# VALUING DATA

How to use it in your grant-making

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# SUMMARY

*'Just through making grants, grant-makers are generating a dataset. You can ignore this data, or you can pick it up and say, "what can I do with this?"'*

**Lucy Bernholz, Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society**

The cycle of proposals, applications, payments, reports and evaluations means grant-making involves a continuous creation of qualitative and quantitative data. Until recently this data has only been used internally, if at all. More and more, however, funders are making their grant-making data publicly available, to support evidence-based decision-making and to improve transparency and accountability. An increasing amount of open data is also available—for example, from the public sector—that is useful for funders. In this report we explore the use of data by funders and the benefits it can bring: supporting better decision-making and increased effectiveness by individual funders, and ultimately improving the sector as a whole.

This paper explores how grant-making organisations in the UK are already using data, and how more funders can build on this work. It reflects insights from staff at 24 organisations—including grant-makers and those working with charities and funders to support the use of data—who we interviewed for this research (see page 24 for a full list of contributors). We also draw on NPC's knowledge on data as reflected by our Data Labs project[1] and our publications on the topic[2].

## Findings

### Data can help funders improve

Funders have access to huge amounts of data—not just their own and that provided by grantees, but the increasing amounts of freely available open data from government and other sources.

Better use of data offers opportunities for funders to improve their practice throughout the funding cycle and to:

- **Identify and highlight needs** and to map funding flows in the sector.
- **Reduce inefficiencies** in the application process, or to support collaboration between funders.
- **Understand their impact**. Many are seeing the benefits of improving their internal data systems, often as part of the process of publishing and sharing their data.
- **Test perceptions and inform strategy**. Funders' data can also contribute to evidence about a particular sector and support field-building activities.

### Funders' data can benefit charities and others too

Data held by funders is not only relevant to funders—it is also of use to charities, statutory organisations and those with a wider interest in the charity sector. If published as open data (see definition on page 7), it can be combined with data from other sources, with huge potential for creativity and innovation in terms of how it is used. Open data is already being used to shape products, services and interventions across different sectors—we are just at the beginning of this journey in the charity sector.

## Reaching critical mass will prove transformational

The potential for open data to benefit funders is dependent on other stakeholders, large and small, making that data available in the first place. As people continue to add to it open data becomes increasingly useful, so people use it even more—a process known as a 'network effect' (see Figure 1).[3] Every contributor, regardless of size, can increase the power of the network, because every funder has unique data that communicates something  different about the context in which they are working.

**Figure 1: How data contributes to an effective sector**
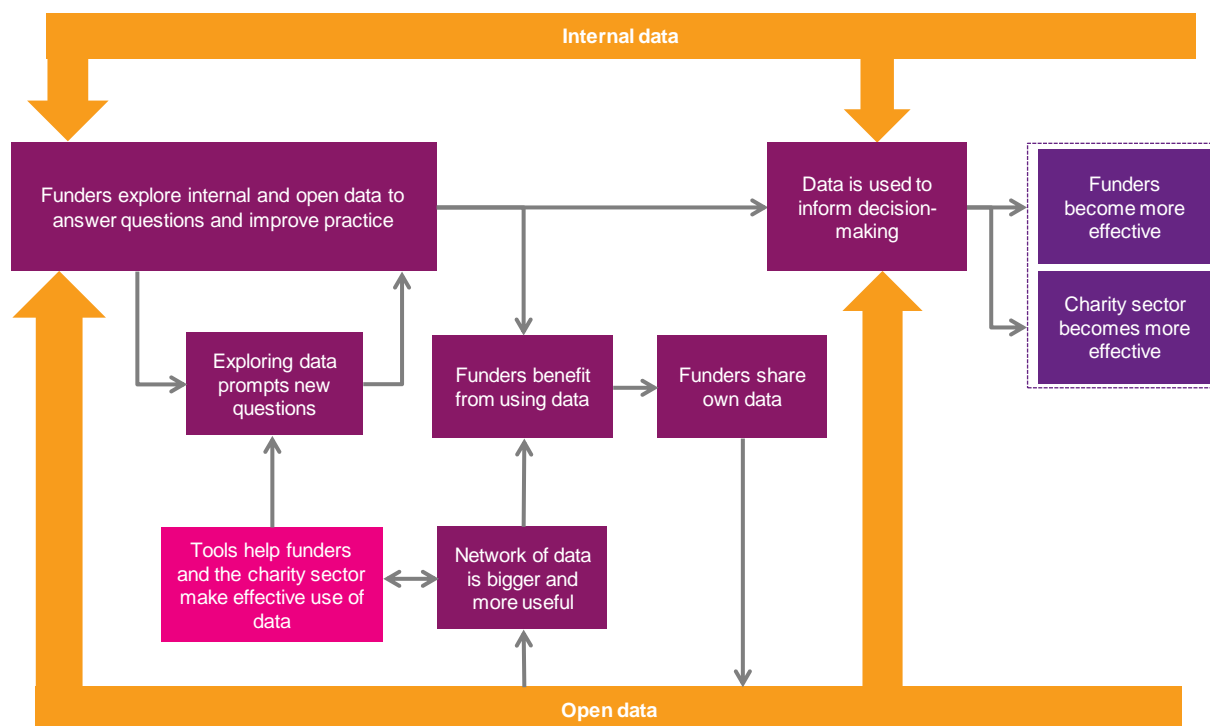


For this network of shared data to be beneficial for as many people as possible, it needs to reach 'critical mass': the point where we have enough information to gain a good understanding of the funding landscape as a whole. Once we reach this point we expect to see the pace of innovation accelerate dramatically—with a corresponding shift from incremental to transformational benefits for the sector.

## Capacity is an issue

Making better use of data often requires an upfront investment (of time, if not money) to establish systems and processes that will provide useful data further down the line. This can be off-putting for organisations with limited resources, but will pay dividends in the long run. At NPC we strongly believe in the value of funders investing in their own capabilities, to become better at what they do and make more of an impact for beneficiaries. A sector approach (see page 6) could help to address the challenge of capacity.

## Leadership is key

Where leaders do not place a priority on data, the organisation is unlikely to either. Those organisations with a clear organisational strategy are more likely to be able to identify opportunities for data to improve their practice and help them achieve their goals.

# Conclusions and recommendations

## A shift in thinking is required to see data as a valuable resource

The 10,000+ charitable foundations in the UK give away more than £2.7bn a year.[4] Between them, they generate a vast amount of data. This data has not traditionally been seen as a resource in the same way that money has been. All funders are conscious of the need to steward and use their financial resources most effectively, with many also aware of other resources they can offer: time, advice and expertise. Data has not traditionally been seen as part of this non-financial 'offer'—through this report we argue that it should be.

## Individual organisations can take action

There are simple steps that individual organisations can take to make better use of data themselves, and to promote better data use across the sector.

**Our recommendations for individual organisations:**

- Consider what problems or questions you have, and how data could help you address them.
- Audit your data and the processes you have for collecting and sharing it.
- Ensure that data is on your board's agenda.
- Think about data as an asset you have. What questions would others have that your data might help answer? Could it be a resource for grantees or applicants, or even directly for beneficiaries?
- Take advantage of the support and resources already available for collecting and analysing data.
- Consider how to encourage use of data more widely throughout the charity sector. Could you develop ideas for grant programmes that encourage innovative or replicable use of data?

## Taking a sector approach could reap rewards

With many organisations facing similar challenges, taking a collective as well as an individual approach would pay dividends. NPC is actively exploring how a sector approach can help funders get the most value from data, in parallel with our current work on digital transformation in the charity sector[5].

**Our recommendations for a sector approach:**

- Bring people within a sector together—charities, funders and organisations working with data—to explore common issues, to look at ways in which data can help, and to develop workable solutions.
- Convene groups with a common sector or geographical interest to define questions, map relevant available data and identify gaps. It might be possible to request this data is opened up, or to access it through Freedom of Information requests.
- Build a conversation and momentum in the sector through sharing efforts and results. To inspire others and get input to improve, communicate about helpful analysis and what this analysis enabled.
- Create a network of data 'champions' in the sector—people with experience and enthusiasm for making better use of data. This network could be a great resource for driving things forward, sharing learning and supporting others.

By making their own data available, ideally to a common data standard, funders can enrich the data landscape, for the benefit of themselves and others. NPC is excited to see what is possible as more funders join those already publishing data, and as data from the charity and public sector comes together.

*'On our own we have a tiny amount of data, but together we have a huge amount. We could all benefit from that.'*

**Gina Crane, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation**

# INTRODUCTION

*'There is a basic sense that the more information funders have access to, the more intelligent decisions they can make.'*

**Carol Mack, Association of Charitable Foundations**

**Key terms**

**Data:** Data is the raw material from which information is obtained. The word 'data' commonly evokes thoughts of numbers, spreadsheets and graphs. However, it is much broader than that. Data can be split into two categories: quantitative data consists of numbers and helps answer the questions 'what, who, where and how many?' Qualitative data can be thought of as stories, and helps answer the questions 'why and how?'[6] Once collected, processed, organised and interpreted, data becomes a source of invaluable information.

**Open data:** Open data is data that anyone can access, use and share. It has a licence, ie, stated permission to share; without this the data cannot be reused. Good open data is available in digital, machine-readable formats so that it can be easily processed.[7] In practice, this means it is published as a spreadsheet—in .xls or .csv format, for example—rather than in PDF or image files. More information on different degrees of openness, and the costs and benefits of each for publisher and user, is available at 5 Star Open Data.[8]

*'If it's made available in ways that other people can use it—this is where the digitisation becomes so important. A simple PDF of a static grants list is not the richest resource. But if it is machine readable, it can be connected to other data, there's more you can do with it.'*

**Lucy Bernholz, Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society**

**Data standard:** A data standard is a specified format that can be used across different organisations to ensure data is organised in the same way. This makes it easier to collate and compare data from different sources.

## What is this paper about?

This paper explores how grant-making organisations in the UK are using data, and how more funders can build on this work. It is based on desk research as well as semi-structured interviews with staff at 24 organisations—including grant-makers and those working with charities and funders to support the use of data (see page 24 for a full list of contributors). Using Inspiring Impact's[9] funding cycle of **Plan, Do, Assess, Review**[10] as a framework, we look at how data can support better decision-making by funders—and ultimately help them improve, to the benefit of the people and issues they are seeking to help.

Throughout the paper we identify—in pink speech bubbles (right)—the important questions data can help funders to answer. We also: highlight real-life examples of how funders and others are using data; identify the challenges facing funders in making greater use of data; and set out our conclusions and recommended next steps. We hope the report will inspire funders to move forward—wherever they are on their 'data journey'.

# Why now?

Four key trends mean there has never been a better time to consider how data can support greater impact in the social sector:

- Policy developments in the UK and overseas are opening up the data held by public bodies[*]

- Data—from government and others—is increasingly available in digital form

- A community of practice has developed around the effective use of data

- Tools and platforms to manipulate, analyse and present data in meaningful ways are more readily available.

# Whose data are we talking about?

Data available to funders includes their own data—and many will readily admit they are not using this to its fullest extent—as well as data from other funders, grantees, government and public bodies such as the Charity Commission. At the time of writing, 27 major UK foundations are publishing their data on grants totalling £8bn, using the 360Giving Standard (see page 17). Brad Smith, President of the Foundation Center in the US, suggests there are three types of grant-making data:[11]

- **Transactional data** is the basic 'who, what and where' of funding: it could include, for example, the number of grants made, the amount of funding provided to a particular organisation or in a particular geography.

- **Contextual data** tells funders about the context in which they work: this might include information about deprivation in a particular community, or about activity by government or other funders.

- **Impact data** tells funders about the impact they are having: this might be data from grantees about their beneficiaries, information about the grantee organisation itself, or information about the wider social problem a funder is seeking to address.

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[*] The availability and, critically, the openness of data from and about the charity sector varies in different parts of the world. In Canada, Canada Revenue Agency data about the charity sector has been available as open data since 2013, providing information about charitable giving trends and characteristics. In the US, the Internal Revenue Service recently began publishing non-profits' 990 tax return files as open data. In the UK, annual accounts filed with the Charity Commission provide limited information about foundations' activity. This information is publicly available, although not (yet) as open data.

# USING DATA THROUGHOUT THE FUNDING CYCLE

Different sources and types of data can be used for a variety of purposes throughout the funding cycle (see Figure 2), which consists of:

- Stage 1: **Plan**
- Stage 2: **Do**
- Stage 3: **Assess**
- Stage 4: **Review**

**Figure 2: How different types of data can be used for various purposes throughout the funding cycle**

| | | | TYPES OF DATA | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Contextual | Transactional | | | Impact |
| | | USES OF DATA | Data on needs | Grant applications | Funding criteria | Grants made | Impact data |
| Stages of the funding cycle | PLAN | Understand needs | ░ | ░ | | | |
| | | Map funding flows | | ░ | | ░ | |
| | DO | Reduce inefficiency | | ░ | ░ | ░ | ░ |
| | | Support collaboration | | ░ | ░ | ░ | |
| | ASSESS | Understand impact | ░ | ░ | | ░ | ░ |
| | | Share and compare data | ░ | ░ | ░ | ░ | ░ |
| | REVIEW | Inform strategy | ░ | ░ | | ░ | ░ |
| | | Build the market | ░ | | | ░ | ░ |

This is not an exhaustive list, but it gives a snapshot of the examples highlighted in the report—and demonstrates that data can be used in many different ways, bringing multiple benefits. We explore each of these uses in more detail throughout this section, using case studies to illustrate.

## Stage 1: Plan

### Understands needs

In order to develop a funding strategy or programme, or even select an issue or cause area, funders require information. Data can be used to identify pockets of deprivation and to show the spread of previous or current funding. As the Big Lottery Fund's Simon Marshall told us, data on applications received can serve as a *'barometer of change',* enabling funders to more quickly identify and

> What can I learn about the cause area that I fund or want to fund?

respond to emerging trends. By sharing their data, funders can contribute to the broader evidence base—about the sector as a whole and about the areas they work in.

Lots of relevant data is held by the public sector: the Index of Multiple Deprivation[12], for example, and data about entitlement to free school meals are frequently used as a basic indicator of need across the public and social sectors. Census data[13], the British Social Attitudes Survey[14] and other national datasets all hold information that can be relevant and useful to funders focusing on a range of different areas. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, for example, made use of datasets held by the UK Data Service[15] in developing its strategy to solve UK poverty.[16]

The sheer volume of data available can be overwhelming, and the 'data landscape' can be difficult to navigate. While it may be available, data may not be easy to find or pull together: held in numerous different places and formats (PDF, Excel, Word and html, for example). Local authorities hold data about specific groups—but a funder looking to access that data would need to visit more than 100 different local authority websites.

*'It's not that the information isn't already available, it's more that it's not easily accessible—no charity has the time to trawl through all the various public sources and make sense of everything.'*

**Jayne Woodley, Chief Executive, Oxfordshire Community Foundation**

Some organisations have sought to collate information about their issue area, providing a resource for all. The homelessness charity CentrePoint, for example, is developing a youth homelessness data bank. This will use data from local authorities to give a picture of youth homelessness across the country over time.[21] Much of this data has been obtained through Freedom of Information requests—a labour-intensive task for the charity and local authorities alike. The London Datastore[22] provides open data relating to the capital, and it has been suggested that there could be a further role for the Greater London Authority in collating, analysing and providing data on civil society and communities' needs.[23] Across the UK, community foundations are drawing together data on local needs (see Case study 1).

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**Case study 1: Building a picture of local need**

**The challenge:** Funders lack a comprehensive picture of needs and issues in a particular area.

**The approach:** 13 UK community foundations participated in the **Vital Signs[17]** initiative last year, using government data on certain key themes to produce a report on social trends and issues in their local communities. Others are developing their own approach: Suffolk Community Foundation's *Hidden needs[18]* report looks at the scale and nature of social deprivation in Suffolk; *Hidden Surrey*[19] (see Figure 3) uses the Index of Multiple Deprivation to explore pockets of deprivation in what is commonly perceived to be one of the country's most affluent counties; *Oxfordshire uncovered[20]* will be followed by a project mapping charity and funder activity in areas of deprivation.

**The outcome:** Each of these initiatives helps to inform local philanthropy and grant-making, consolidating the information available into a more easily accessible format and enabling funders to be more strategic in their decisions. Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland found that, as well as being used by some private and corporate donors to target their funding at gaps highlighted in the report, Vital Signs encouraged funders from outside the area to invest in the North East and also helped to influence external decision-makers.

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**Figure 3: Data map from Suffolk Community Foundation's *Hidden needs*[24] report, which uses government data to highlight areas of need in the county**
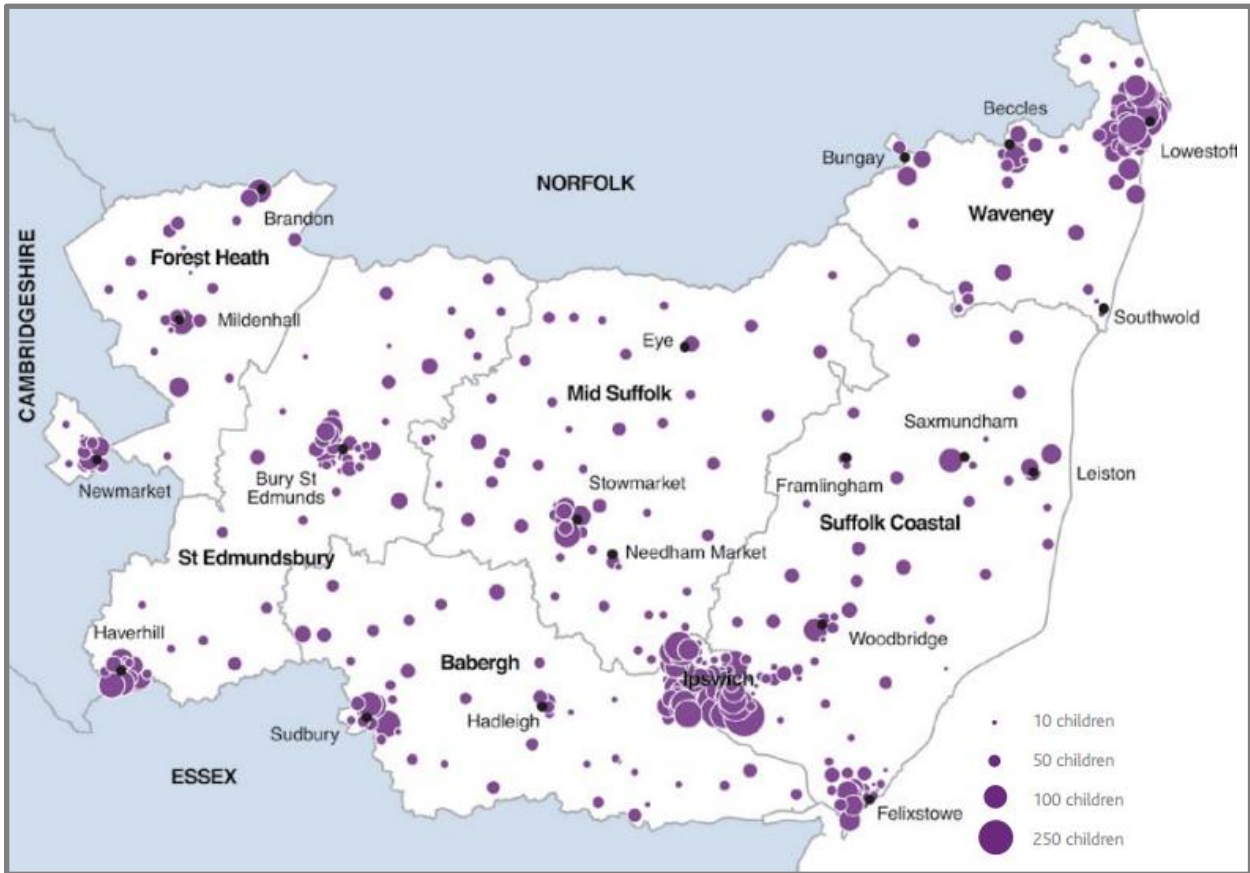


Figure source: Fenton, A., Markkanen, S. and Monk, S. (2011) *Hidden needs: Hidden deprivation and community need in Suffolk*. University of Cambridge (for the Suffolk Foundation).
Data source: Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2010), Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)

## Map funding flows

It is not only funders who can benefit from greater sharing and use of grant-making data. As more funders publish their data, a more comprehensive picture of UK grant-making activity becomes available, which will allow funders and others to map funding flows. Charitable funding is only part of the picture—government funding is also crucial—but the increasing availability of this information is helping to build a picture of the charity sector to complement existing sources such as the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)'s Civil Society Almanac.[25] The government has recently announced it will be publishing contract data to the Open Contracting Data Standard.[26] As well as being of interest to funders, this data is invaluable to umbrella bodies, academics, think tanks and others with an interest in the sector (see Case study 2).

> Who else is funding this issue? Where can my funding have the most impact?

**Case study 2: Mapping funding flows**

**The challenge:** Making sense of open data about grants to map funding flows within the charity sector.

**The approach:** Landscape by PoweredByData combines charitable data from the Canada Revenue Agency with data from foundations to present a comprehensive overview of funding in the sector. The tool enables users to filter and present the data in a way that makes sense for them. For example, they can break the data down using keywords, a particular timeframe or province. If someone is interested in understanding more about the grants given in the health sector in the year 2012, for example, they simply enter 'health' as a keyword and specify the year.[27]

A similar platform recently launched in the UK. GrantNav (See Figure 4) allows users to explore grant-making data published to the 360Giving Standard (see Case study 7), making it easy to search, explore and download the raw data about grant-making in the UK.[28]

**The outcome:** These platforms make it easier for users to explore data about grant-making and see how resources are flowing throughout the sector. Funders have a better idea of their place within the landscape in relation to everyone else, and can make strategic funding decisions accordingly. If it is obvious where funders are already working, the risk of duplicating efforts in the same area is reduced.

**Figure 4: Image of the Grantnav website, which allows users to explore UK grant-making data published to the 360Giving Open Data Standard**

# Stage 2: Do

*'We couldn't have done what we did without data, and we couldn't have done it without data from a range of organisations.'*

Fiona Duncan, Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland

## Reducing inefficiency in the application process

Applications are themselves a source of data, and they demand a huge amount of effort on the part of charities and funders. Unfortunately, much of that effort is wasted: the proportion of applications sent to foundations that do not meet their funding criteria has been estimated at anywhere between a quarter and a half.[32] Some see potential for open data to create efficiencies in this process: just as Amazon can suggest books or music you might like based on your previous preferences, and dating websites match user profiles according to the information users provide about themselves and what they are looking for, so platforms are emerging that aim to help charities connect with the 'right' funders (see Case study 3). Others are exploring whether more use could be made of those applications that are unsuccessful, by making them more widely available (see Case study 4).

> Can we reduce the number of ineligible applications we receive?

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**Case study 3: Matchmaking for funders and charities**

**The challenge**: Ensuring that applications for funding match funders' strategic priorities.

**The approach**: Different platforms are helping charities to identify funders relevant to their work. The Beehive Giving website (see Figure 5) allows charities and funders to browse each other and will recommend those that are likely to be of interest.[29] More than 7,000 organisations and 30 funders are registered to use the site, which receives 100–150 proposals a week.

Similarly The Good Exchange, being developed by Greenham Common Trust, matches charitable projects with funding. Projects' profiles are automatically matched to eligible funding schemes, and can also be used in digital fundraising—for example, shared on social media or used to invite people to fundraising events.[30] Funders, meanwhile, can use the platform to manage the grant administration process—from shortlisting applicants to auditing grants. More than 500 grant applicants and 250 projects are registered on the platform.

**The outcome**: These platforms are still developing, but should help charity fundraisers in particular to save time. Rather than having to check eligibility criteria and guidance on a funder-by-funder basis, they can set up their own organisation's profile and allow the platform to do much of that work for them. For funders, platforms such as these should help reduce the number of ineligible applications over the long term, as well as improving the quality of applications, streamlining the grant administration process and helping to identify organisations working in their area of interest.

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**Case study 4: 'Recycling' funding applications**

**The challenge**: Time invested in funding applications goes to waste when applications are unsuccessful.

**The approach**: Comic Relief intends to publish a longlist of applications to this year's Tech for Good programme. It will be published as an open Google sheet, which anyone can circulate and use.[31]

**The outcome**: By publishing the application longlist, Comic Relief hopes to: facilitate collaboration; increase knowledge of projects and organisations working in the tech for good space; celebrate the potential value of projects it has been unable to fund; encourage more funders to invest in this space; and help those projects on the longlist to attract investment.

**Figure 5: Image of the Beehive Giving website, which tells charities how closely their project matches funders' interests**



## Supporting collaboration

Open grant-making data can help prevent unproductive duplication and support collaboration by making it easier to identify other funders working in a similar area or funding the same charities. This can open up new conversations between peers: for example, by ensuring that funders are not giving grantees contradictory advice. It can also lead to more deliberate efforts to pool knowledge and resources to maximise impact. This was the case of Big Bang Philanthropy in the US, a group of funders supporting charities fighting poverty.[33] It can also facilitate better coordination with public sector bodies, to maximise the value of public and private investment—as in the case of Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland (see Case study 5).

> Are there other funders we could work with to increase our impact?

**Case study 5: Pooling grants data to identify cold spots**

**Organisation:** Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland.

**Where is the data from?** Grant-making data from a small group of Scottish funders.

**How was it used?** Following a strategy update, the Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland sought to reach communities that its previous, responsive grant-making had not reached. The Foundation pooled its own data with that of other major Scottish funders: the Big Lottery Fund, BBC Children in Need and The Robertson Trust. The initial aim was to map the data to identify cold spots. This was more complicated than it sounded, with different funders capturing different types of data and using different categories. Once combined, the data ultimately allowed the Foundation to identify nine local authority areas receiving proportionately less independent funding. At this point they realised that government data, such as the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), was required to identify the communities facing multiple challenges within those areas. With the help of the Improvement Service, the Foundation was able to drill down into the SIMD and obtain more granular data. When combined with the funders' data, this gave the information the organisation wanted.

**What were the benefits?** By pooling data, and processing it in a way that allowed them to have a complete overview, the Foundation was able to identify areas funding had not reached—exactly the information it was looking for as it began implementing its new strategy. The work has also had unexpected benefits: a closer working relationship with the Scottish Government, which has a shared interest in those communities; and interest from other major funders, which has led to co-funding a strategic programme of community empowerment in some of those areas.

# Stage 3: Assess

*'Some of the simplest things we've done have had the most tangible benefit and use.'*

**Alex van Vliet, Lloyds Bank Foundation England and Wales**

## Understanding your impact

Impact data helps funders understand the difference they are making, and how they can learn and improve as funders. However, it is not only 'impact data' that can help funders learn: much of the data they already hold can be used to draw lessons. It can show, for example, the level of support for one issue compared to another, or the application conversion rate among different groups and geographies. For example, if particularly large numbers of ineligible applications are being received from certain communities, is the relevant guidance perhaps not reaching those communities? If some groups are consistently unsuccessful in their applications, are there challenges specific to those groups that you are able to address?

Interviewees reported that improved data systems, and time spent exploring what the data can tell them, had led to improved conversations within the organisation. Even simple things, such as testing different ways to present the same data, had prompted new questions at senior management and board level, and created an appetite to use the information already collected in new ways. It has also enabled more informed conversations and better relationships with external stakeholders.

> What impact are we having?

> Are we reporting to our board in the most useful way?

Exploring and analysing their own data can often lead organisations to identify gaps or weaknesses in their data management. Many interviewees commented on the quality of their own data—the importance of using sensible coding and tagging systems that allow data to be grouped, sorted and analysed more effectively. These structures determine the level of analysis possible. One interviewee declared he had become *'the coding policeman'* after realising the importance of consistency for making use of data. The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, too, has improved data coding to gain more value from the information it collects (see Case study 6).

> **Do our internal systems and processes allow us to answer the questions that matter to us?**

**Case study 6: Learning lessons**

**Organisation:** The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

**Where is the data from?** Internal quantitative data about grant-making, and qualitative feedback on performance and learning from grantees.

**How is it being used?** The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation is combining quantitative and qualitative data to draw out lessons and patterns in the impact of their grants and their role as a funder. Previously, while staff may have known they had 300 live grants in the arts, the Foundation had no way of breaking that information down any further. By improving the structure and consistency of coding and tagging, the organisation can now sort and compare grants data at a more granular level—for example, by looking at a particular beneficiary group or key words. This categorisation is used consistently across internal systems and published grants data.

**What are the benefits?** By mapping grants data with feedback from grantees, the Foundation hopes to learn whether different funding approaches are more successful with different types of grant, activity or organisation. Consistent data collection and recording has also had other benefits—with contact details being kept up to date, for example, ongoing communication with grantees has been improved.

## Organising data so it can be shared and compared

To enable the combination of, or comparison between, different datasets, it is important that the data is organised in the same way. This can be done by using a data standard—a specified format used across different organisations. In the UK, 360Giving has developed a standard for publishing grants data (see Case study 7). Many interviewees remarked that an unexpected consequence of preparing to release their data publicly was that it drove improvements in their internal processes and the quality of the data they held: cleaning and organising it, identifying gaps and inconsistencies. Taking these steps is crucial before any meaningful analysis can take place: poor quality data will translate into poor decisions.

> **Can we improve our data processes so it is more useful for us and others?**

**Case study 7: Making data easier to share and compare**

**The challenge:** Data needs to be in the same format in order to be easily combined, compared and analysed.

**The approach:** The 360Giving Standard provides a common way to share information on grants. It uses a set of fields and definitions to help organisations describe and format their grant-making in a consistent way. For example, there are fields for the amount of funding applied for by each grantee, the amount awarded, and the start and end dates of delivery. The information is presented in the same format and is openly licensed, meaning it can be freely accessed, used and re-used. At the time of writing, 27 funders are publishing their grants data to the 360Giving Standard.[34]

**The outcome:** 360Giving links the data published by each grant-maker to a registry so it can be easily located and downloaded. The data can be located and 'read' by different applications, allowing users to compare grant data from different sources. For example, users can compare the locations of different beneficiaries to gain an understanding of the distribution of funds amongst a particular group of funders or sector. Because it is open data, users can also export it, play with its presentation and combine it with other datasets to create new knowledge.

# Stage 4: Review

*'Every time we make a new decision about strategy, or think about how we support people we fund, we start with data.'*

**Gina Crane, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation**

## Informing strategy development

At the most basic level, using and analysing data can make for more informed decisions. In the case of Buttle UK, data allowed them to investigate their perceptions and test a new approach (see Case study 8).

How can we make a bigger impact for our beneficiary group?

## Building the market

By sharing their data, funders can contribute to the broader evidence base—about the sector as a whole, and about the areas they work in. Some organisations have seen the power of data to help build a field or advocate for a cause. One example is the KL Felicitas Foundation in the US, which has invested 100% of its assets for impact and is set on developing the impact investing field. They are one of the first investors to have published both the financial returns and also the social impact of their investment portfolio—not only to learn and improve as an investor, but to demonstrate that it is possible to achieve market-competitive returns while pursuing social impact, encouraging others to follow suit.[35] In the UK, the Environmental Funders Network is an established resource for funders active in the environmental sector (see Case study 9).

What contribution do we make to developing the sector as a whole?

What can we learn from others in our field?

**Case study 8: Responding to a changing environment**

**Organisation:** Buttle UK, a charitable foundation providing grants directly to disadvantaged children, young people and families around the UK.

**Where is the data from?** Buttle UK provides grants directly to beneficiaries based on referrals from statutory and voluntary agencies, and has very rich data around socio-demographic characteristics, need and deprivation as a result. It is using historical grants data from across the past ten years, data from referral agencies, and qualitative data collected by staff who work with families on a daily basis. It also uses publicly available data from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and census data.

**How is it being used?** Buttle UK is using data to test its assumptions, and to shape decision-making and strategy around priority funding areas. Buttle UK has seen how referral levels have dropped in some areas in recent years, which it believed was due to cuts to statutory and non-statutory services and many referral agencies closing or becoming more stretched. This prompted the organisation to compare its internal data with data from DCLG, DWP, HMRC, census data and more, to ensure that grants were going to the most deprived areas—rather than making funding decisions based purely on the numbers of referrals received.

**What are the benefits?** This work has allowed Buttle UK to gain a better understanding of the environment in which it provides support, and to ensure its funds are going to the places where they will have the greatest impact. Buttle UK is also investigating whether increasing the size of individual grants can lead to longer-term benefits for families and young people, and create cost savings for the state in addition to meeting the immediate needs of beneficiaries. By drawing on government data, Buttle UK will be able to see whether these larger grants have helped to address complex social issues, such as helping to get young people back into work.

**Case study 9: Mapping funding within a sector**

**The challenge:** Understanding the level and nature of funding in a thematic area.

**The approach:** The Environmental Funders Network (EFN) uses grants data, published openly by funders or shared privately with EFN, to produce *Where the green grants went* (see Figure 6)[36]. The report provides a comprehensive overview of grants to environmental and conservation initiatives: the total level of funding, the type of funding being provided, and the issues and geographic areas it focuses on. Because the coding was developed alongside sister networks in Europe, Australia, the US and Canada, the findings can be compared with other countries.

**The outcome:** The reports act as the basis for discussion and advocacy. For example, having found that environmental philanthropy represents less than 4% of total giving by UK foundations, EFN can have a conversation about whether this is the right level. Similarly, looking at the different thematic areas funded, the report finds that *'the share of foundation grants directed towards systemic drivers of environmental harm, such as consumption and waste and trade and finance remains vanishingly small'*[37]. It is only by having this information to hand that EFN can engage in a conversation about what a balanced portfolio would look like. EFN can also set the report alongside the results of their survey of charity chief executives, to explore whether funding flows match what those within the sector are saying about needs.[38] At an organisational level, individual foundations have used information in the report during strategy development—for example, choosing to focus on under-represented areas.

**Figure 6: Funding data used to offer a picture of funding in the environmental sector in** *Where the green grants went*[39]
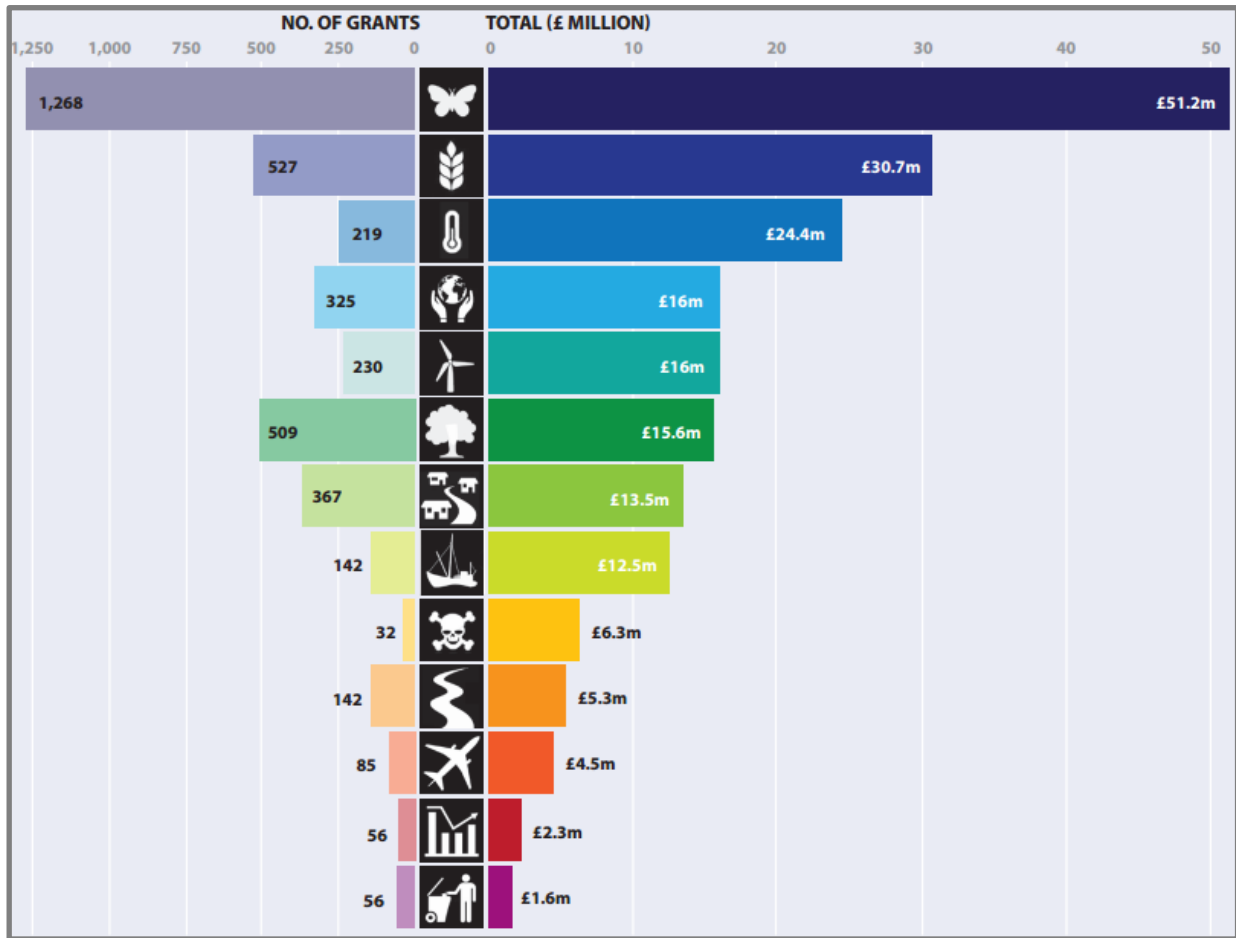


Figure Source: Cracknell, J., Godwin, H., Murray, P. and Scholfield, K. (2014) *Where the green grants went 6: Patterns of UK funding for environmental and conservation work.* Environmental Funders Network

Data shows: Distribution of foundation grants by thematic issue in UK in 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 combined

# CHALLENGES

## Individual challenges

### A need for leadership

A clear message came through during our research and interviews: that while capacity can be an issue, the key factor for improved data use is leadership. For many charitable foundations, success has traditionally been seen as getting money out of the door, and spending as little as possible on the organisation itself. Leadership can shift that focus, introducing a more data-driven approach and making it acceptable to invest in resources that allow the organisation to do a better job. Making better use of data often requires an upfront investment (of time, if not money) to establish systems and processes that will provide useful data further down the line. This can be off-putting for organisations with limited resources, but should pay dividends in the long run. Leadership can help to ensure a strategic approach to data (as well as ensuring that data is used to inform strategy). It can also shift the culture of an organisation, enabling the whole team to see the value of data.

### Limited capacity

Capacity—time, technology and skills—can be a challenge for funders looking to make greater use of data. Organisations may lack in-house data analysis skills—as one interviewee said, *'people don't tend to go work for a foundation in order to become a statistician'.* Equally, outdated systems can make it harder to make effective use of data; this is also a challenge when it comes to sharing data, where initiatives such as 360Giving might be asking for data that organisations do not currently collect, or cannot easily convert into the required format. This can initially take some time, depending on the amount of information being made available and its quality. 360Giving provides pro bono support to organisations that are preparing to publish, and has developed tools to help convert and validate the data. In the longer term, 360Giving is hoping that the process can be automated so the information is produced directly out of funders' own systems. The move to online relationship management systems for those not already using them can open up new possibilities, and many of our interviewees drew on external support in their efforts to use data better.

### The desire for anonymity

For some, particularly smaller family foundations, publishing data risks compromising their desire for anonymity. They may also fear that publishing their grant-making data will lead to them becoming overwhelmed with applications that they do not have the capacity to process. However, much of this data is already publicly available via the Charity Commission, albeit not in open format. A better understanding of how a funder operates could lead to fewer applications being made, but of a higher calibre: information about historical grants should allow applicants to tailor their approaches more closely to funder interests—leading to fewer inappropriate applications and a time saving for funder and charity alike. Greater transparency around grants and decision-making processes by funders can enhance trust, feedback and communication between funders and charities, and demonstrate accountability to supporters, partners and beneficiaries.

At the same time, there can be legitimate security concerns—registered workplace addresses may be an individual's home, and some areas of activity are highly sensitive. For example, organisations funding human rights work, refugee organisations or civil society activity in politically unstable parts of the world have a particular responsibility towards those they fund. It is not always appropriate for funders to reveal all of their data, and an informed and proportionate approach to opening up data is essential. It is not an all or nothing choice—some share

information within a trusted network of their peers or publish only some of their grants, thereby gaining some of the benefits of data sharing while mitigating this concern.

## Concern over how data will be presented

Open data can be used by anyone, for any purpose—leading to concern among funders about how information may be presented and interpreted. This concern relates both to media scrutiny, and the way that historical information may lead people to draw incorrect conclusions about current funding practice.

The 'proper' use of open data cannot be controlled. Much of this information is already publicly available for those with the time and inclination to look for it, and the direction of travel both at home and abroad suggests that transparency and reporting requirements will only increase. The sector could benefit from engaging with this trend head on, celebrating the contribution that philanthropy makes and helping this contribution to become more visible. Some have found that transparency has helped to avert criticism, by demonstrating openness and putting themselves in the driving seat. By opening up their data, funders can get ahead of the challenge and contribute to greater understanding—and increased trust—about the sector.

# The collective challenge: Reaching critical mass

The potential of open data to benefit funders in the ways outlined above is dependent on other stakeholders, big and small, sharing their data in the first place. The value of that data increases as more organisations contribute to it. As people continue to share their data, the network becomes increasingly valuable, so people use it even more—a process known as a 'network effect'.[40] Every contributor, regardless of size, can increase the power of this network (see Figure 1).

There is an element of the unknown: by increasing the value of the network—making data open, freely available, transformable and sharable—we are opening up endless possibilities about how that data can be used, in ways we may not even be able to imagine. The experience of the public sector, which shares information as a public good, has shown this. Since Transport for London (TfL) started openly publishing its data on bus stop locations, timetables and GPS movements, hundreds of new apps have been developed to make travel on public transport more convenient for users. The rationale for TfL was that *'rather than spending huge amounts of money in developing apps ourselves, we can spend a small amount of money in publishing all the data'*[41]—with passengers becoming the ultimate beneficiaries. The Citymapper app, for example, is so successful it has spread to more than 30 cities around the world. It allows users simply to type in their destination and the app does the rest of the work, offering a range of transport options and even advising on which tube carriage the passenger should use for the most efficient journey.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*'We are used to stewarding financial resources toward public benefit—data is a resource that we need to steward with the same integrity.'*

**Lucy Bernholz, Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society**

There is scope for much greater use of data to help funders improve their practice at each stage of the funding cycle. A shift in thinking is needed to realise how much data funders have, and for the sector to see and use this consistently as a resource. Data alone does not tell the whole story, but used effectively it can help to improve practice and support evidence-led decision-making—by identifying patterns, confirming or challenging perceptions, and almost always prompting new questions.

We have not yet reached a critical mass of UK grant-making data in the public domain, but when we do these incremental benefits are likely to shift to transformational ones. The more data that is readily accessible, preferably in open format, the greater the potential for improvement—not only for funders, but for all those with an interest in the charity sector. By making their own data available, ideally to a common data standard, funders can enrich the data landscape for the benefit of themselves and others.

With many organisations facing similar types of challenges, and with the real benefits of data only realised once we reach critical mass, taking a sector-specific as well as an individual approach would pay dividends. There will come a point where it is routine for funders to be using data at all stages in the funding cycle, and for others to use data in their interactions with them. NPC is excited to see what is possible as more funders join those already publishing data, and as data from the charity and public sector comes together.

## Taking the next steps: Advice for funders

**Start with the problem you are trying to solve:** The first question is not, 'what shall we do with our data?', but rather, 'what questions do we have, and how can data help us to answer them?'. Identify these questions—get people from across the organisation to think about this, including trustees and staff. Think across the grant-making cycle, from strategy to process to learning (the examples in this paper may help).

**Look at what relevant data is available:** This will include your own, of course, but there may also be published data that can help answer your question, and other funders may be prepared to share their data if asked.

**Audit your data:** Review the quality of your own data. What information do you have? Is it collected and recorded consistently? Is it up to date and organised in a way that allows you to make use of it—and if not, what steps can you take to improve this? Talk to others about how they have tackled this, and make sure that data and its use is on the board agenda.

**Ask yourself who else could benefit:** Think about data as an asset you have. Could it be a resource for grantees or applicants, or even directly for beneficiaries? What questions would others have that your data might be able to help answer? We would like to see more funders publishing their data using the 360Giving Standard. However, for those who are not ready, sharing among peers can be a useful intermediate step.

**Talk to others:** There is a growing network of organisations in the funder and data community that have an interest in this area. Draw on the resources that are out there for support and ideas (see page 23 for some of the organisations providing support).

**Consider how to encourage use of data more widely in the sector:** Could you, for example, develop ideas for grant programmes that encourage innovative or replicable use of data?

## Taking a sector approach to getting value out of data

**Bring together others—funders and charities—working in the same area to identify questions you would like to answer and how data could help.** Approaching data experts for help understanding the potential of different data sets and developing workable solutions could be useful. Think also about how to get value out of existing data resources in the sector. 360Giving data has huge potential, and Charity Commission data is underused. Get people together to think through what questions could be answered from these data sets (individually or together).

**Convene groups with a common sector interest—such as the issue-based networks brought together by the Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF)—to define questions, map relevant available data and identify gaps.** It might be possible to request this data to be opened up, or to access it through Freedom of Information requests. This could be done with geographies too—for example, funders in London have the London Datastore at their disposal.

**Build a conversation and momentum in the sector through sharing efforts and results.** To inspire others and get input to improve, communicate about helpful analysis and what this analysis enabled.  ACF's Knowledge-sharing network could be a forum for this. Another option is to initiate an annual get-together to share ideas and insights such as: uses of open data, uses of data to improve processes, powerful data visualisations, the most surprising thing discovered through data use, or the most useful development for a funder's work.

**Create a network of data 'champions' in the sector—people with experience in and enthusiasm for making better use of data.** This network could be a great resource for driving things forward, sharing learning and supporting others.

**Organisations that offer support with making better use of data in the UK:**

CAST (Centre for Acceleration of Social Technology): www.wearecast.org.uk

DataKind: www.datakind.org

Data Orchard: www.dataorchard.co.uk

The Open Data Institute: www.theodi.org

Pro Bono OR: www.theorsociety.com

**…and further afield:**

digitalIMPACT.io: www.digitalimpact.io

Markets for Good: www.marketsforgood.org

School of Data: www.schoolofdata.org

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# TRANSFORMING THE CHARITY SECTOR

NPC is a charity think tank and consultancy which occupies a unique position at the nexus between charities and funders, helping them achieve the greatest impact. We are driven by the values and mission of the charity sector, to which we bring the rigour, clarity and analysis needed to better achieve the outcomes we all seek. We also share the motivations and passion of funders, to which we bring our expertise, experience and track record of success.

**Increasing the impact of charities:** NPC exists to make charities and social enterprises more successful in achieving their missions. Through rigorous analysis, practical advice and innovative thinking, we make charities' money and energy go further, and help them to achieve the greatest impact.

**Increasing the impact of funders:** NPC's role is to make funders more successful too. We share the passion funders have for helping charities and changing people's lives. We understand their motivations and their objectives, and we know that giving is more rewarding if it achieves the greatest impact it can.

**Strengthening the partnership between charities and funders:** NPC's mission is also to bring the two sides of the funding equation together, improving understanding and enhancing their combined impact. We can help funders and those they fund to connect and transform the way they work together to achieve their vision.

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