

Enhancing Data-Driven Decisions by Improving Nonprofit Transparency and
Collaboration: A Study of the Accessibility of Nonprofit Data in the Global Landscape

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Abstract

This paper addresses the pressing need for enhanced transparency of nonprofit data to improve nonprofit collaboration, emphasizing the development of a global nonprofit database. Globally, there is a lack of transparency and accessibility to nonprofit data, which reduces the ability to make better decisions 1) between nonprofits as they work to collaborate and improve outcomes, 2) with nonprofit resource providers (foundations, volunteers, donors, company CSR programs, governments, grantees, etc.) when making decisions about who to support, and 3) with nonprofits as they attempt to reach those who need their services. By analyzing 34 nonprofit databases from the European Union, the United States, and Canada, this study explores the variation in data availability, quality, and transparency measures. Preliminary findings suggest that standardized and accessible nonprofit data can significantly improve decision-making, resource allocation, and strategic planning across these three groups. The study also highlights the potential of such a database to address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by identifying service provision gaps, optimizing collaboration, and informing data-driven advocacy and policy making. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and a comparative case study methodology, this research aims to provide actionable recommendations for creating a more transparent, accountable, and collaborative global nonprofit sector. By creating a global nonprofit database that increases nonprofit transparency and makes data more accessible to decision makers, there will be 1) increased trust, 2) increased collaboration, 3) better decisions being made, and 4) better outcomes.

Keywords: Nonprofit Transparency, Collaboration, Nonprofit Database

Enhancing Data-Driven Decisions by Improving Nonprofit Transparency and Collaboration: A Study of the Accessibility of Nonprofit Data in the Global Landscape

Transparency and Collaboration is crucial for the nonprofit sector to achieve its goals effectively. Research indicates that nonprofits which collaborate tend to have better outcomes (Collins & Gerlach, 2019), and nonprofits who are transparent have access to more resources and contributions (Proulx, Hager & Klein, 2014) than nonprofits who are not transparent (Harris & Neely, 2018). Collaborative efforts lead to increased resources, enhanced funding opportunities, and more impactful initiatives (Holzer, 2022).

To facilitate collaboration, it is essential to identify the types of data that are collected that will enhance collaboration (Davidman, Betcherman & Hall, 1998; Woodworth, 2022), by whom the database is accessed, the audience these databases are catering to, in order to identify what specifically is most useful to increase transparency and accessibility. This includes data on nonprofit activities, financials, leadership, and contact information.

How Transparency Leads to Collaboration

One of the most significant ways to foster collaboration is by improving the transparency of data about nonprofits. When nonprofit data becomes accessible to a wider audience, four major benefits emerge: 1) increased awareness, 2) improved ability to connect potential partners or collaborators (Boris, de Leon, & Roeger, 2010), 3) heightened levels of trust (Millan, Retamosa & Carranza, 2024), and 4) increased access to additional resources (Harris & Neely, 2018).

- 1. Awareness:** Transparency of data about nonprofits can raise awareness of potential collaborative opportunities by highlighting common causes and areas of focus.
- 2. Connection:** Making data about nonprofits transparent, including contact information and leadership details, enhances the ability to identify and engage with key decision-makers, facilitating collaborative efforts.
- 3. Trust:** Transparent nonprofit data builds trust, making organizations more willing to collaborate and increasing opportunities for joint initiatives (Collins & Gerlach, 2019; Millan, Retamosa & Carranza, 2024).

In this study, nonprofit collaboration includes all three areas of the nonprofit sector namely, 1) between nonprofits as they work to collaborate and improve outcomes, 2)

with nonprofit resource providers (foundations, volunteers, donors, company CSR programs, governments, grantees, etc.) when making decisions about who to support, and 3) with nonprofits as they attempt to reach those who need their services.

Obstacles to Collaboration: Trust and Transparency in Data

Nonprofit organizations operate in complex environments where collaboration can significantly enhance their impact. Despite the potential benefits, many nonprofits struggle to work together effectively. Understanding the barriers to collaboration is crucial for developing strategies to overcome them and foster more cooperative efforts within the sector.

There are a few main obstacles that nonprofits face in collaborating with other nonprofits and organizations in the public and private sectors. There are four main challenges why nonprofits often do not collaborate:

1. Lack of trust among organizations,
2. Lack of awareness about other nonprofits operating in the same space,
3. Competition for the same funding sources, and
4. Limited funds and resources to collaborate (Holzer, 2022).

Open access to standardized data about nonprofits within the nonprofit community can help increase trust by facilitating improved communication, collaboration, and opportunities to work together on activities, promote collaborative funding and mission achievement. Addressing these obstacles requires a multifaceted approach. Building trust can be achieved through consistent communication and transparent practices. Increasing awareness involves creating networks and platforms for nonprofits to share information about their activities and goals. To mitigate competition for funding, organizations can seek collaborative grants that reward partnerships and shared resources. By tackling these issues, the nonprofit sector can move towards a more united and effective way of achieving their missions. This research study focuses on ways to improve transparency, which in turn leads to an increased level of trust, which can lead to more opportunities of collaboration.

The Power of Data-Driven Decisions that Leads to Collaboration

Data-driven decisions hold transformative potential for the nonprofit sector, enabling organizations to make better informed choices, allocate resources more efficiently, and measure their impact more accurately. By sharing and analyzing data collectively, nonprofits can identify trends, uncover insights, and develop strategies that are more

effective and responsive to the needs of the communities they serve. This approach not only enhances transparency and accountability but also fosters innovation and strengthens the capacity of the sector to address complex social challenges. Through the power of data-driven decisions, nonprofits can achieve greater collective impact and drive meaningful change on a global scale.

Moreover, data-driven decisions can significantly enhance collaboration within the nonprofit sector. Access to comprehensive and reliable data allows organizations to identify potential partners with complementary missions and resources, facilitating strategic alliances and joint initiatives. This collaborative approach can lead to more efficient use of resources, increased funding opportunities, and more impactful programs. By leveraging data to guide their decisions, nonprofits can build stronger, trust-based relationships with stakeholders, including donors, volunteers, and beneficiaries. Ultimately, the integration of data-driven decisions into nonprofit operations can create a more cohesive and effective sector, capable of achieving sustainable development goals and addressing pressing social issues worldwide.

Benefits of Accessible and Transparent Data about Nonprofits

Here is a quick reference guide on the benefits of accessible and transparent data about nonprofits. Accessible and transparent nonprofit data can yield several benefits:

- **Increased Trust:** Enhanced transparency fosters trust among nonprofits globally.
- **Improved Understanding:** A comprehensive view of the global nonprofit landscape, including geographic distribution, services offered, and funding needs.
- **Effective Advocacy:** Data-driven insights enable more effective advocacy efforts.
- **Enhanced Collaboration:** Improved opportunities to find suitable collaborators, empowering nonprofits to meet sustainable development goals more effectively.

Evaluating the Global Nonprofit Data Landscape

Evaluating the global nonprofit data landscape is crucial for improving outcomes across the sector. By systematically assessing the availability and accessibility of data, stakeholders can identify gaps and inefficiencies that hinder effective decision-making and resource allocation. This evaluation is a foundational development of standardized data collection and reporting practices, which fosters greater transparency and accountability. Moreover, understanding the global data landscape about nonprofits can facilitate the creation of more targeted and impactful interventions, as organizations can leverage comprehensive data insights to address specific needs and challenges.

Ultimately, a thorough evaluation of nonprofit data enhances the sector's ability to collaborate, innovate, and achieve its mission of driving social change.

What Data Systems Are Currently in Place?

A review of major data systems will be assessed within countries and in the global space. This analysis will highlight the benefits and challenges of different systems mainly in the European Union, United States and Canada. Key data points will be reviewed along with the transparency and accessibility to a variety of different groups operating in the nonprofit sector (nonprofit organizations, donors, volunteers, etc).

Identifying Key Data Points for Collaboration Opportunities

Identifying key data points is crucial for fostering collaboration opportunities within the nonprofit sector. This research study emphasizes the importance of data elements such as organization name, contact information, cause or area of focus, location of operations, partnerships, supporters (including donors and volunteers), leadership, impact, and current projects. These data points provide a comprehensive view of nonprofit organizations, allowing for the identification of potential collaborators who share similar missions and goals. By reviewing each database, the study aims to highlight how accessible and complete these data points are, thereby enabling nonprofits to make informed decisions about collaboration. The availability of detailed and standardized information helps nonprofits connect with suitable partners, align their efforts, and maximize their collective impact. Through this study, the critical role that well-documented and accessible data plays in enhancing the effectiveness and reach of collaborative initiatives within the nonprofit sector is underscored.

Assessing Data Quality and Standardization

To ensure the reliability and usability of the data, an assessment will be made with the following:

- **Data Completeness:** Availability of key data points such as name, location, financial information, and board composition.
- **Data Consistency:** Standardization of data formats and metrics across the global nonprofit sector, and whether the format is accessible to the different nonprofit groups indicated in Research Question 2.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of nonprofit data transparency and accessibility and to offer insights into how a global nonprofit database could enhance these aspects, ultimately fostering greater collaboration within the sector.

Problem Statement

There is a lack of transparency and accessibility to nonprofit data in the global space, which reduces the ability to make better decisions that lead to collaboration, which leads to better outcomes (Holzer, 2020).

Thesis Statement

The lack of transparency and accessibility of data about nonprofits globally impedes the sector's ability to achieve its objectives efficiently and effectively. Developing a comprehensive, accessible global nonprofit database will enhance accountability, foster better resource allocation, and facilitate international collaboration, ultimately leading to more impactful and sustainable social outcomes.

Main Arguments and Supporting Evidence

The primary arguments of this paper revolve around the critical role of data transparency in enhancing nonprofit collaboration and ultimately achieving sustainable development goals. It contends that increasing the availability and reliability of nonprofit data is essential to effectively empower the nonprofit sector (Harris & Neely, 2018; Rathi, Given & Forcier, 2014). The evidence is derived from an overview of globally available nonprofit data sources and a comprehensive review of challenges faced in accessing and utilizing this data. By analyzing the largest global nonprofit database, this study provides valuable insights into the state of nonprofit data and offers recommendations for future analysis. Additionally, this type of data offers invaluable insights for policymakers, researchers, and analysts. Access to a rich dataset of nonprofit details, activities and outcomes allows for evidence-based decision-making, enabling organizations, governments and institutions to implement more effective policies and interventions (Goldberg, 2020; Alanazi, 2023).

Anticipated Outcome

By creating a global nonprofit database that increases nonprofit transparency and makes data more accessible to decision makers, there will be 1) increase trust (Millan, Retamosa, & Carranaza, 2024), 2) increase collaboration, 3) better decisions being made, 4) better outcomes/more impact.

Literature Review: Current State of Affairs with Nonprofit Data & Transparency

Transparency in nonprofit data is crucial for fostering trust, accountability, and collaboration within the sector. The current landscape of nonprofit data transparency varies significantly across different regions and organizations, impacting the effectiveness and efficiency of nonprofit activities globally.

Transparency in the Nonprofit Sector

Transparency has been identified as a key factor in the success and credibility of nonprofit organizations. According to Behn et al. (2010), transparent practices in the nonprofit sector lead to better resource allocation, increased donor trust, and improved organizational performance. Furthermore, transparency is essential for ensuring that nonprofits can be held accountable by their stakeholders (Saxton & Guo, 2011).

Challenges in Nonprofit Data Transparency

Despite its importance, achieving transparency in the nonprofit sector faces several challenges. One major obstacle is the inconsistency in data reporting standards across different countries and regions. This inconsistency makes it difficult to compare data and evaluate the performance of nonprofits on a global scale (Ebrahim, 2005). Additionally, many nonprofits lack the resources and technical expertise to implement comprehensive data transparency practices (Mitchell, 2017).

Regional Variations in Transparency

There is significant variation in the level of data transparency among nonprofits in different regions. In the United States, there are platforms like GuideStar that provide data on nonprofit organizations, promoting transparency and accountability (Candid, 2020). However, in many other parts of the world, access to nonprofit data is limited, and transparency practices are less developed. For instance, European nonprofits often face stringent regulatory requirements, which can either enhance or hinder transparency depending on the implementation (Salamon & Anheier, 1997).

Benefits of Data Transparency

Research has shown that transparency can have a profound impact on the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations. Transparent data practices lead to better decision-making and strategic planning, as organizations have access to reliable information about their operations and the broader sector (Buteau, 2018). Moreover,

increased transparency can help build trust with donors and stakeholders, which is crucial for securing funding and support (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002).

Conclusion

The current state of nonprofit data transparency is marked by significant regional variations and numerous challenges. However, the benefits of transparency, including improved accountability, better resource allocation, and increased donor trust, highlight the need for continued efforts to enhance transparency practices in the sector. By addressing the challenges and leveraging initiatives aimed at standardizing data reporting, the nonprofit sector can move towards a more transparent and effective future.

Methodology

Research Design. This study employs a comparative case study method to examine the transparency and accessibility of nonprofit data across different countries. By analyzing 34 nonprofit databases, primarily from the European Union, the United States, and Canada, we aim to identify patterns and variations in the types of data collected, the level of transparency, and the primary users of these databases.

Data Collection. Thirty-four nonprofit databases or data portals were selected, with a focus on those from the European Union, the United States, and Canada, representing 25 countries to ensure a diverse representation of geographic regions. These databases were chosen based on their prominence and accessibility in their respective countries. The selection criteria included the following:

- Geographic diversity: Ensuring a mix of countries mainly from the European Union, the United States, and Canada.
- Sector representation: Including databases from governments, public and private organizations.
- Accessibility: Databases that are publicly accessible or available for research purposes.

Data Analysis. A detailed analysis of each database was conducted, focusing on the following aspects:

1. Data Collected: Types of data collected and accessibility of this data in 12 specific areas searchable within each database/datasource;

1. Requirements to Access Data: Email, Contact Person, Payment, Other
2. Organization Name

3. Contact Information: Contact person(s), Email, Website, Phone Number, Physical Address
4. Cause (includes Focus Area or Topics)
5. Mission Statement
6. Area(s) of Operation
7. Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts
8. Supporters
9. Leadership
10. Projects (current activities)
11. Impact
12. Financials

2. Transparency:

- Availability of data to the public.
- Ease of access (e.g., online availability).
- Measures taken to ensure data accuracy and reliability.

3. Intended Users: An assessment of databases were conducted based on what the different users were able to easily access the database for their needs.

- Nonprofits: Organizations that use the data to improve their operations and transparency.
- Nonprofit Resource Providers: Foundations, companies' corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, volunteers, and other supporters who use the data to make informed decisions about funding and support.
- Service Beneficiaries: Individuals and communities who need the services provided by nonprofits and use the data to find and evaluate service providers.

Comparative Analysis. The data collected from each database were systematically compared to identify commonalities and differences. We used a coding system to categorize the data according to the types of information collected, the transparency measures implemented, and the intended users of the databases. This comparative approach allowed us to identify best practices and areas for improvement in nonprofit data transparency and accessibility.

Validity and Reliability. To ensure the validity and reliability of our findings, we employed the following strategies:

- Triangulation: Cross-referencing data from multiple sources to confirm the accuracy of our findings.
- Peer Review: Engaging experts in the nonprofit sector to review our methodology and findings.

- Replication: Applying our analysis framework to a subset of databases to verify the consistency of our results.

By employing a rigorous comparative case study method, focusing on databases from the European Union, the United States, and Canada, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of nonprofit data transparency and accessibility in these regions and to offer insights into how a global nonprofit database could enhance these aspects.

This study explores limitations and obstacles related to collecting comprehensive nonprofit data (including privacy and security concerns, resource constraints, and transparency issues), and summarizes challenges associated with data access and availability (Harris & Neely, 2018; Brewer, 2023; Niyonzigira, 2023; Alanazi, 2023). The research primarily utilizes the 34 largest databases in the European Union and North America to obtain insights and make recommendations.

This approach will help bring to light the diversity and commonalities in nonprofit data practices globally and provide insights into how a global nonprofit database could be structured to enhance transparency and accessibility.

Research Questions

In looking at 34 nonprofit databases based in 25 different countries, the following questions were asked to get a better understanding of what nonprofit data is available and what audience this data is accessible to. There were 5 overall questions that drove this research that includes an additional 0-12 sub-questions for each of the main questions.

Research Question 1: Preliminary Questions - Accessibility to Public

Preliminary questions were asked prior to reviewing the actual nonprofit data that focused specifically on the user experience when searching for and attempting to access the data on each platform. When “nonprofit” is mentioned, this refers to any organization that has a nonprofit status that could include a charity, NGO, foundation and other named entities.

RQ1: What is the user experience when initially visiting a database or platform?

RQ1.1) Does the database website focus mainly on nonprofit information? (Does it have its own URL/website or is it included in a database that involves for-profit companies or other governmental departments, making it more difficult to navigate.)

RQ1.2) Is it easy to navigate the database or platform to start finding and searching for charities? This is based on 2 requirements; 1) Do they have a search engine on the home page? If not, 2) Is there a clear link to charity or nonprofit data on the home page?

RQ1.3) Can you directly search within the website for nonprofit organizations? (Opposed to needing to download the registry or nonprofit list.)

RQ1.4) Can you search by a cause when initially looking for a nonprofit?

RQ1.5) Can you search for a nonprofit organization by name?

RQ1.6) Can you search for a nonprofit by their registration number?

RQ1.7) Can you search for a nonprofit by their headquarters address?

RQ1.8) Can you search for a nonprofit by where they operate or where they work?

RQ1.9) Can you search for a nonprofit by their validation or vetting status? (Is there a validation or vetting criteria beyond being registered as a nonprofit?)

Research Question 2: Data Points Important in Collaboration

A review is being done on the data that are available in these databases as it relates to decision elements important to collaboration. It is important to have a more holistic view of a nonprofit to improve trust that leads to collaboration. The following 12 data points are considered important to help nonprofits and nonprofit resource providers make better decisions that lead to collaboration.

RQ2: What data points are available in these databases?

RQ2.1) Requirements to Access Data: Is there an added requirement to access nonprofit data?

- a) Email,
- b) Contact person,
- c) Payment (Is there a fee to access data?),

RQ2.2) Organization Name

RQ2.3) Contact information: Do they give any contact information? If yes, which information?

- a) Contact person(s),
- b) Email,
- c) Website,
- d) Phone Number,

e) Physical Address (Headquarters)

RQ2.4) Cause (includes Focus Area or Topics): Does it list the nonprofit's cause with their organizational information?

RQ2.5) Mission Statement: Many countries list this as a nonprofit's purpose statement.

RQ2.6) Area(s) of Operation: This is the area or areas (country, city, etc) where a nonprofit operates, not necessarily the address of their headquarters, which is listed under contact information.

RQ2.7) Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts: Partnerships or Collaboration is defined in this study as "a method that can be used either formally or informally by a group of individuals (or organizations) who can work side by side to share concerns that can bring mutual gain" (Felix, 2011, p.14).

RQ2.8) Supporters: This includes companies, organizations and groups that provide support to a nonprofit organization which includes funding, volunteerism, mentorship and in-kind donations.

RQ2.9) Leadership: At a minimum, this includes listing a nonprofit's CEO/President. Depending on the country's requirements and availability, Board Members or Trustees could be listed. If requirements are different in a particular country where Board Members are not required to maintain nonprofit status, this is noted in the research findings.

RQ2.10) Projects (current activities): This includes a nonprofit's current and/or recent activities and what a nonprofit actively spends their time and funds on. This could also be an annual report describing recent activity in the past year.

RQ2.11) Impact: Does it show any type of impact measurements or explanation?

In this study, "impact" broadly refers to the significant, positive changes that an organization's activities produce in the lives of individuals and communities. This study will note whether any of the following 'Key Elements of Impact' were noted in the database whether in metrics or measurement form or simply in paragraph form:

- d) Outcomes: Tangible and intangible results of an organization's activities, reflecting short-term and long-term changes.
- e) Relevance: Alignment of activities with the needs and priorities of the target population.
- f) Effectiveness: Achievement of stated objectives and success of strategies implemented.
- g) Efficiency: Optimal use of resources to achieve desired results.
- h) Sustainability: Longevity of the benefits post-intervention.
- i) Scalability: Potential to expand successful initiatives to other contexts.
- j) Reach: Breadth and diversity of individuals or communities affected.

- k) Equity: Fair distribution of impact among different groups, especially the underserved.
- l) Feedback and Adaptation: Continuous improvement based on data and stakeholder feedback.

RQ2.12) Financials: This study will determine whether financials are available based on any type of financials presented. This could be in a financial report, annual income, or other financial indicators or information available.

Research Question 3: Audience Accessibility

A review was done on how accessible these databases are to all three areas of the nonprofit sector, 1) nonprofits (NGOs, charities), 2) nonprofit resource providers (foundations, volunteers, companies, small and large donors) and 3) those who need help or access to nonprofit services.

RQ3: How accessible are these data points to the 3 groups in the nonprofit sector?

Group 1: Nonprofits.

RQ3.1a) Smaller Nonprofits: Are the data points accessible and useful for smaller nonprofits when contemplating collaboration?

RQ3.1b) Larger Nonprofits: Are the data points accessible and useful for larger nonprofits when contemplating collaboration?

First, nonprofits can make better decisions on who to work with when they have access to nonprofit data within their local community and cause community. This first group was separated into 2 categories,

1) Smaller nonprofits who have a normal understanding of how to use a search engine and no experience in data analysis. Smaller nonprofits are classified as organizations that do not have the funds to pay to access a database or registry, making less than \$100,000 a year or they do not have enough funding to pay for manpower to download large batches of nonprofit data and filter through the information.

2) Larger nonprofits who have access to funding or larger systems to interpret the data. Making over \$100,000 a year. This study looked at whether the database has enough information about a nonprofit to make it useful for a larger nonprofit organization such as a foundation.

Group 2: Nonprofit Resource Providers (NRPs).

RQ3.2a) Smaller Nonprofit Resource Providers (NRPs): Are the data points accessible and useful for smaller nonprofit resource providers when contemplating giving support or volunteering?

RQ3.2b) Larger Nonprofit Resource Providers (NRPs): Are the data points accessible and useful for larger nonprofit resource providers when contemplating support or collaboration?

Second, nonprofit resource providers (small and large) need access to nonprofit data to make decisions about who to support. This group consists of anyone or any entity that gives support to nonprofits through donations, volunteerism, in-kind donations and more. This group was separated into 2 categories,

1) **Smaller NRPs:** Individuals or groups that do not have access to funding or larger systems to interpret or pay for the data system. Smaller nonprofits are classified as organizations that do not have the funds to pay to access a database or registry. This group has a basic understanding of how to search online and will spend limited time trying to figure out an online database system in order to access information.

2) **Larger NRPs:** Organizations, researchers or funders who have access to funds or systems to help interpret or access the data system. Does the database have enough information about a nonprofit to make it useful for larger nonprofit resource providers such as a company's corporate social responsibilities department?

Group 3: Those In Need/Individual Who Need Services.

RQ3.3a) Are nonprofits and nonprofit services searchable by topic and location without a fee or downloading lists?

Third, those individuals or groups who need help or the services of a nonprofit should be able to access information about that nonprofit prior to choosing their services. To attain a "yes" answer - a nonprofit must meet all three of these requirements, 1) be easy to find/navigate (as noted in R1), 2) free to access, and 3) searchable by topic/cause. This group mainly uses Google as a search engine to find needed resources and services in their community, which does not have a trusted validation system in place when a nonprofit is found.

Research Question 4: International Audiences

This question looks at whether the database or experience is helpful for international audiences, specifically through an online English translation and availability to download or accessing the database in a downloadable version.

RQ4: Is this database or platform accessible to international audiences?

This is based on whether both of these two questions are true. A positive answer needs to be answered for one or both of the following questions in order to receive a “yes” answer in the overall RQ4.

- 1) Is this search engine and information available or translatable in english?
- 2) Is there a downloadable version of this database either on the platform directly or easily obtainable by a request through email?

Research Question 5: Validation or Vetting Indicators

To classify a platform as indicating a validation or vetting indicator, it needs to be beyond the current awareness of a nonprofit’s status within a country. A review was done on whether a validation or vetting process is a part of the database process.

RQ5: Does the database provide a validation or vetting process beyond the requirement to become registered as a nonprofit in a country?

Criteria for a nonprofit validation or vetting varies. However, this question simply looks at whether there is additional vetting or validation happening beyond the nonprofit status indicator.

List of Databases Used in the Research Study

There are many countries around the world that do not maintain nonprofit data or do not give the public access to their nonprofit data due to the data not being digitized, making it difficult to access. In this study, 34 nonprofit databases were reviewed from 25 countries who provided their data in digital formats, making it more accessible than countries who do not have public databases powered by governments, private or public entities.

34 Nonprofit Databases or Platform that Contain Nonprofit Information by Country

European Union		
<u>Country</u>	<u>Name of Database or Agency</u>	<u>URL</u>
1. Austria	Federal Ministry of Justice - ZVR (Central Register of Associations)	https://org-id.guide/list/AT-ZVR
2. Belgium	Crossroads Bank for Enterprises	https://economie.fgov.be/en/themes/enterprises/crossroads-bank-enterprises
3. Bulgaria	Registry Agency	https://www.registryagency.bg/
4. Czech Republic	Public Registers Portal	https://www.justice.cz/
5. Estonia	e-Business Register	https://ariregister.rik.ee
6. Finland	Finnish Patent and Registration Office	https://www.prh.fi https://virre.prh.fi/novus/home?execution=e1s2#search-result
7. France	INSEE (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)	https://www.insee.fr/
8. Germany	Vereinsregister (Associations Register)	https://www.handelregister.de/
9. Greece	General Commercial Registry (GEMI)	http://www.businessportal.gr/
10. Hungary	Hungarian Ministry of Justice	https://birosag.hu/
11. Ireland	Charities Regulator	https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/
12. Italy	Italian Revenue Agency	https://www.agenziaentrate.gov.it/
13. Latvia	Register of Enterprises	https://www.lursoft.lv/en/companies/lt
14. Lithuania	Centre of Registers	https://www.registrucentras.lt/
15. Luxembourg	Luxembourg Business Registers	https://www.lbr.lu/
16. Netherlands	Chamber of Commerce (KVK)	https://www.kvk.nl/
17. Portugal	Central Register of Legal Persons (CRP)	https://justica.gov.pt/
18. Romania	National Office of the Trade Register	https://www.onrc.ro/
UK and Others		
<u>Country</u>	<u>Name of Database or Agency</u>	<u>URL</u>

19. United Kingdom	Charity Commission for England and Wales	https://www.gov.uk/find-charity-information
20. Australia	Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission	https://www.acnc.gov.au/
21. India	Darpan	https://ngodarpan.gov.in/
22. Scotland	Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR)	https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/
23. Northern Ireland	The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland	https://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk
US/North America		
<u>Country</u>	<u>Name of Database or Agency</u>	<u>URL</u>
24. United States	IRS Exempt Organizations Select Check	https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/exempt-organizations-business-master-file-extract-eo-bmf#states
25. Canada	Canada Revenue Agency	https://apps.cra-arc.gc.ca/ebci/hacc/srch/pub/displayBscSrch?request_locale=en
26. United States	GuideStar by Candid	GuideStar.org
27. United States	Charity Navigator	www.charitynavigator.org
28. US Only	Nonprofit Works Interactive Database	http://ccss.jhu.edu/nonprofit-works/
Global		
<u>Country</u>	<u>Name of Database or Agency</u>	<u>URL</u>
29. Global - New York	Worldwide NGO Directory	wango.org
30. Global - Washington DC/London UK	GlobalGiving Atlas - sell nonprofit data	www.globalgiving.org/atlas
31. Global - Washington DC/London UK	Global Giving - fundraising platform	www.globalgiving.org
32. Global - San Francisco, CA, USA	TechSoup	Techsoup.org
33. Global - US	Powered by Percent	poweredbypercent.com
34. Canada	Benevity	Benevity.com

Results

Initial findings indicate significant variation in the transparency and accessibility of nonprofit data across different regions. Preliminary analysis of the 34 nonprofit databases, primarily from the European Union, the United States, and Canada, reveals that data availability and quality are inconsistent. Some countries, like the United States, provide comprehensive and easily accessible data through government sources, such as the IRS, and other up and coming nonprofit platforms such as WikiCharities. In contrast, other regions display substantial gaps in basic data coverage and accessibility, complicating efforts to compare nonprofit performance and collaboration potential on a global scale.

Initial observations suggest that databases with more standardized data collection practices, such as those in the United States and certain European countries, offer a more reliable foundation for decision-making and collaboration. However, the lack of standardized metrics and reporting formats in many regions remains a significant obstacle. Moreover, the preliminary analysis highlights the challenges nonprofits face in implementing transparency practices due to resource constraints and varying legal requirements. As the study progresses, a more detailed examination of these patterns will help identify best practices and formulate recommendations to enhance data standards, transparency, and accessibility in the nonprofit sector globally.

Results to Research Question 1: Preliminary Questions

Table 1: RQ1.1-RQ1.9

	Database focuses mainly on Nonprofit Information? RQ1.1	Easy to navigate to find charities? RQ1.2	Can you search within the platform? RQ1.3	Search by Cause RQ1.4	Search by Org Name RQ1.5	Search by Registration number RQ1.6	Search by HQ location RQ1.7	Search by Where they operate RQ1.8	Search by Validated or Vetted Status RQ1.9
Yes	14	22	24	15	23	20	17	5	3
% of Total	41%	65%	71%	44%	68%	59%	50%	15%	9%
No	20	12	10	14	6	9	17	29	31
% of Total	59%	35%	29%	41%	18%	26%	50%	85%	91%
Data unknown	0	0	0	5	5	5	0	0	0
% of Total	0%	0%	0%	15%	15%	15%	0%	0%	0%
Total	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34

In Table 1, the findings show that out of the 34 databases reviewed, less than half (41%) were databases solely-focused on nonprofits. The majority of the noted databases (59%) data on nonprofits was a subset of a larger data collection held on various government websites, e.g. the Ministry of Justice, National Trade Registry Pages,

Patent and Registration Offices, and others. This can often make it frustrating for users to find charities, or the charity search engine, because links are often hidden or hard to find. Out of all the databases and web pages, 65% were available for users to search for nonprofits or charities (e.g. by a direct link on the homepage) without difficulty. The other 35% were more difficult to find nonprofit information on the web page, which could cause many users to stop searching and look elsewhere. Once the database and search engine was found, the main searchable data point available is an organization's name (68% of databases provided this option). Only 44% of the databases had the ability to search for a nonprofit by cause. This is problematic as finding a nonprofit that works in the same cause as your organization is crucial when contemplating collaboration with nonprofits.

Results to Research Question 2: Questions on Data Points

Table 2: RQ2.1-RQ2.1c

	Are there requirements to access database?			
	<u>RQ2.1</u>	<u>RQ2.1a</u>	<u>RQ2.1b</u>	<u>RQ2.1c</u>
Yes	9	4	2	8
% of Total	26%	12%	6%	24%
No	20	24	26	20
% of Total	59%	71%	76%	59%
Data unknown	5	6	6	6
% of Total	15%	18%	18%	18%
Total	34	34	34	34

Table 3: RQ2.2-RQ2.4

	Org Name	Contact Info Do they give you any contact information? If yes, which information?					HQ Address	Cause: Do they list a cause on the nonprofit's profile page?
		Contact Person	Email	Website	Phone			
	<u>RQ2.2</u>	<u>RQ2.3</u>	<u>RQ2.3a</u>	<u>RQ2.3b</u>	<u>RQ2.3c</u>	<u>RQ2.3d</u>	<u>RQ2.3e</u>	<u>RQ2.4</u>
Yes	25	26	8	16	16	14	24	17
% of Total	74%	76%	24%	47%	47%	41%	71%	50%
No	3	2	19	11	11	13	3	11
% of Total	9%	6%	56%	32%	32%	38%	9%	32%
Data unknown	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	6
% of Total	18%	18%	21%	21%	21%	21%	21%	18%
Total	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34

Table 4: RQ2.5-RQ2.12

	Mission Statement	Area(s) of Operation	Partners	Supporters	Leadership	Projects or Current Activities	Impact:	Financials
	<u>RQ2.5</u>	<u>RQ2.6</u>	<u>RQ2.7</u>	<u>RQ2.8</u>	<u>RQ2.9</u>	<u>RQ2.10</u>	<u>RQ2.11</u>	<u>RQ2.12</u>
Yes	16	11	0	0	16	11	3	14
% of Total	47%	32%	0%	0%	47%	32%	9%	41%
No	12	17	28	28	12	17	25	14
% of Total	35%	50%	82%	82%	35%	50%	74%	41%
Data unknown	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
% of Total	18%	18%	18%	18%	18%	18%	18%	18%
Total	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34

Only 9% of databases touch on the impact a nonprofit has in their community (Table 4). And 50% of databases or platforms show the nonprofit’s causes or topic they are working on within their profile page, and often this is simply a drop down menu with a few choices for the user. When thinking about engaging supporters and partners for nonprofits, ensuring nonprofits are searchable by cause and impact are important. A recent study at Brigham Young University surveyed 500 students to find out which data points are most important to them in supporting or volunteering with a nonprofit organization. The top 2 most important data points were 1) cause and 2) impact (Dew, 2024). Another important finding is that out of all 34 databases, none (0%) showed a nonprofit organizations’ past or present partnerships or collaborations with other entities. Failure to collect this data displays the relative lack of importance placed on collaboration. Research shows that when nonprofits work together with other nonprofits and for-profit companies, resources increase and outcomes improve (Holzer, 2022).

Results to Research Question 3: Questions on Audience Accessibility

Table 6: RQ3.1a-RQ3.3

	Small NGOs	Larger NGOs	Smaller donors/volunteers/etc	Larger Supporters (companies, foundations)	Individuals (Those in need)
	<u>RQ3.1a</u>	<u>RQ3.1b</u>	<u>RQ3.2a</u>	<u>RQ3.2b</u>	<u>RQ3.3</u>
Yes	9	20	10	27	0
% of Total	26%	59%	29%	79%	0%
No	25	12	24	5	34
% of Total	74%	35%	71%	15%	100%
Data unknown		2	0	2	0
% of Total	0%	6%	0%	6%	0%
Total	34	34	34	34	34

When thinking about the importance of having access to nonprofit data, this research study looked at the accessibility of each database based on whether you were a nonprofit (small or large), nonprofit resource providers (small or large), and someone in need who wants to find a service they need (Table 6). It is important to note that none (0%) of these databases were easily accessible to Group 3 (those in need). This could be due to the difficulty of navigating the database, a fee was due to access the database, or information was not available needed to search by cause or services for those who need help. The majority of these databases were accessible to larger NGOs and Nonprofit Resource Providers, who had funds to access the database, ability to understand the system, or the information provided was more targeted and useful for larger organizations. Only twenty-six percent of these databases made it accessible for smaller nonprofits to access the information or the majority of the data was not useful for nonprofits to use when choosing to collaborate with other nonprofit organizations. In the United States alone, the majority of nonprofits are small, making under \$100K a year (McKeever, 2016). This means an increased importance needs to be placed on getting smaller nonprofits access to data about other nonprofits that encourages them to work together, moving towards greater impact and improved outcomes.

Results to Research Question 4 & 5: International Audiences, Validation or Vetting Indicators

Table 7: RQ4-RQ5

	Easily Accessible to international audience?		Validation/Vetting Process or Indicator Beyond the NGO status	
	<u>RQ4</u>		<u>RQ5</u>	
Yes		22		7
% of Total		65%		21%
No		12		27
% of Total		35%		79%
Data unknown		0		0
% of Total		0%		0%
Total		34		34

In reviewing the last questions in this research study (Table 7), a low percent of databases are focused on engaging international audiences and showing an increased validation process beyond the initial nonprofit status required for nonprofits to obtain, which is often only done in their first year in operation. When attempting to enhance data-driven decisions in the nonprofit sector to increase transparency and collaboration, a higher priority needs to be placed on creating a global database where a standardized collection of nonprofit data is obtained, regularly updated, and made accessible to all three groups discussed in this research study.

Current Efforts

WikiCharities, based in the United States, is the largest open-access global database of nonprofits in the world, based on the number of Charities listed. It aims to provide globally comprehensive, accessible data that can be utilized by various stakeholders, including researchers, policymakers, and the general public, thereby promoting informed decision-making and accountability within the sector. Although the largest, their data is far from comprehensive at this point, but it is rapidly expanding. Their aim is to create a transparent global nonprofit database accessible to every area and audience in the nonprofit sector. Other private and public entities globally are also looking to address the dearth of data and understanding in other ways such as researching innovative ways to collect and present data using AI.

Strengthening the Causal Relationship Between Transparency, Trust, and Collaboration

Transparency is fundamental in fostering trust and facilitating collaboration within the nonprofit sector (Dethier et al., 2023). When organizations consistently share clear, reliable data, they establish credibility, enabling stakeholders to engage with confidence. Trust, in turn, is a precursor to effective collaboration, as it reduces perceived risks and fosters openness in joint decision-making processes. According to Millán, Retamosa, and Carranza (2024), transparent practices not only increase trust but also encourage nonprofits to share resources and expertise more freely.

The interconnection between these dynamics becomes particularly evident in collaborative environments. Transparency provides stakeholders with the necessary visibility into shared goals, resources, and organizational performance, making alignment easier. For example, a global nonprofit database with standardized metrics could amplify trust by ensuring that all parties have access to the same verified information. This trust lays the foundation for collaborative ventures that optimize resource allocation and expand the impact of nonprofit initiatives.

Moreover, the combination of transparency and trust drives a feedback loop that strengthens organizational outcomes. As collaborative projects yield tangible successes, they reinforce the value of transparency, further enhancing trust. This cycle is particularly critical in multi-stakeholder initiatives involving government agencies, donors, and community organizations, where transparency aligns diverse interests and creates shared accountability. By linking transparency, trust, and collaboration in this way, nonprofits can achieve a greater collective impact and address global challenges more effectively.

Limitations and Concerns

While the benefits of a global nonprofit database are compelling, potential concerns must also be critically evaluated. One significant concern involves the misuse or misinterpretation of data. In regions with weak data protection laws, the publication of sensitive nonprofit information could expose organizations to geopolitical risks or exploitation. For instance, nonprofit entities operating in politically unstable environments might face surveillance or retaliation if their data is publicly accessible.

Another concern is the potential for unintended consequences in funding dynamics. Increased transparency might intensify competition among nonprofits by exposing disparities in organizational efficiency or donor preference trends. While competition can drive improvements, it may also discourage collaboration and foster divisiveness among nonprofits vying for the same resources. When pursuing the development of a global trusted database for nonprofits, extra consideration needs to be considered to address potential concerns. Addressing these potential concerns is vital for ensuring the database not only enhances transparency and collaboration but also protects the nonprofit sector's diverse interests and stakeholders.

While acknowledging the potential concerns, it is also important to recognize that establishing a global database for nonprofits can significantly enhance transparency, reduce fraud, and facilitate data-driven decision-making. Such a centralized repository would enable organizations to share information, benchmark performance, and identify best practices, leading to improved accountability and operational efficiency.

For instance, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (2024) emphasizes the importance of data governance in building trust and accountability among stakeholders. By providing a platform for nonprofits to share data, a global database can foster collaboration and ensure that resources are allocated effectively.

Additionally, the Global Resource for Nonprofit Data Sharing (GRNDS, 2024) initiative highlights the benefits of open data in the nonprofit sector. By leveraging shared data, organizations can make informed decisions, identify trends, and mitigate risks associated with fraud and mismanagement.

Furthermore, systematic data analysis is crucial in optimizing decision-making processes. As highlighted in "Data-Driven Decision Making for Not-for-Profit Organizations," nonprofits can use a global database to enhance business decisions, allocate resources more effectively, and identify trends (CPA Journal, 2019). Such a database provides the infrastructure needed to access and analyze data, ultimately amplifying the impact and effectiveness of nonprofit organizations. In summary, creating a global nonprofit database is a strategic approach to enhancing transparency, reducing fraud, and enabling data-driven decision-making within the sector.

Practical Use and Recommendations

The practical use and recommendations for enhancing data-driven decision-making in the nonprofit sector involve promoting data accessibility and standardization, fostering trust-based partnerships and data sharing, and addressing geopolitical considerations. By implementing these recommendations, the nonprofit sector can improve transparency, collaboration, and ultimately, its impact on society.

A. Promoting Data Accessibility and Global Standardization. To enhance data-driven decision-making and foster greater transparency in the nonprofit sector, it is imperative to advocate for policies and initiatives that promote open access to comprehensive data about nonprofits. Leveraging existing national registries or establishing centralized databases can significantly improve the accessibility of critical information. Additionally, supporting the development and adoption of standardized data collection formats and metrics for reporting on key information about nonprofits is crucial. This standardization can include details such as location, mission, and financial information, and could be facilitated through platforms such as WikiCharities, through improved international and national policies, and through increased demand from nonprofit funders - including government and philanthropies. Furthermore, encouraging collaboration between international organizations, government agencies, NGOs, and data providers to create user-friendly data portals and open-source data sets can provide invaluable insights into the global nonprofit sector.

B. Fostering Trust-Based Partnerships and Data Sharing. Building a culture of trust and transparency within the nonprofit sector is essential for effective data sharing and collaboration. Encouraging nonprofits to develop data sharing protocols and mechanisms for the secure exchange of information, while respecting privacy concerns, is a critical step. Promoting peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing on best practices for data collection, management, and utilization can further enhance this culture. Emphasizing the importance of transparency, regardless of legal obligations, can strengthen trust among stakeholders. Additionally, supporting the development of multi-stakeholder initiatives that bring together nonprofits, government agencies, and donors to collaboratively collect, analyze, and utilize data can yield mutual benefits. A notable recommendation is the launch of a 'Data Sharing Conference' by WikiCharities/JoNI and other partners, focusing on trust-based partnerships in data sharing.

C.Promoting a Community Approach. Promoting a community approach is essential for engaging all three groups in the nonprofit sector: nonprofits, nonprofit resource providers, and those in need. This approach focuses on improving collaboration within the nonprofit sector by encouraging shared goals, mutual support, and coordinated efforts. By fostering a sense of community, nonprofits can work together more effectively, resource providers can make more informed decisions about where to allocate resources, and those in need can receive more comprehensive and coordinated services. This holistic approach ensures that all stakeholders are involved in the process, leading to more sustainable and impactful outcomes.

Conclusion

The initial findings highlight the critical importance of transparency and data accessibility in enhancing collaboration and decision-making within the nonprofit sector. As the data is continually analyzed across different regions, several key points have emerged that underline the potential benefits of a global nonprofit database.

1. Enhanced Understanding of the Global Nonprofit Landscape:

- Comprehensive data about nonprofits will provide insights into the sector's geographic reach, service areas, and funding needs (Buteau, 2018).
- This improved understanding can inform targeted strategies and resource allocation to address critical needs within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework (United Nations, 2021).

2. Identifying Gaps and Underserved Areas:

- Data analysis can reveal areas with limited or absent nonprofit activity, highlighting areas where interventions are most needed to achieve SDGs (Holzer, 2020).

3. Optimizing Collaboration and Impact:

- Comprehensive data can connect nonprofits with complementary missions and expertise, facilitating collaboration for greater impact on specific SDG targets (Harris & Neely, 2018).

4. Data-Driven Advocacy and Policy Making:

- Analyzing data on sector trends and impact will empower nonprofits to advocate for evidence-based policies that support achieving the SDGs (Millán, Retamosa, & Carranza, 2024).
- This data can also inform more efficient resource allocation at the national and international levels (Goldberg, 2020).

5. Promoting Transparency and Accountability:

- Standardized data reporting on key nonprofit activities can enhance transparency and accountability within the sector, fostering public trust and attracting additional resources (Behn, DeVries, & Lin, 2010; Saxton & Guo, 2011).

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