Do you have an issue identifying key performance data within your organization?

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

Not everything that can be counted, counts - One of the most difficult challenges faced by nonprofit organizations is to effectively communicate performance metrics and successes to board members, partners, and funders. Each organization is unique and there is not a one-size-fits-all combination of metrics that will accurately report current statuses and areas for potential improvement.

Effective communication can be compounded further by the plethora of data often collected by nonprofit organizations – not everything that can be counted is important, so how do you determine what metrics are necessary for telling the most powerful story? This is the exact issue our partner, On the Rise, was facing when they wanted to make better decisions with their data and approached us for volunteer analytics help.

On the Rise is a women’s homeless shelter and community dedicated to their mission of providing the relationships, safety, and resources needed to get out and stay out of homelessness. Their primary offerings are day shelter services, housing, health services, legal services, financial advice, etc. while focusing on relationships as the foundation for staff advocacy within the program.

On the Rise collects a vast amount of data about its programs and clients, but its staff was overwhelmed identifying what information needed to be the focal point of their funder and partner reports. There were a few ideas for performance metrics they’d like to see, but no clear path for how to accurately identify or report them.

On the Rise needed to develop a tool for data aggregation and reporting to better explore some specific aspects of the organization’s performance: relationships between program participants’ engagement and other attributes (risk factors, tenure, housing status), how the organization is functioning as a whole, and gathering information about descriptive and diagnostic analytics reporting. Building a tool to easily identify and draw conclusions for these outcomes would help them achieve their main goal of identifying data to better communicate program effectiveness with funders and human service provider partners.

Our volunteers got together and started the process of sifting through On the Rise’s data to identify what would be the most helpful for achieving their outcomes. They determined that they would compare participant demographic data, risk factors, and contact data (how the participant interacted with the organization) to identify a quantitative analysis with potential impact on the overall program design. Since this was one of the initial attempts at identifying choice information for performance reporting, our volunteers built a few analytics models as tools for a more accurate graphic depiction of the data. The models were set up and populated with engagement data measuring consistency (number of visits per month) and involvement (time spent per month) from participants.

Result of the Project

Identifying this preferred engagement and building the preliminary models laid the groundwork for On the Rise to further investigate phases of analysis for their policy makers and funders. Our volunteers helped them to realize the potential for using analytics to help identify program performances. They are inspired to continue collecting and identifying key data on program participants to complete a well-rounded, quantitative analysis of their organization and more accurately tell the story of their successes.