

Do you want to become a more data driven NFP?

By Perpetual Impact

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Data and analytics are big topics in the non-for-profit (NFP) sector today. Whether it's wanting to better understand funding patterns and behaviours, leveraging Open Data and operational data to improve policy, or addressing broader questions around community context and issues – data analytics play an important role in ensuring decisions are evidence based.

In this article, we interview Kristi Mansfield, CEO of Seer Data and Analytics (Seer) about the value of becoming more data driven and how NFPs can turn their data into insight.



COVID-19 support: Access to Seer and financial vulnerability data insights is now free

2020 is going to be an extraordinarily challenging year for the community sector. The COVID-19 crisis may make some communities more vulnerable. In this time of crisis, efficient access to data and the ability to build a clear picture for each community will allow strategies to be developed and actioned quickly to respond best on a local level.

To improve access to data for both NFP and philanthropists, Seer wants to help by providing access to their standard plan for free for the rest of 2020.

[Read more about this offer below.](#)

Q: How can NFPs become more data driven?

Creating a data driven organisation means building an understanding of data, turning it into insights and knowledge, and sharing that knowledge inside and outside the organisation to improve decisions and take action based on the information available.

Becoming data driven is also developing the aspiration for decision-making based on facts and information – data – rather than solely on intuition or past behaviour. In many NFP organisations, decisions can still be based on instinct and 'gut feel', or past experiences and then data is used to justify a decision. A data driven organisation will bring in rich sources of data including qualitative data, capturing intuition, instinct and experience, and combine it with a range of statistical sources and analytics forming a strong informational basis for decision making. In this way, being data driven reinforces the goal of turning data into insight.

Over time, when decisions are based on a data-centric process, employees become more focused on the importance of data, including how it's captured, stored and interpreted as a decision-making tool, and the value it provides to the NFP. They become data driven.

Q: How does the Seer platform work?

Seer lets people easily access Open or publicly available data and upload their own private data to share insights quickly with team members or partner organisations. We have linked thousands of Open Data sets so that people who work in the NFP sector can rapidly understand more about their community, see patterns and answer more complex questions to solve problems. Our mission is to make data accessible, usable and shareable for all. Open Data is an opportunity for people of all skillsets to engage in solving social problems. We believe complex, tough questions can be asked and answered with data from which all communities and people can benefit.

We offer 'Pre-packed Data Suitcases'; this is a compilation of the most used datasets in the NFP sector which make it fast and easy to make better decisions, have better conversations with funders and create efficiencies in the delivery of services.

Q: Do you have any examples of the type of data that can be collected and how it can be used to gather insights?

The data people access is Open Data and we also let people create 'data collaboratives' in their community, which is the ability for NFPs to share data with others to answer questions that matter to them at a local level.

In the past, we've had organisations use the Seer platform to address questions like:

- Do we have enough supply to meet our demand for quality early education?
- How ready for school are our kids?
- How much wealth will transfer in our community in the next 10 years?
- What services would our community need if we were in crisis?

Q: What challenges do NFPs have in using data well?

Data is hard to access, prepare and interpret. Many NFPs don't have the resources to hire analysts focused on data analytics and, while being data-led and backing decisions with a strong evidence base is critical, it is an area that needs more investment.

We aim to take the pain out of the data preparation component by linking Open Data in our data library and making it simple for NFPs to bring in their own data to that library for richer insights. In doing so, NFPs can focus more on taking action from the insights, rather than starting at the beginning with turning data into knowledge insights.

Q: What's the benefit of NFPs having access to a platform like Seer?

Community organisations are using Seer for strategic planning and funding applications. For example, one of our clients, a small, grassroots NFP organisation received \$450,000 in new philanthropic funding by using Seer to create a strong evidence base for the application.

More and more, government and philanthropic grant makers need to see strong, data-led applications. In addition to potentially attracting more funding, our users are getting a seat at the table with policy makers. They know their community and they have a stronger voice when advocating for services and programs to meet those needs.

What factors are important to consider when thinking about an analytics program?

It's important to understand questions you need answered with data. There needs to be a solid understanding and agreement about the purpose for which you are placing the effort. Only then can there be recognition of the value that the activity provides to the organisation.

Q: Do you have any advice for NFPs that are considering investing in data solutions?

Our vision has always been to transform the social sector by deepening people's understanding of how to better solve social challenges by using data analytics. We developed the Seer platform to allow users to explore, blend and analyse data sets in to make evidence-based decisions about programs and interventions, and ultimately improve outcomes in their communities.

With this in mind, I'd advise NFPs to:

- Get curious about the questions they'd like to answer, no matter how complex they seem. Data can be a very useful tool to create more insight to help tackle difficult and complex problems.
- Look inside their organisation and start to catalogue the data they already work with. Chances are NFP organisations are sitting on a goldmine and may be able to use this more effectively for their own work or share this data with others to help solve hard issues that would make a big difference to many.
- Seek opportunities to leverage data and evidence in all applications and grant making.

Seer's offer to Perpetual's IMPACT subscribers

Seer believes open data is an important resource for people of all skillsets to engage in problem solving, especially during times of crisis.

To ensure NFPs and philanthropists get immediate valuable insights, new users will have access to a 'Financial Vulnerability Map' paired with a 'Financial Vulnerability Insights Package' which can be tailored to local community areas. This will include data related to small businesses, employment, industries, household types, Centrelink support, population and demographics illuminates the location and scale of vulnerable communities around Australia. Ongoing support and regular webinars will also be available to ensure that users will be able to make best use of these resources.

Community organisations, service providers, local Governments, policy makers and philanthropists will face tough decisions in the coming months, and we want to empower these organisations with insightful data to help.

Free access to Seer and the crisis data package will be available from Thursday 26 March. Visit www.seerdata.com.au and sign up to get started.

Perpetual and Seer Data & Analytics partnership

Perpetual and Seer have partnered to provide all Perpetual social impact clients with access to Perpetual philanthropy data. This will ensure that both NFPs and philanthropists can gather more insights and improve their capability to make strategic decisions on how to best invest in and/or service communities.

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