deciding to incorporate a paid consultant to help with the insights. Their reason for doing so was that this was going to be a more intense engagement than they deemed appropriate to ask of a volunteer. They needed a consultant with deeper industry knowledge of marketing and media with a very current understanding of Google Analytics – the consultant they found was being considered for a permanent role. Chalkbeat is excited to be in a position with full report automation for all their various systems and with future plans for concrete recommendations to improve their editorial and product work.