A New Approach for Tracking Philanthropic Activity to the SDGs

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As the social good sector looks ahead on the journey towards achieving the SDGs, advancing the use of impact measurement, indicators and feedback loops will become an imperative key to success. The adoption of the SDGs in 2015 not only provided a framework to achieve change globally, it also prompted a challenge for social good organizations to align their programs and measure their contributions towards furthering specific SDGs.

At Blackbaud, it is our mission to provide software, services, and data intelligence that empowers and connects people to advance the social good movement, including global initiatives like the SDGs. Over the past three years, we have been researching how to equip and enable the social good sector, in particular foundations and corporations, to track and measure the outcomes and impact of their grantmaking and employee engagement initiatives.

Our preliminary research found a major shift toward results-focused philanthropy but a lack of tools allowing foundations and corporations to track, measure and report back on outcomes. In addition, there was a heightened desire for more collaboration and agreement on what should be measured, leading us to develop a sector-sourced taxonomy for a new outcomes measurement solution.

With the new imperative to demonstrate contribution towards the SDGs, Blackbaud collaborated with three other organizations, including Global Impact, to map the SDGs and associated indicators to ICNPO/NTEE codes, so that companies, foundations, nonprofits and other social good organizations could not only measure their work against internally set objectives, but also to the larger framework of the SDGs. Mapping the SDGs and associated indicators to a universal code allows organizational alignment and contributions to be more strategically managed and reported on. This is an essential aspect given that with 17 goals and an additional 169 targets, the new SDGs are significantly more granular than their predecessors, the Millennium Development Goals, creating many new complexities to measurement.

The SDG mapping project resulted in multiple solutions. Global Impact embedded it into its consulting work by helping clients map employee giving and volunteering to the SDGs, and used this mapping data to help organizations enhance their alignment with the SDG framework. Blackbaud is embedding the mapping into its Blackbaud OutcomesTM technology solution to enable grantmaking organizations to start tracking the impact of their programs toward the SDGs, with a feedback loop allowing funders and grantees to collaborate during the course of a grant (product update to be released on May 13, 2017). Ultimately, connecting all the players addressing similar issues, from service providers to funders, will better allow for measureable progress in SDG-related grants.

The SDG mapping work being done by these partners is enabling organizations to deliver data-driven storytelling that furthers the SDGs. Data-driven storytelling can help elevate and more broadly share lessons learned from philanthropy and corporate engagement initiatives. This mapping project provides a framework that allows stories to inform future funding decisions and drive future progress toward achievement of the SDGs.