Inventing Digital Civil Society

Lucy Bernholz
Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society
Digital Civil Society Lab
What is Digital Civil Society?

Private resources for public benefit in the digital age.

Resources can be used to organize, create, distribute, and fund.

Resources include time, money, wisdom, physical and social networks, and data.
Civil Society’s Enterprises: The Do-ers

What’s out here...?
The Donors

Charitable Giving
+
Impact Investing
+
Political Giving
+
Consumer Choices
+
Crowdfunding
What digital data?
Characteristics of digital data

These characteristics are interdependent – we’ve broken them apart for definitional purposes. It is the combination of these traits that make digital data function the way they do.

In traditional economic parlance, digital data act like public goods. They are non-rival (lots of people can use them at once) and non-excludable (it’s hard to prevent people from using them even if they don’t pay).

- Generative
- Replicable
- Mixable
- Scalable
- Storable
- Accessible
- Perpetual
- Unclear ownership
Civil society organizations have a spectrum of decisions to make that affect how information is shared, stored, retained, or destroyed.

The same data (whether digital or analog) can vary in degrees of access and use depending on what is selected to share and how. For example: a paper version of the 990 form stored in file cabinet is like an ice cube. A single 990 form scanned and hosted online as a PDF is like water. A downloadable and open access database created from all the individual fields drawn from all organizations’ 990s is like steam.
Starts with digital data and infrastructure

Digital Civil Society

Civil society assumptions, behaviors, values and institutions

Digital data and infrastructure
Here’s some of what is new

- Nonprofits that manage digital assets
- New Organizational Forms and Relationships
- New Funding Behaviors
- Data Philanthropy
- New Social Calculus
Nonprofits managing digital assets
New organizational forms and relationships
New Funding Behaviors

First crowdfunded IVF baby
Data Philanthropy

4 Ways of Sharing

1. Share aggregated and derived data sets for analysis under non-disclosure agreements (NDA)
2. Allow researchers to analyze data within the private company's own network, under NDA
3. Real-Time Data Commons: data pooled and aggregated between multiple companies of the same industry to protect competitiveness.
4. Public/Private Alerting Network: companies mine data behind their own firewalls and share indicators.
New social calculus
Some of what we don’t know

Who owns what?

How do you donate something and still own it?

How do nonprofits and foundations want infrastructure providers and third parties to treat their information?

How do we decide what to collect, what to keep, what to share, and what to destroy? – How do we govern private data for public good?
Who owns what?
How do you donate digital data?
Third parties and foundation data

Photo: Foundation Center
How do we govern data?

- Who decides what gets collected?
- What gets shared?
- Stored?
- Destroyed?
The current state of digital civil society
What will be invented next

- A spectrum of rights regarding digital data
- Practices and rules for data philanthropy
- Widespread ways to use the emerging philanthropy data infrastructure
- Best practices for governing and managing philanthropic data
- Capacity building efforts that build in digital governance and management skills
  - Digital Data Governance Guide
    - Email me to beta test it (bernholz@stanford.edu)
The Emergence of Digital Civil Society

Good Fences: The Importance of Institutional Boundaries in the New Social Economy

Social Economy Policy Forecast 2013

The Shifting Ground Beneath Us: Framing Nonprofit Policy for the 21st Century

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