Presence of Nonprofits Linked to Lower Unemployment

According to a recent study by the National Conference on Citizenship, an organized and active nonprofit community is linked to lower levels of local unemployment. Among those communities, there are specific nonprofit types that have more people at work: they provide direct service to their members and engage supporters as members of the organization. Social cohesion, or the overall connectedness of citizens as neighbors and friends, is also credited with reducing unemployment rates.

The study is encouraging for nonprofit efforts, especially during an economic downturn that has reduced donations to nonprofits. Its findings may be a significant tool for influencing communities and their legislators to invest time and funding into nonprofit organizations.

Grant Opportunity for Organizations Addressing Achievement & Opportunity Gap

Greenlight Foundation Announces Social Innovation Fund Initiative

The Greenlight Foundation recently unveiled a funding opportunity for organizations addressing underprivileged youth in three major cities. Two Boston nonprofits will receive five-year awards in the range of $750,000 to $1,500,000, along with evaluations to improve and expand their impact. To qualify, nonprofits should demonstrate innovative approaches to closing the achievement gap for youth in their communities.

Detailed information about the grant opportunity can be found on the Greenlight Fund’s website. Applications are due October 31st at 5PM.

Ami Dar Interview:

**Q.** Our theme is Rising Beyond the Challenge—it’s about acknowledging & confronting recent economic and technological changes so we can adapt to them and even benefit from them. You started Idealist in 1995, right before the internet took off. To what extent did you anticipate an almost entirely web-based resource? How has Idealist adapted to changes in technology over the last 17 years?

**A.** I didn’t anticipate the internet, although I think I wished for it. In previous years I had obsessed over how to bring people together for common challenges, so I felt like it had been created for me.

Staying relevant and adapting over 17 years is tough. Things change so quickly. It goes in cycles; you’re cutting edge sometimes, then you’re playing catch-up other times. We’re very self-critical—right now we’re working to make the website the best it can be, hopefully by the end of the year.

**Q.** Was there any effect on your site, its mission, the tone and dynamics of Idealist in the last 4 or so years, following the recession? It impacted nonprofits significantly—did idealist feel that?

**A.** The impact of the recession was huge. There was a day I’ll probably always remember—September 15, 2008—that the stock market crashed. Almost every executive director told us they were going to freeze hiring until further notice. Idealist is funded 90% by revenue from a $70 fee to post jobs so within weeks, our revenue was cut in half. Only in the last year or so have we started to feel healthy again.

Nonprofits learned how to do more with less, which is a good skill in the long term. The economy forced people to be more efficient in their work. Our staff of 45 was cut to 28, but we learned to do more with our resources. Technology has helped make that easier.

Q. What challenges in philanthropy and social justice work do you anticipate in the next few years?

Younger folks are in a tough place: they were told they just needed to get into the right schools and have the right internships and they would find work. Now there’s a mismatch of skills and needs: liberal arts educations aren’t sending people out with enough tangible skills. We need things like programmers. It’s not that hard to learn and has a huge payoff.

Their relationship with technology is so different. We don’t have to teach young people technology—they already have an understanding about being connected with the world.

They see things as less hierarchical; they have this desire to communicate across boundaries and borders.

But now we’re grappling with cracking this nut: how do you connect online communication with offline action? Real change happens in the real world. Our websites have to create change in the real world—otherwise it’s just noise.

What projects are you excited about, looking forward?

Idealist.org is the go-to information hub for activists, whether they seek employment, new staff members for their organization, or want to publicize events and volunteer opportunities. In seventeen years, it has grown from a $2[help what are the numbers]. Its founder, Ami Dar, offers a dynamic background and a vision that blends pragmaticism and idealism.

Action without Borders, Idealist’s parent nonprofit, was founded in 1995, just on the brink of the technology explosion; in the few years following, personal computers and Internet access became commonplace. “I didn’t anticipate the internet, although I think I wished for it,” he says. “In previous years I had obsessed over how to bring people together for common challenges, so I almost felt like it had been created for me.”

But that technology moves quickly, and many good ideas have been swallowed up while trying to stay on the forefront of innovation. “Staying relevant and adapting over 17 years is tough,” Ami admits. “It goes in cycles; you’re cutting edge sometimes, then you’re playing catch-up other times.” The key to staying on top is to never become complacent. “We’re very self-critical. Right now we’re working to make the website the best it can be, hopefully by the end of the year.”

Recent economic challenges have forced Idealist to adapt its operations, as well. The recession took a large toll on the organization. “There was a day I’ll probably always remember—September 15, 2008—that the stock market crashed,” Ami says. “Almost every executive director told us they were going to freeze hiring until further notice. Idealist is funded 90% by revenue from job posting fees, so within weeks our revenue was cut in half.”

The bright side was discovering the organization’s ability to adjust and even benefit from the crisis. “Nonprofits learned how to do more with less, which is a good skill in the long term,” Ami says. “The economy forced people to be more efficient in their work.”

Looking ahead, Ami predicts some turbulence as millennials enter the nonprofit workforce. “There’s a mismatch of skills and needs: liberal arts educations aren’t sending people out with enough tangible skills,” he says. However, their seemingly unlimited access to technology has sculpted a fresh perspective on global challenges. “They see things as less hierarchical; they have this desire to communicate across boundaries and borders.”

Although Idealist has found immense success on the web, Ami firmly maintains that real change happens outside of one’s smartphone or laptop. “How do you connect online communication with offline action? Real change happens in the real world. Our websites have to create change in the real world—otherwise it’s just noise.”

Develop Your Organization Leadership & Budgeting Skills

AGM and Bank of America offer Nonprofit Learning Institute