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Grey Matter(s): Embracing the Publisher Within

Lisa Brooks, B.A. and Gabriela Fitz, M.A., Foundation Center

Key Points

- Most foundations don't think of themselves as publishers, yet many of them act as such – making information available by funding research and publications, or by authoring their own. And failing to think of these activities as publishing efforts has serious consequences for shared learning in the social sector.

- The shift toward knowledge-sharing strategies and approaches that embrace new search technologies, the logic of open access and open source, and the realities of the Internet as a largely decentralized and dynamic self-publishing space offers the possibility of coordinating publishing efforts, and possibly agreeing to the use of shared practices that can facilitate shared learning while acknowledging the independence of individual organizations.

- While there are some common obstacles preventing foundations from moving toward shared systems and practices, there are also a number of publishing practices being widely adopted that together address most of those obstacles and represent a set of shared practices around which the social sector might coalesce and coordinate.

Overview

Most foundations don't think of themselves as publishers. Grantmakers? Sure. Partners? Sometimes. Change makers? When they are at their best. But not publishers. And yet, many of them act as publishers, making information available to the public by funding research and publications, or by authoring their own. These are the case studies, evaluations, research reports, and issue briefs with which we are all familiar; an enormous body of "grey literature"[1] that captures important information about the social problems we are addressing as well as valuable front-line lessons about the social interventions we support. We rarely talk about any of this activity as publishing, and we certainly don't treat it like publishing.

Why does it matter what we call this effort, or whether foundations think of themselves as publishers? In failing to think about our knowledge production and sharing activities as publishing efforts, we do two things that have serious consequences for shared learning in the social sector.

First, we largely treat publishing efforts as communication tasks. Foundations and other nonprofits rely almost exclusively on dissemination efforts instead of shared, long-term publishing strategies. Although the art and science of communication have greatly contributed to our ability to share what we are learning with a larger audience, there is no substitute for an information infrastructure

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[1] According to Grey Literature Network Service (n.d.), grey literature "deals with the production, distribution, and access to multiple document types produced on all levels of government, academics, business, and organization in electronic and print formats not controlled by commercial publishing, i.e. where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body." The fact that grey literature isn't published or controlled by commercial publishers can make it difficult to find it through conventional channels such as journals or online catalogs.

that makes possible the kinds of searches and analyses upon which ongoing, shared learning is based.

Second, when we don't consider these activities to be publishing activities, we also don't fully consider or appreciate all the related organizational decisions as publishing decisions. These include how we approach the licensing of research and resources, where we want to publish and share these findings (repositories, journals, research aggregators), how we plan to measure readership, and how we want search engines and other entities to describe and index these resources for greater, long-term discoverability and access. In short, by not thinking of ourselves as publishers, we also don't think about the kind of publisher we want to be.

The consequences of this mindset are real. Despite our best intentions, the program officer who is considering new areas for investment still can't do a quick search on what's already been learned about an issue, problem, or attempted solution. The nonprofit practitioner who is shifting toward an earned-income model still can't easily track down existing models from which to borrow. The evaluator who has been hired to understand the impact of an initiative still has no way to easily review existing evaluations of similar efforts. And the people we, as a sector, serve – those who rely on us to build on and improve the services we deliver – still bear the brunt of our failure to learn from mistakes and successes.

Imagine for a moment if medical or academic research was collected and shared in the same way that we have historically gathered and shared insights about the social sector's work. Scary, huh?

IssueLab, a service of the Foundation Center, has been operating alongside this underorganized system, trying to capture and index an enormous body of literature – our collective intelligence –for the past decade.[2] This effort has made abundantly

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clear the limitations in how the social sector shares its insights and findings. The current state requires time-strapped individuals to find the knowledge they rely on while expecting individual organizations that often lack capacity to capture broad readership on their own. We have seen the rise and fall of dozens of platforms, killer apps, and outreach channels and will no doubt see the rise and fall of many more. Just a quick trip down short-term-memory lane brings up a long list of "must use" applications and platforms for disseminating new reports and research findings: StumbleUpon, Ning, Technorati, FriendFeed, Friendster, del.icio.us, QR codes, Juno. Without a doubt, these platforms – whatever their life span – help us to share our work more broadly. In many ways they meet the need to amplify our findings. What they don't do is help us continue

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[2] IssueLab was formed in 2005 and became an independent, 501(c)(3) organization in 2006. It was acquired by Foundation Center in 2012, at which point it merged its holdings with those of PubHub, a similar project of Foundation Center.

FIGURE 1 Dirty Window, Katie Brady (licensed under CC BY 2.0)

to share those findings when the study or report isn't so new anymore. Two years from now, will we still be able to locate a 2015 report in the first 20 pages of a Google search-result list without a clear memory of its title or the organization that published it?

The good news is we are finally seeing a shift toward knowledge-sharing strategies and approaches that embrace new search technologies, the logic of open access and open source, and the realities of the Internet as a largely decentralized and dynamic self-publishing space. This shift offers the possibility of coordinating our publishing efforts, and possibly agreeing to the use of shared practices that can support and facilitate shared learning while still acknowledging the limitations of forced standards and the independence and creativity of individual organizations.

How Big Is the Potential? How Big Is the Problem?

At what scale is the social sector producing knowledge? And how big is the problem we face in collecting and indexing it? (See Figure 1.)

Currently, there is no way to do the equivalent of a comprehensive search of the total population of reports about a specific field of practice,[3] let alone

an aggregate count across dozens of issues. This doesn't just leave us without a clear end game for our collection efforts; it reflects serious problems with knowledge retrieval, access, and synthesis. For the same reasons that we can't be certain of how much related literature is out there, we also can't accurately capture the lessons contained in that literature.

What we are certain of is this: Private foundations in the U.S. are committed to publishing, despite the absence of a coordinated approach to sharing the results of that funding. In 2012, U.S.-based private and community foundations made more than $74 million in grants[4] for the express purpose of publication. (Foundation Center,

[3] While comprehensive digital collections do exist in the social sector (Eldis, Zunia, and the What Works Clearinghouse are

just three examples), the majority of clearinghouses focus either on the work of one organization or on work addressing just one social issue. If more clearinghouses were built in ways that allowed for interoperability between collections (as Eldis is), this wouldn't in itself be a problem. We also see sophisticated knowledge collection and sharing efforts in some fields and almost no knowledge-sharing capacity in others, resulting in an unequal distribution across issue areas and with collections emerging only where and when there are resources.

[4] Foundation Center's grants database includes grants of $10,000 or more awarded by larger U.S. foundations by total giving, an assortment of grants of less than $10,000 for foundations with giving of $5 million or more, and sample grants of all sizes for foundations with a total giving amount of less than $5 million. All grants are at least $1,000. Our estimate of dollars spent annually on publications is conservative; the data set represents a little more than half the foundations in the U.S., albeit the larger ones that are more likely to fund research.

2015). When we also consider grants made for the purpose of program evaluation, which often results in publications, that total jumps to more than $210 million. This hefty annual investment is a testament to foundations' ongoing belief in and commitment to the importance of collecting and sharing knowledge.

But the real level of investment is most likely much higher. As a proxy measure for the scope of publishing activity in the sector, the number of dollars granted for "publication" unfortunately leaves out some significant support streams and sources of grey literature, including:

- publication that is supported through foundation contracts rather than grants;
- grants for research that results in publication (and is funded to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars each year), but whose descriptions themselves don't mention publishing;
- thousands of reports that are published each year by nonprofits whose work may be supported by a foundation, but that did not secure a grant for a specific piece of research or evaluation; and
- publications that are authored and produced by foundations themselves.

Some of the largest of these "publishing foundations," like the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Commonwealth Fund, or the Pew Charitable Trusts, have public collections on their websites that contain literally thousands of reports, case studies, and evaluations.[5] There are also many more foundations that commission, author, and publish dozens of reports, including community and private foundations, public charities, and, less often, family foundations. Add to this the grantmaker networks and affinity groups that author, commission, and publish reports for their members. All these foundations are investing money, thought, and care into capturing and making sense of the lessons they and their grantees are learning. And all are sharing their publica-

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tions outside and in the absence of a coordinated approach to archiving, indexing, preserving, and sharing this public good.

What Holds Us Back? Common Obstacles

After almost 10 years of conversations with organizations large and small about safeguarding and sharing grey literature, we have a few hunches about why foundations don't more fully embrace their role as publishers and why they may resist moving toward shared systems and practices. We present them as just that – hunches, hoping readers will push back or add to the list based on their own reflection and experience. (See Figure 2.)

What we have heard and observed follows five commonly held rationales:

[5] As of January 2015, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's online library included more than 8,000 resources, the Commonwealth Fund's included more than 2,500, and Pew's included more than 2,120 resources – more than 12,000 resources from these three foundations alone.

FIGURE 2 North Cascades Rockfall, Washington State Department of Transportation (licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

1. *Restricting rights on intellectual property is believed to be the best, or only, way to protect the value of an organization's knowledge products.* It's expected that organizations would want attribution for the knowledge they have invested in producing; this knowledge is not just what has been learned in the field, but is also often about what an organization has done with its resources to impact that field or effect change. In a knowledge-intensive sector such as ours, evidence and analyses are a form of currency that contributes to organizations' and individuals' value and potential for influence – not unlike what scholarly writing can bring to academics and their institutions.

   Unfortunately, many organizations believe that the restriction of rights to intellectual property is the best or only way to capture that value, unaware of licensing options that might better serve their purpose and goals. Add to this the often expensive and time-intensive process of changing organizational policies, and we can begin to understand why organizations persist in defaulting to restrictive licenses.

2. *Organizations already have their own approaches to formatting and sharing their resources; coordinating practices with others would be extra work without clear immediate benefit.* This speaks directly to the communications mindset that treats knowledge sharing as the task of a single organization rather than part of a collective effort.

   In some ways this perspective represents a failure of organizations like IssueLab and Foundation Center to help our peers imagine what types of learning are possible when knowledge is drawn from across organizations and fields of practice. But it also represents a long history of fierce independence among foundations, and the realities of what organizations with limited capacity can or will prioritize.

3. *The quality of social-sector research is questionable: is it really fit for "publishing"?* This is what we have come to think of as grey literature's imposter syndrome[6] (Clance & Imes, 1978). Again and again in conversations with foundations that fund practice-based research, case studies, and evaluation, we find ourselves, oddly, defending its quality. Although there is a clear commitment to funding this work, there is also an awkward skepticism about its value. When we point to the existing grey literature on a topic and the potential value of collecting it for synthesis, peer learning, or scanning exercises, we are often challenged on whether it is too agenda-driven to be considered valid. Despite the incredible range of work that falls

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[6] Impostor syndrome is a psychological syndrome in which people are unable to recognize or internalize their accomplishments; our use of it, while tongue-in-cheek, offers a useful analogy.

into this body of literature (from multiyear, large-scale surveys to small, community-based ethnographies), the academic credentials and training of many of its authors, and the invaluable practice-based insights the literature contributes to our work, it is often presumed lacking in comparison to peer-reviewed and academic literature.

The impostor syndrome keeps us from taking the actions needed to achieve our goals, which the sector can ill afford to do (Warrell, 2014).

4. *Organizations aren't sure people are even reading this stuff.* Or, alternatively, the only way they know to track readership is if the report lives on their website. Instead of more meaningful measures, the sector largely relies on web analytics to understand the impact and value of its knowledge products. We report the number of "eyeballs," counting downloads and page views, while unsure about whether the people to whom these eyeballs belong actually read the report or passed it on to others within their networks. And more often than not, we hear disappointment at the number of downloads a report receives without any real sense of what an appropriate goal for readership should be.[7] A recent World Bank report echoed, and maybe even reinforced, these concerns (Doemeland & Trevino, 2014). "Which World Bank Reports Are Widely Read?" revealed that large portions of its publications were downloaded relatively few times, and an overwhelming majority of them – 88 percent – were never even cited. These findings seem to resonate most with funders' fears, but neither of these data points actually addresses the purpose of the World Bank's reports – which is to inform public debate, not to gain the largest numbers of readers.[8]

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The emergence of alternative scholarly impact metrics, or "altmetrics" (Public Library of Science, 2012), on platforms such as PLoS, Mendeley, and Elsevier are, alongside tools like digital object identifiers, pointing us in a clearer direction. These altmetrics combine citation counts with other metrics, such as how many data and knowledge bases refer to a work and how often a work is mentioned in social media. Altmetrics, almost by definition, are still a work in progress, but hopefully can better inform our expectations and measures of readership.

5. *This is just how it's always been done.* This rationale is no surprise to anyone who has worked in an institution, but we include it here because we view this as an opportunity to offer the technical and operational support many foundations may need in order to change. Most foundations have the best intentions around their knowledge-sharing and publishing efforts. They just don't know another way.

Steps Toward Open Publishing

One of the biggest benefits of naming all this activity as publishing is that we place ourselves in the much larger context of digital and scholarly publishing, opening ourselves up to the hard lessons and promising practices being learned in an industry that is already adapting to massive technological, economic, and cultural change.

An entire commercial industry has developed around academic and scientific publication, devoted to the management of a published work, including versioning, metadata generation and maintenance, rights management, peer review,

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[7] This reliance on web analytics is the reason that many organizations initially resisted archiving their work with IssueLab, and why our default publication-download link points to the file on their servers.

[8] Other conclusions from the World Bank report that are especially relevant to this discussion include the key finding that media pushes alone were "not sufficient for a good dissemination strategy" (p. 22) and, not surprisingly, that reports continued to be downloaded over long periods of time, albeit at slower rates (p. 13).

FIGURE 3 Converging Paths Looking East, Brent Granby (licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

print and electronic release, download tracking, citation tracking, search and browse tool development, promotion and advertising, and long-term archiving and distribution. As we have discussed, the social sector has nothing near this level of organization or systematization when it comes to releasing and tracking published works so that they are actively preserved and managed through their life cycle of interest and usefulness.

We think this is perfectly appropriate. We don't believe the social sector should publish its research and resources in the same way that the academic, scientific, or commercial sectors have historically done. The purpose and goals behind our noncommercial and nonprofit knowledge production would not have been well served by simply adopting their business models. But, as we begin to recognize the need for better coordination of social-sector publishing efforts, we do have the opportunity to borrow and adapt some of the most promising practices and new directions from more traditional publishing spheres and entities.

Ironically, the absence of a more formal publishing system in the social sector may just be the best news yet. We have the chance now, as publishing models shift toward greater openness, to adopt those practices that best align with the noncommercial goals and purpose of social-sector publishing. Our time may finally have come!

Below are four distinct but complementary publishing practices that are being widely adopted by knowledge producers and publishing entities around the world. Each of these is what we think of as a socio-technical strategy, combining supportive technologies (mechanical or procedural) with social practices and principles. Together they address most of the obstacles and entrenched rationales we described above, representing a set of shared practices around which the social sector might coalesce and coordinate. (See Figure 3.)

Open Licensing

As stewards of one of the social sector's largest active public-knowledge repositories and distribution systems, copyright notices that clearly state that a work can and should be shared are a welcome sight. We have seen "all rights reserved" notices that lock a publication into a view-only state – no printing, no reproduction, no citing, no activity beyond personal enrichment through reading on-screen allowed without the express permission of the publisher.[9] No joke! In extreme cases, publishing organizations have even taken

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[9] A report was recently added to IssueLab that carried the following copyright notice: "Copyright 2014 by the Council on Foreign Relations Inc. All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part, in any form beyond the reproduction permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law Act (17 U.S.C. Sections 107 and 108) and excerpts by reviewers for the public press, without express written permission from the Council on Foreign Relations."

steps to mechanically secure documents so that a reader is technically blocked from printing them or even copying text.

There is a better way to handle copyright, a way that more closely aligns with the goals of grey literature: to share an idea, an approach, a successful or failed intervention. By using open licenses,[10] publishing organizations across the world are able to specify how they wish their work to be attributed and repurposed rather than defaulting to an "all rights reserved" mentality that is often misaligned with the purpose and intent of social-sector research. Many online content providers have been using this alternative for years to protect their ideas while still sharing broadly. Open licenses aren't about giving away our intellectual property; they are about giving us a way to specify how we want our work to be used and to indicate "some rights reserved." We all benefit when a social-change organization produces a report and releases it in a way that clearly states what can be done with it.

In the early days of the Internet, there seemed to be an opportunity for anyone to make money and an ethos that only losers weren't cashing in. Where nonprofits were concerned, the emergence of services and tools that enabled online donations, retail sales of logo-bearing goods, and ticket and publication sales held the promise of generating revenue as quickly and easily as clicking a mouse. Today, online donations and ticket sales continue to help some nonprofits supplement grant-based income. But selling publications was never a moneymaker in the social sector. Over the years, we've watched actual price tags attached to publications devolve into suggested donations. At this point, for the most part, a pay-per-view requirement or suggestion has pretty much disappeared from social-sector publication distribution.

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What hasn't disappeared is an "all rights reserved" mentality, a "closed" attitude that persists despite a larger shift in recent years toward "open" – open content, open access, open source, open culture. There is a growing recognition that knowledge – like music, images, and other cultural work – is produced as part of a commons and its greatest value comes through its exchange.

Thankfully, we are seeing a small but growing number of foundations and nonprofits adopting this viewpoint, using open licenses on the work they author to ensure attribution but also to specify how they would like their work to be used (e.g., for noncommercial purposes or without restriction). A number of foundations have taken the encouraging step of extending these open licensing requirements to the work they fund, writing open licensing guidelines directly into their grant agreements.[11]

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[10] Not all open licenses are equally open, but the term is often used to describe licenses that stipulate permissions that are more lenient than "all rights reserved." Organizations like Creative Commons offer simple tools for users to select a license that best aligns with their intentions and principles, while encouraging creators to consider truly open licenses that allow for work to be freely shared, improved, and built upon as long as the original author is credited.

[11] Wellcome Trust in the United Kingdom was the world's first funder to mandate open access for publication of the research it funds. Others, like the Shuttleworth Foundation, have been leaders in this area for some time. In recent months, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and Ford Foundation have joined them in requiring and/or strongly encouraging grantees to use open licenses on funded work.

What if, instead of attempting to track all these downloads or the page views where the download link exists, there was just one link that provided a cumulative accounting of how many times a report is downloaded, regardless of where the link to it is clicked?

Digital Object Identifiers

Digital object identifiers (DOIs) provide a way to start moving toward more accurate knowledge management and knowledge-sharing metrics. Imagine that a foundation has funded a collaboration of five nonprofits and part of the grant is to produce a report. The collaboration hires a firm to co-author the report. When the report is released, where does someone access it? Here's a worst-case scenario: If every entity involved in this effort posts the report to their site for downloading (since everyone wants the web traffic), there are seven places where this file can be accessed. Getting an idea of how many times this downloadable file was accessed will require cobbling together data from seven web-usage-statistics accounts (assuming the accounts were set up to properly capture this data). Want the total download count next month? You'll have to cobble stats all over again.

What if, instead of attempting to track all these downloads or the page views where the download link exists, there was just one link that provided a cumulative accounting of how many times a report is downloaded, regardless of where the link to it is clicked? That's what a DOI can do. Not only can all the groups involved in producing this report use the DOI link, anyone they share the link with can use it as well. Now we're closing in on a true measure of knowledge access.

A DOI is a permanent, unique identifier that provides a persistent and singular link to an object. Essentially it acts as a tracking device when attached to objects – documents, web pages, videos, and other online resources – and provides a direct link to details about and access to the object itself. A DOI can be assigned to only one object, and an object can have only one DOI. They do not expire; once assigned, the identifier remains in the DOI system, maintained by the International DOI Foundation.[12]

It's next to impossible to find a published article in a peer-reviewed journal that doesn't have a DOI; they are an integral part of a journal publisher's archiving and sales processes. Journal publishers take on the costs and tasks associated with securing a DOI because the DOI link to a journal article becomes the only way the article can be obtained. (The costs and tasks associated with DOIs are varied and complex: partneringpartnering - at a cost - with a DOI registration agency, developing and maintaining systems and processes that enable interactions between a journal's system and the registration agency's system, and ensuring that a click on a DOI will return the correct metadata and full text. The payoff is a streamlined and trusted system of content delivery and archiving, with an integrated paywall where needed.) These identifiers also enable citation tracking, which can provide information about how many times an article has been cited and by whom. This is an important and useful metric in academic publishing: an academic's tenure, for example, can rely on how much she publishes and how often her published works are cited. Likewise, the prowess of an institution is in part dependent on the uptake of its faculty's ideas as indicated by citation metrics; journals that carry articles by highly cited authors enjoy a certain caché in the journal's subject niche and the publishing world in general.

In addition to providing a permanent link to a resource, DOIs can provide access to otherwise hard-to-capture usage metrics and can create new opportunities for exposure and sharing. They are

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[12] The International DOI Foundation, established in 1997, is a nonprofit membership organization.

issued by registration agencies, such as CrossRef,[13] that can share data with a network of content providers (libraries, aggregators, clearinghouses, etc.) that use DOIs and their associated metadata in information delivery tools and services. A DOI-carrying publication automatically becomes part of this larger data share.

Schema.org

Content can't be "king" if it can't be found. And so an entire industry has grown up around search engine optimization (SEO), the art and science of structuring HTML code and Web content to gain higher ranking in search engine result pages (SERPs). As anyone who has tried to gain readership for their reports knows, optimizing the long-term discoverability of published works isn't a simple matter. And those who are searching for a specific kind of knowledge know that finding the most relevant results is no easy task. In an information ecosystem that is increasingly crowded, complex, and granular, search has taken on new importance for readers and publishers.

Search engine technology is constantly evolving, and there's buzz that the next evolution will get us closer to a semantics-aware Web – the "Semantic Web" – that will enable data "to be linked from a source to any other source and to be understood by computers so that they can perform increasingly sophisticated tasks" (Cambridge Semantics, 2014). For the Semantic Web to supply contextualized and nuanced search results, it needs an assist from humans to help it understand how things relate to each other. It is no surprise that this next-generation Web is of enormous interest to Internet search companies. In fact, the thought of it created a collaboration of competitors to figure out how to foster the conditions necessary to bring the next iteration of the Web online and help it thrive.

In 2011, Google, Yahoo, Yandex, and Bing! unveiled Schema.org, a jointly created and maintained data vocabulary whose primary purpose is to describe all manner of "things" on the Internet: creative work; an event, organization, person, place, or product; more abstract things,

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like an action or an intangible; and "sub-things" that describe things, such as a title of a person or a creative work, an address of an organization or event, or a name of a product or a place.

There are more than 750 tags in the Schema.org vocabulary. When applied correctly, these tags can compile a fairly complete and, importantly, machine-readable contextualized picture. All it takes to use Schema.org is adding a bit of familiar-looking HTML code to the code we already include in our Web pages. Doing so can turn a Web page that could only be understood by search technologies in literal terms into, essentially, a data base that search engines can mine for semantic meaning.

Another interesting collaboration around the promise of the next-generation Web also came in 2011, when the Learning Resource Metadata Initiative (LRMI) was created in response to Schema.org's release to "make it easier to publish, discover, and deliver quality educational resources on the Web." (Learning Resource Metadata Initiative). The initiative's work was partly an assessment of Schema.org's immediate applicability to learning resources and partly an extension of Schema.org to better address the nuances of this particular content. The initiative ultimately added a number of education-specific tags that are now available for anyone to use in their Web pages. The new tags – "timeRequired," "typicalAgeRange," and "educationalAudience," for example – add nuance and clarity when thinking about learning resources. It's apparent how these could

[13] See http://www.crossref.org/02publishers/index.html

What organization doesn't want more control over how it is represented in Internet search results, or to be included in next-generation tools and linked data sharing? The looming challenge for social-sector organizations will be how they can leverage this technology to amplify the knowledge they produce, rather than disappearing from the frame altogether.

be useful to a parent searching for learning aids for a child or a teacher searching for a workshop curriculum for sixth-graders. If we extend that thinking, LMRI's adaptation of Schema.org has broad implications for learning in other fields. Could Schema.org provide the same level of specificity to a program officer's search for economic empowerment measures targeting Latino youth, or to a direct service provider's search for examples of supportive-housing approaches in suburban environments?

Schema.org is not the only way to describe things on the Web. But who could argue against the power of suggestion when it's wielded by the major search engines – including that holy grail of SERPs, Google – to galvanize content producers eager to build awareness about their offerings? What organization doesn't want more control over how it is represented in Internet search results, or to be included in next-generation tools and linked data sharing? The looming challenge for social-sector organizations will be how they

can leverage this technology to amplify the knowledge they produce, rather than disappearing from the frame altogether.

The LRMI has shown that getting a critical mass of publishers to tag their content in a specified way requires different types of tasks: part technical, part advocacy, part educational. It behooves us to take a page from the LRMI's playbook when considering how to organize our content so it is ready for the next set of online innovations. The first step is to decide not to be left out of the next big thing. The second is to get collaborative and engage the stakeholders involved with all aspects of the production of grey literature. And the third is to support constituents and collaborators in the necessary behavioral change.

Open Access Repositories

Open access repositories have been in use by academic and publishing institutions for many years, collecting and organizing in one place the digital objects (e.g., Microsoft Word documents, PDFs) and the metadata that describes them. But what makes them especially valuable is that they do so in ways that make them interoperable with each other, exposing their metadata for open exchange with other repositories. This interoperability is based on international standards, so sharing can be done on a global scale. Open access repositories give knowledge producers an easy way to archive their work somewhere other than their personal hard drive or organizational website. And they give end-users access to knowledge and clear information about what they can and cannot do with that knowledge.

Many repository software packages have open licensing tools baked into them, educating users about this alternative approach to copyright and making it possible to choose and apply an open license at will. Open access repositories play a key role as content aggregators, curators, archives, and distribution channels. They also can be learning environments providing auxiliary tools, such as recommendation engines, in addition to search and browse capabilities, thus enabling people to explore and discover in new ways.

The federal government seems to agree that open access repositories are a vital part of the movement toward greater openness and transparency in government. In February 2013, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy laid out new mandates for federal agencies that spend more than $100 million a year on research (Holdren, 2013). Agencies are now required to make the results of that research, including scientific and scholarly works in peer-reviewed journals, available for public access within 12 months of publication; digital repositories are a recommended method of sharing. Earlier adoption of and success with these practices can be found in the historical work of agencies like the National Institutes of Health, which has long required grantees to deposit a copy of funded research in its open repository, PubMed.

The social sector has hardly been a slouch when it comes to open access. In December 2001, well before the federal government mandated public access to publicly funded research, the Open Society Institute (now Open Society Foundation) hosted a meeting in Budapest, Hungary, of open-access proponents and advocates to figure out a way forward. The focus was, and continues to be, access to scientific and scholarly journal literature. On its 10-year anniversary, the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) released updated recommendations and a renewed call to action:

> Nothing from the last 10 years suggests that the goal is less valuable or worth attaining. On the contrary, the imperative to make knowledge available to everyone who can make use of it, apply it, or build on it is more pressing than ever" (BOAI, 2012).

We couldn't agree more.

The vast majority of knowledge-producing organizations in the social sector begin and end their publishing efforts by posting their publications to the website. The problem with this approach is that a website is not an archiving tool or a long-term repository; it is actually the opposite. Websites provide the latest news, presenting an organization as a current, relevant player. Staying current online means refreshing not only content,

Every foundation grant toward research or evaluation is motivated by a promise: that we learn from what we have done so that we can do it better in the future.

but also design – often requiring wholesale restructuring of a website's back end, complete with deleting and relocating content. In this restructuring, much can be lost. We can say from experience – IssueLab attempts to link directly to a copy of any resource shared through our system, where it lives on the publisher's site – that website redesigns are the chief enemy of long-term publication archiving.

We can do better. Imagine if knowledge producers, funders, and exchange facilitators in the social sector joined the open access movement with conviction. There's still time. As the BOAI puts it, "Today we're no longer at the beginning of this worldwide campaign, and not yet at the end. We're solidly in the middle" (BOAI, 2012). The opportunity to build and preserve a knowledge commons unlike any in existence on the Web is waiting to be seized.

Conclusion

Every foundation grant toward research or evaluation is motivated by a promise: that we learn from what we have done so that we can do it better in the future. This requires the ability to survey the landscape, review the methods and approaches used by others addressing the same problems, identify obstacles and solutions, and consistently and freely access relevant insights from across a diverse field of activities and interventions. Where knowledge generated by the social sector is concerned, this is not currently possible. But it can be.

Promising new practices – which we are observing in our own sector and in commercial and scholarly publishing – offer a number of entry

points for foundations that are invested in the production of knowledge for public good. If foundations are serious about people using the research they fund and produce, and genuinely believe in the value of this grey literature, then it's time that they also embrace their role as publishers.

Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.
Maya Angelou.

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