

GEO Member Story



NEW HAMPSHIRE CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

NonprofitNext is a valuable resource for more than 1,500 nonprofit users, but ask the New Hampshire Charitable foundation about its significance, and you'll find that it's about more than just getting valuable resources to nonprofits; it's about innovating, taking smart risks, and collaborating with the private sector.

Imagine making a single grant that has enabled over 200 nonprofits to increase their boards' engagement in fundraising, and more than 400 to increase their leadership capacity. That is the story of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation and "NonprofitNext," a comprehensive online training center, resource library, and empowerment tool, just one click away for any organization that needs it.

"These are different times," said Katie Merrow, vice president of program at the foundation. "There are fewer resources in the sector. We are calling on our grantees to work differently, and we have to do the same. Nonprofit Next is very much an embodiment of that for our foundation."

First for the foundation was to listen to a brilliant entrepreneur who wanted to transform a wildly successful commercial product into something the nonprofit world would use. Howard Brodsky, local business leader and CEO of CCA Global Partners, had built a family of web sites that have helped tens of thousands of small businesses compete with large chains. He came to the foundation to see how his model of bringing scale and innovation to small businesses might be transferred to the nonprofit sector. The foundation connected Brodsky with the NH Center for Nonprofits, which the foundation had launched several years earlier together with other funders in the state. Brodsky's expertise, the center's deep knowledge of the sector, and the foundation's funding and convening leadership made an ideal match.

The NH Charitable Foundation led an effort to raise three years of start-up funding, together with the Center for Nonprofits raising more than \$665,000 from 15 funders — a particularly broad-based effort for New Hampshire. The foundation understood that for this initiative to succeed, it would take exploring new approaches and taking calculated risks.

"It was a significant effort for our foundation to commit to this project when it was just an idea, go out front and help raise that amount of working capital, and invest the staff time and leadership needed to launch a project like this," Merrow said. She added that grantmakers have to be willing to look outside of the box when searching for collaboration partners — that particularly means being willing to look to the private sector for innovation.

Not only did the private sector become involved at the formative-level of NonprofitNext through CCA, but the New Hampshire Center for Nonprofits partnered with other businesses as well in developing resources for the site. Merrow highlighted the project's benefit in forging new ways of working with business on both levels.

Merrow readily gives much credit for NonprofitNext's success so far to the work of the NH Center for Nonprofits, whose content expertise and leadership have been key to the project's success.

“Our nonprofit partner had to take risks too, and for nonprofits to be positioned to do that they need sustainable funding,” Merrow said. “We fund our center for nonprofits every year with a significant operating grant and really invest in that organization. This contributes to their being positioned to take a smart risk — like launching a \$665,000 dollar project with a new business partner ... At the funder, business and nonprofit levels we were all open to innovation, and we took a risk together.”

Merrow went on to say that, ultimately, funders that want to support innovation have to also be willing to invest in nonprofits’ core capacity.

“As funders, it’s not just funding that new, innovative idea, it’s investing in the core capacity of those key nonprofits that are going to move your community forward, and that takes sustained funding year after year to get the strong leadership you need and position the nonprofits themselves to innovate and take those risks.”

NonprofitNext, hosted by the Center for Nonprofits, has been highly effective at helping nonprofits across the state access a common operations toolkit with the click of a mouse. The site gives users access to high-quality training videos, presentations, HR documents, and other tools. It has resources for launching a capital campaign, creating a board assessment tool, updating an employee handbook and many other nonprofit needs. A TCC Group evaluation found users of the site had statistically significant individual and organizational-level improvements, and called the on-demand “bite-sized pieces of information and real ‘how-to’ instruction” key factors in achieving that change.

While there is a sizeable selection of resources for nonprofits, one of the strengths of the platform is having a limited quantity of materials, and a high threshold of quality for the materials that get selected.

“People’s time is precious. We have too many things going on,” said Deborah Schachter, senior program officer at the foundation. “This tool does a good job of vetting and distilling information that is actually usable and not overwhelming.”

NonprofitNext and the Next Steps

Since it went online in June 2011, NonprofitNext has tripled original expectations for its number of users. Currently, more than 1,500 users from 600 nonprofits access the resources available on the site. The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation and its partners hope to more than double that number in New Hampshire over the next two years

Here’s a couple of more quick findings from TCC Group’s evaluation:

- 36 percent of users accessing fundraising resources increased board engagement in fundraising
- 73 percent of users accessing board resources reported an increase in leadership capacity
- Use of NonprofitNext “leads to ... strengthening positive habits that individuals could not have achieved with traditional training”

Now the partners are looking for how to expand the reach of NonprofitNext to a national level.

Katie Merrow, the foundation’s vice president, is inviting any foundation staff members who believe that NonprofitNext could be a valuable tool for their state to [contact her](#).

“We see this tool as a game changer not just in New Hampshire but in the field nationally — in terms of approach, but also in use of this tool itself,” Merrow said. “We’re excited to see other states benefit from that.”

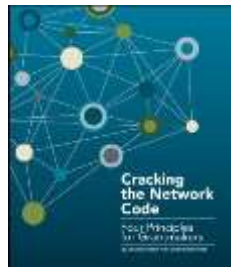
By investing in NonprofitNext, the NH Charitable Foundation expects to be able to reduce grants given to address training and other capacity building needs that can now be resolved with freely accessible resources via NonprofitNext. The foundation now asks grant applicants if and how they're using Nonprofit Next, and directs them to use the resources there wherever possible.

GEO resources that relate to the topics covered in this member spotlight:

[*Pathways to Grow Impact*](#)



[*Cracking the Network Code*](#)



[*Working Better Together*](#)

