
Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs

Vol. 4, No. 1

Are You Being Served? Toward a Typology of Nonprofit Infrastructure Organizations and a Framework for Their Assessment

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Nonprofit infrastructure organizations provide multiple functions to the nonprofit sector: strengthening individual and organizational capacities, mobilizing material resources, providing information and intellectual resources, building alliances for mutual support, bridging the research and practice divide, and connecting nonprofits to the other sectors. Although researchers have described a variety of organizations that support nonprofit activity, they have done little to distinguish them or to explain their primary purposes. In this article, we develop a typology to classify these nonprofit infrastructure organizations, which offers new insight into their various objectives and functions. Based on a review of the relevant literature and interviews with stakeholders, we then construct a necessary framework for the assessment of the infrastructure organizations we have identified. The result is a better understanding of not only the types of nonprofit infrastructure organizations but also the appropriate dimensions for their assessment.

Keywords: Assessment, Management Support Organizations, Nonprofit Infrastructure Organizations, Nonprofit Sector

In a chapter published in *The State of Nonprofit America*, Abramson and McCarthy (2012) describe a diverse collection of “infrastructure organizations” intended to strengthen the effectiveness and capacity of nonprofit organizations. According to these authors, nonprofit infrastructure organizations encompass a variety of membership, advocacy, education, research, management assistance, and other types that “promote the health of the nonprofit sector” (Abramson & McCarthy, 2012, p. 423). This article develops a comprehensive framework for the assessment of one type of infrastructure organization: nonprofit academic centers housed in colleges and universities that offer education, research, and technical assistance to the nonprofit community. Although our research began with a request from a university to develop an assessment framework that could be applied to nonprofit academic centers, we find – and show in this article – that our framework has much broader application to the infrastructure organizations (IOs) described by Abramson and McCarthy (2012) and other scholars.

Abramson and McCarthy (2012) ground their chapter on the related concerns that “there has been little systematic analysis of ... IOs” (p. 423). At the same time, “There is some worry that IOs are not serving the sector as effectively as they should. Of special concern are the quality of services that IOs are providing” (p. 424). We find similar circumstances with respect to the nonprofit academic centers that provided the catalyst to our research. The Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC), the lead membership organization for these entities, has not updated its “Indicators of Quality in Nonprofit Academic Centers” (2006) since their formulation and approval more than a decade ago. The performance challenge is heightened for these entities because they are housed in universities and colleges, which are themselves under pressure to demonstrate their worth to the public and, in state-supported schools, to the legislature (Brudney & Russell, 2016; Fowles, 2014).

Of course, nonprofit academic centers are not the only part of the university that may, and should, generate credibility for colleges and universities with the larger community. However, with their explicit focus on “the education of nonprofit leaders and managers, support of nonprofit research by scholars from a variety of academic disciplines, and the provision of technical assistance and support to nonprofit organizations in their communities” (NACC, 2006, p. 2), nonprofit academic centers constitute potentially powerful offices, as well as means, through which colleges and universities might help to establish their value and service to the surrounding community.

In this article, we show that nonprofit academic centers belong to a large, rather amorphous, category of infrastructure organizations intended to serve the nonprofit sector, which has received little systematic attention from researchers. Whereas Abramson and McCarthy (2012) refer to these support organizations as infrastructure organizations (IOs), we think it is more accurate and prefer to use the acronym NIOs (*nonprofit* infrastructure organizations) to describe this segment of the nonprofit landscape. We add “nonprofit” to distinguish these infrastructure organizations from those that provide supporting resources to other major sectors of the economy (Smith, 1997).

This article intends to enrich our understanding of nonprofit infrastructure organizations in two primary ways. First, we develop a typology to identify and distinguish the main types of these organizations that offers new insight into their various purposes and functions. Second, we construct a needed framework for the assessment of the different types of nonprofit infrastructure organizations we have identified. Our framework emanates from a review of the relevant literature, examinations of nonprofit academic centers’ websites, communication with directors of nonprofit academic centers, and extensive interviews with stakeholders of a single nonprofit academic center. We show that the framework has application to nonprofit academic centers as well as the other types of infrastructure organizations included in our typology. The result is a better understanding of not only the different types of infrastructure organizations but also the appropriate dimensions for their assessment.

Distinguishing Nonprofit Infrastructure Organizations

A review of the relevant literature shows that nonprofit infrastructure organizations provide multiple functions to the sector: strengthening individual and organizational capacities, mobilizing material resources, providing information and intellectual resources, building alliances for mutual support, bridging the research and practice divide, and connecting nonprofits to the other sectors (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002; Graaf, McBeath, Lwin, Holmes, & Austin, 2016; Smith, 1997). Although researchers have described a variety of organizations that

support nonprofit activity, they have done little to distinguish them or to explain their primary purposes. Given the lack of systematic attention to NIOs (Abramson & McCarthy, 2012), it is not surprising that the responsibilities accorded these various entities differ in the literature as do the variety of names used to denote them, including management support organizations, community support organizations, intermediary organizations, civil society support organizations, nonprofit capacity-building organizations, nonprofit academic centers, etc.

Abramson and McCarthy (2012) maintain that the diverse organizations that provide these support functions fall into one of two categories: organizations that serve the nonprofit sector as a whole, or organizations that serve individual nonprofits and their staffs. In the former category one finds advocacy, public education, and national membership organizations (e.g., Independent Sector, Council on Foundations, North Carolina Center for Nonprofits) as well as organizations and associations that serve the field of nonprofit research (e.g., Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy at the Urban Institute). The latter category includes management training and support organizations, professional development associations (e.g., Association of Fundraising Professionals), and financial intermediaries (e.g., United Way of America and its local affiliates).

To distinguish and understand the variety of NIOs, we add a third category to complement Abramson and McCarthy's (2012) conceptualization: organizations that serve local communities. Referred to as community or civil society support organizations, these organizations build community capacity by mobilizing resources, connecting community actors across diverse social and economic cleavages, and fostering intra- and inter-sectoral collaborations (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002; Connor, Kadel-Taras, & Vinokur-Kaplan, 1999). As an example of a civil society support organization (a term predominantly found in the international development literature), Brown and Kalegaonkar (2002) explain how the Orangi Pilot Project in Pakistan worked with slum dwellers to develop long-needed sanitation infrastructure. In Cleveland, Ohio, the community support organization (typically used by researchers describing organizations in the U.S. context) Neighborhood Progress, Inc. convened residents and government, nonprofit, and for-profit stakeholders to bring attention to and resolve community housing issues (Mendel & Brudney, 2012). Table 1 presents the three-category typology of NIOs that we have developed.

The first category in our typology pertains to organizations whose service focus is the nonprofit sector as a whole. *Sector support organizations* address the macro-environment in which nonprofits operate and seek to strengthen the sector through advocacy, public education, member support, and conceptual research on the nonprofit sector (Abramson and McCarthy, 2012).

The second category in the typology refers to organizations that serve nonprofits and their staffs. *Management support organizations* are local nonprofits with regional service areas spanning multiple jurisdictions that provide support to other nonprofits through training, consultation services, and management guidance (Connor et al., 1999; Wimberley & Rubens, 2002). Typical service topics include leadership, planning, fundraising, marketing, board governance, and human resource development. According to Wimberley and Rubens (2002), management support organizations "have evolved over the last 25 years as the major resource for nonprofit training and consultation in the nation" (p. 131). These direct assistance organizations help nonprofits professionalize their operations through training and implementation of best practices.

Intermediary organizations are nonprofits that form knowledge-sharing systems to bridge research and practice, promote evidence-based management (or evidence-informed practice),

Table 1. Typology of Nonprofit Infrastructure Organizations

Service Focus	Purpose and Primary Activities	Nonprofit Infrastructure Organization Type and Examples
Nonprofit Sector	• Strengthen nonprofit sector - o Advocacy - o Public education - o Member support - o Nonprofit sector research	• Sector Support Organizations - o Independent Sector - o Council on Foundations - o North Carolina Center for Nonprofits - o Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action • Nonprofit Academic Centers - o Arizona State University Lodestar Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Innovation
Nonprofit organizations and their staff	• Build nonprofit capacity and provide professional development - o Trainings - o Consultation services - o Management guidance - o Information dissemination - o Knowledge development and sharing - o Nonprofit management research	• Management Support Organizations - o BoardSource • Intermediary Organizations - o United Way • Nonprofit Academic Centers - o See example above
Local Community	• Build social capital and increase cross-sector collaboration - o Connecting - o Convening - o Bridging	• Community Support Organizations - o Neighborhood Progress, Inc. (Cleveland, OH) • Civil Society Support Organizations - o Orangi Pilot Project (Karachi, Pakistan) • Nonprofit Academic Centers - o See example above

and serve as financial intermediaries. In their role as boundary spanners, intermediary organizations perform three primary functions: first, they create a network to link researchers and practitioners with the goal of facilitating information-sharing. Second, they serve as knowledge brokers that interpret research findings for practicing managers and communicate practitioner needs to scholars. Third, in their role as financial intermediaries, these organizations raise and allocate funds to support local nonprofit organizations.

The final category in table 1 consists of nonprofit support organizations that serve the community. Similar to intermediary organizations, *community and civil society support organizations* are nonprofits that seek to form networks to connect actors and facilitate communication. Whereas intermediary organizations link researchers to practitioners with the purpose of improving dialogue and promoting evidence-based management, community and civil society support organizations cast a wider net and have broader goals. Community support organizations use their interest and capability in convening to persuade key actors (individuals and organizations) from all three sectors (for-profit, government, nonprofit) to enter into synergistic collaborations that improve the local community by building social capital, trust in the nonprofit sector, and volunteerism.

Nonprofit Academic Centers

As one category of nonprofit infrastructure organizations, nonprofit academic centers help illustrate the usefulness of the typology. As shown in table 1 nonprofit academic centers have adopted all three of the service foci performed by NIOs -- the nonprofit sector as a whole, nonprofit organizations and their staff, and the local community -- and, therefore, fall into the three categories of our typology. They serve the nonprofit sector as a whole by convening nonprofit scholars and incubating and disseminating conceptual research that educates the public on the benefits and impacts of the third sector, as well as the challenges confronting it. Nonprofit academic centers serve nonprofit organizations and their staff by offering trainings, workshops, and consultation services, and by acting as intermediary knowledge brokers. Finally, they serve the local community by connecting key actors to build social capital and increase cross-sector collaboration.

In the nascent days of nonprofit academic centers in the 1990s (NACC began in 1991), Smith (1997) may have been correct in arguing that these entities emulated their university hosts by providing traditional services, such as credit-bearing instruction, theory-based research, and community service. With the passage of time and the changing demands of their stakeholders, however, nonprofit academic centers have incorporated additional functions once provided by other types of NIOs. Nonprofit academic centers increasingly aim to function as all-encompassing “one-stop-shopping” infrastructure organizations.

Our review of the extant literature suggests that NIOs share similar features, although their particular emphases should not be overlooked. With this background we turn to the development of a framework for the assessment of one type of NIO: nonprofit academic centers. Because nonprofit academic centers perform all of the activities of the broad family of NIOs, we feel that with some attention to the differences across the various types, our framework can be applied fruitfully to them. Based on our typology presented in table 1, the discussion section of the article elucidates the application of our framework to the different categories of NIOs.

Literature Review

Two streams of scholarship underlie the development of our assessment framework: first, research that explores the opportunities, challenges, and tensions emanating from the multiple accountabilities of nonprofit organizations; and second, research on building individual, nonprofit, and community capacity.

Nonprofit Accountability

Nonprofit academic centers are accountable to multiple stakeholders with similar yet divergent interests: upward to their funders, downward to their clients, and internally to themselves and their mission (Ebrahim, 2010). First, they are accountable to external funders, such as those for whom they perform work to meet grant or contract requirements. These funders are organized and operate to meet various needs and serve diverse populations. As such, grants must be strategically structured and programs purposefully designed to increase the degree of overlap between funders’ priorities and decrease the likelihood that the nonprofit academic centers will be held responsible for conducting activities that fall beyond their mission.

Second, nonprofit academic centers are accountable to the nonprofit organizations and the communities they serve. Their programs and activities must be targeted and responsive to the diverse needs of these organizational constituents (Frumkin, 2002). Third, nonprofit academic centers are accountable to the host university, its mission, and the faculty and administrators with an interest or oversight authority regarding them. They must balance demands of external stakeholders with the academic mission of the university and, consequently, strategically plan, seek and earn external funding, and execute programs that align with the university's mission and goals. As with other nonprofits that must balance stakeholders' expectations (Bryson, 2011, 2016), the challenge before NIOs is to manage the demands of external funders and serve constituent groups in the community in a way that will also contribute to the academic mission of the university.

Considerations of accountability include not only accountability to whom but also for what (Carver, 1997; Renz, 2010). Nonprofit academic centers are accountable to stakeholders for three broad categories: finances, governance, and performance. First, they are expected to engage in sound financial practices, including budgeting, financial planning, developing/following policies for the use of funds, disclosing financial transactions, providing transparency in the use of funds, and ensuring grant compliance, among other fundamental best practices. Second, they must ensure sound governance practice that meets legal and ethical standards. Officers and others with governance authority share the responsibility to ensure that financial and programmatic decisions, oversight, and stewardship of resources and personnel are based on sound evidence, are in the best interest of relevant stakeholders, and are in accordance with university policies and procedures. Finally, nonprofit academic centers are accountable for demonstrating performance toward goals. Performance-based accountability requires that they demonstrate programmatic results, which we elaborate in our assessment framework.

Nonprofit academic centers have two primary methods for demonstrating their accountability to relevant stakeholders: tools and processes (Ebrahim, 2005). Tools include disclosures and reports that typically require an entity to convey numerical metrics (e.g., counts) related to inputs (i.e., resources received or committed) and activities (i.e., programs). Although tools may require some level of performance assessment, evaluation is typically performed at intervals with data limited to short-term outputs. Thus, the tools themselves lack the introspective and performance components that facilitate organizational learning and results.

Whereas tools are employed predominantly for compliance (i.e., to satisfy funders and others with oversight authority), processes are strategic. Process-based accountability involves participation by a range of stakeholders, is long-term in nature, and provides adaptive learning via a feedback loop. Multidimensional outcome assessment is performed to generate data that can be used to facilitate learning and lead to changes in programming, thereby improving performance and mission fulfillment.

Nonprofit Capacity Building

The second literature stream underlying our assessment framework is the scholarship on nonprofit capacity building. In its widely referenced 2001 report, the Urban Institute defines capacity building as "strengthening nonprofits so they can better achieve their mission" (Backer, 2001, p. 38). Elegant in its minimalism, this definition leaves space for practitioners to articulate what it means to strengthen nonprofits and determine how to build the requisite capacity. The Urban Institute's definition may seem straightforward, but it belies the complexity of capacity building.

Capacity building requires a multifaceted approach (Despard, 2016). For many practitioners, nonprofit capacity is narrowly construed to consist of organizational structures, financial resources, and human capital. However, this limited conceptualization fails to acknowledge the purpose for which nonprofits exist and the environment in which nonprofits operate. That is, nonprofit capacity building approaches are useful insofar as they also address the need to build community capacity. Therefore, capacity building is studied at three levels: individual, organizational, and communal, i.e., community-based (Bryan & Brown, 2015).

Individual Capacity. Individual level capacity comprises the human capital of a nonprofit. Human capital is the stock of resources individually and collectively possessed by the people associated with a nonprofit, including its employees and volunteers. These resources can add value and return a social and/or financial benefit to the organization. Examples of individual capacity include number of staff and volunteers, quality of staff and volunteers, and knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes of these paid and volunteer personnel (Brown, Andersson, & Jo, 2016; Minzer, Klerman, Markovitz, & Fink, 2014). Also included is the commitment of staff and volunteers to the organization, its mission, and its clients.

Organizational Capacity. Organizational capacity includes the financial, physical, and social capital of the organization, as well as its structures and systems of operation. Organizational capital represents the stock of resources owned by the nonprofit that have an economic value. Assessing and investing in this capital can add value and generate a social and/or financial return to the organization. Examples of organizational capital include financial capital (cash, investments, assets, and endowment; revenue portfolio, trends, and forecasts); physical capital (facilities and equipment; information technology); and social capital (strength of internal relationships and culture; number and strength of external linkages; attitudes of stakeholders, i.e., reputation and legitimacy) (Brown et al., 2016).

How organizations structure, facilitate, build, and leverage available capital (individual and organizational) affects the achievement of organizational outcomes. Hence, organizational capacity also comprises institutional structures and systems of operation. Examples include organizational structures (mission, vision, goals, and values; bylaws; policies; job descriptions for staff and volunteers; strategic plan) and systems of operation, i.e., processes by which work is performed (action plans, performance management system).

Communal Capacity. Communities provide resources that support nonprofit operations, and, as with nonprofit organizations, they have a potential capacity that can be nurtured and built. A community's carrying capacity is the degree to which nonprofit organizations can be supported by the social, economic, and political conditions of the area (Anheier, 2014). Building nonprofit capacity entails increasing communal carrying capacity. Examples of community capacity relevant to nonprofit capacity building include social capital, trust in the nonprofit sector, extent of volunteerism, and amount of philanthropy (individual, corporate, foundation, government).

Methodology

Given the exploratory nature of this project, along with the lack of systematic research on nonprofit infrastructure organizations, we cast a wide net and drew on multiple sources of information to develop our framework for the assessment of nonprofit academic centers and nonprofit infrastructure organizations more generally. Our exploratory qualitative approach involved three phases.

Table 2. Dimensions and Sub-Dimensions of the Assessment Framework

Dimension 1: Administration	Dimension 2: Academic Support	Dimension 3: Research	Dimension 4: Education and Management Support	Dimension 5: Community Engagement
• Operations • Structure • Human Capital	• Students • Faculty • Academic Units	• Center produced • Faculty supported and promoted	• Credit-bearing instruction • Non-credit-bearing instruction • Consultation services	• Knowledge Broker • Connector and Advocate

First, we conducted reviews of 24 nonprofit academic centers' websites to identify common activities and glean best practices. To identify the nonprofit academic centers used in our analysis, we combined, then sorted, lists maintained by the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC, 2013) and the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR). The initial sample of NACC members and ISTR-recognized academic centers contained 157 entities. We restricted our analysis to U.S. entities and then discarded entities not identified as nonprofit academic centers or institutes (e.g., nonprofit degree programs, public affairs departments, and university-based community initiatives). After sorting the lists, 24 U.S. nonprofit academic centers and institutes remained.

For the second phase of our data collection effort, we posted a request to the ARNOVA-L listserv¹ to solicit information and input from the nonprofit academic and practitioner community. The email solicitation culminated in gathering relevant information from three directors of nonprofit academic centers via phone and/or email communication, including their center's strategic plan, self-studies, and assessment tools.

For the third and final phase, we conducted semistructured, open-ended interviews with nine stakeholders of a single nonprofit academic center, including the director of the center, faculty and administrators with an interest in and oversight authority over the center, and nonprofit funders. The stakeholder interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in duration. Extensive handwritten notes taken during the interviews were later analyzed to identify commonly noted themes. Based on our literature review and our methods, we developed an assessment framework (below) for nonprofit academic centers that offers a multidimensional depiction of the many activities centers may pursue. We emphasize that the assessment framework emanates from our data collection methods and reading of the literature and represents what we consider is a useful next step to organize and advance the study of nonprofit infrastructure organizations.

The Assessment Framework

Our assessment framework comprises five dimensions: administration, academic support, research, education and management support, and community engagement. For each of the five dimensions we propose related subdimensions that collectively represent the multifaceted dimensions (as shown in table 2). In the following sections, we introduce and elaborate upon the dimensions and subdimensions along with suggested activities and sample metrics for application and use. For illustrative purposes, some of the metrics have accompanying

performance indicators that can be used to track progress and report to stakeholders.

Given the broad and comprehensive nature of the framework, it is unlikely that any nonprofit academic center, unless sufficiently resourced and staffed, could operationalize, implement, and track all of the proposed activities. Therefore, center leadership with stakeholder input may prioritize the proposed dimensions and choose to pursue those activities that meet the following criteria, among others:

- Does the activity align with the academic center's mission, strategic plan, and goals?
- Does the academic center have sufficient resources to engage the activity?
- Does the activity satisfy multiple stakeholders?
- Does the activity offer a high return on investment?

Metrics

Over the last two decades funders of nonprofit organizations have increasingly chosen to focus on the outcomes of their monetary “investments.” For example, United Way organizations no longer fund favored nonprofits but prefer to support programs that achieve outcomes intended to create positive community impact. Additionally, philanthropic foundations provide targeted grants and attempt to quantify outcomes using complex formulas with the goal of attaining the highest return on their investment.

Although this movement commands a large following among funders, outcomes are complex, long-term, and often difficult to quantify and measure (Despard, 2016). Furthermore, it is tenuous to credit a single event/stimulus (e.g., grant, change in management) with producing an observed outcome. Therefore, some experts advocate targeting key organizational resource attributes and management functions that are “likely to contribute to fulfilling performance objectives” (Brown et al., 2016, p. 2892). Accordingly, the proposed framework provides a selection of metrics from which managers may choose, including input, process, and output level metrics that research and best practices suggest may reasonably lead to the desired outcomes. We now turn to the explication of the dimensions.

Dimension 1: Administration

The administration dimension encompasses the structure, operations, and human capital necessary to operate a nonprofit academic center. We offer suggestions of metrics that arose through our review of the literature and interviews/discussions, but they should not be viewed as exhaustive. Rather, the proposed metrics serve to define and illustrate the subdimensions. Managers may use the proposed metrics to develop relevant and timely performance indicators based on conditions at the time of assessment and reporting. For example, if university or other funders articulate a preferred level of state support versus non-state support, academic center leadership may calculate the level of support in percentages and demonstrate academic center progress toward the goal. The suggested metrics follow.

Structure

- Mission, vision, goals, values
- Policies (e.g., conflict of interest, whistleblower, code of ethics, financial)
- Organizational chart with clear reporting lines (internally and externally)
- Job descriptions for staff, contractors (e.g., consultants, trainers), and interns
- Strategic plan
- Evaluation systems

Operations

- Revenues: state support, non-state support, contract revenue, program service revenue, grant revenue, grants applied for and rates of success
- Expenses: operating expenses (i.e., overhead costs), resource seeking costs (i.e., staff's time, with associated cost, allocated to grant writing and reporting), program expenses (i.e., costs related to program delivery)

Human capital (i.e., personnel and professional development)

- Qualifications of staff, faculty, contractors, interns (example metrics: knowledge, skills, abilities, other attributes)
- Professional development completed (example metrics: hours, skills, certifications)
- Continuing education obtained (example metrics: hours, skills, certifications)

Dimension 2: Academic Support

The second dimension views nonprofit academic centers in their role as support entities serving the academic mission of the host college or university. This dimension captures the intentional and facilitative work performed to assist students and faculty. For example, centers can match students with certain majors/coursework to opportunities with nonprofit organizations that help build skills or extend knowledge.

Students

- Center support of experiential/applied learning (example metrics: number of applied learning projects arranged/hosted, number of internships hosted at center and cumulative hours, number of internship placements in the community and cumulative hours, number and dollar amount of center funded applied learning and/or research opportunities).
- Center support of student learning outcomes: increased learning (example metric: number of student learning outcomes achieved), change in student skills (example metric: number and quality of marketable skills gained in budgeting, event planning, grant writing, volunteer management, etc.).

Faculty

- Breadth, depth, and diversity of academically centered faculty connections (example metrics: number and listing of faculty with whom the academic center works, frequency of communication, number and listing of academic projects/requests facilitated).

Academic units

- Breadth, depth, and diversity of departmental connections (example metrics: number and listing of partner departments, frequency of communication, number and listing of projects/requests facilitated).

Dimension 3: Research

As part of an institution of higher learning, nonprofit academic centers should contribute to the research mission of the college or university. The research dimension comprises the extent to which academic center staff and faculty: author, publish, and disseminate original research relating to the nonprofit sector; support research-based grants for the study of issues relevant to the nonprofit sector; and promote faculty research on the nonprofit sector.

Center produced research

- Center produced research and its presentation and publication by faculty/staff (example metrics: number and listing of conference presentations, number of research articles, book chapters, trade journal articles, and technical reports).

Faculty supported and promoted research

- Range of activities and extent to which center supports and promotes faculty research pertinent to the nonprofit sector (example metrics: number and dollar amount of external research-based grants academic center applied for and received to support faculty research, number of projects in which academic center assisted in facilitating community-engaged research, number of faculty research presentations hosted by the academic center, number of faculty/staff attendees at research presentations, number of student attendees at research presentations, number of community attendees at research presentations).

Dimension 4: Education and Management Support

Nonprofit academic centers perform an important function by providing instruction on campus as well as off campus. The education and management support dimension has three subdimensions: credit-bearing instruction, non-credit-bearing instruction, and consultation services. The first subdimension pertains to the extent to which the center is involved in the strategy, development, and provision of the nonprofit curriculum for the college or university. The second subdimension captures the extent to which the center offers academically based training, workshops, and other non-credit-bearing courses in nonprofit studies that are responsive to community needs and interests. The third subdimension relates to the consultation services offered by the center.

Credit-bearing instruction

- Center created and/or supported academic programs/courses with content relevant to the nonprofit sector (example metrics: listing and description of programs, e.g., Master of Public Administration, Master of Nonprofit Management, Minor in Nonprofit Management and Leadership, Certificate in Nonprofit Management, number of undergraduate and graduate students formally advised for degree programs, list and description of undergraduate and graduate courses pertaining to the nonprofit sector, frequency with which curricula supported by the academic center is reviewed and updated).

Non-credit-bearing instruction

- Curricula responsive to needs of targeted market ascertained through systematic market analysis (updated every two to three years).
- Frequency with which training modules are updated and by whom. Schedule for updates may vary by subject, depending on the extent to which research, best practices, and legal landscape change. For example: annual updates for program evaluation, board governance, leadership, and biannual updates for law, financial management, human resources.
- Frequency with which center training personnel are evaluated by participants and faculty with subject matter expertise.
- Variety of training/workshops (e.g., topic areas) and levels of sophistication (e.g., entry level, intermediate, advanced).
- Number and frequency of academically based (evidence-based) training/workshops by subject area, e.g., financial management, governance,

volunteer management, advocacy/lobbying, marketing (example metrics: number offered by faculty, number offered by practitioners, number of attendees for each training/workshop).

- Demonstrable outputs and short-term outcomes of training/workshops observed in attendees (example metrics: knowledge and skills gained by attendees, e.g., able to read financial statements, knowledge of board fiduciary duties; confidence and leadership ability improved, e.g., feeling of self-efficacy, increased emotional intelligence).
- Demonstrable organizational short-term outcomes of training/workshops (example metrics: mission statement updated, strategic plan adopted, job and volunteer job descriptions updated, board committees created, external audit obtained, increased number of clients served, increased revenues and diversification, new funding obtained, higher percentage of grant applications funded, client outcome data tracked, client feedback data obtained [Minzer et al., 2014]).
- Demonstrable organizational midterm and long-term outcomes of training/workshops (example metrics: nonprofit delivers better/more services for its clients, and nonprofits achieve improved outcomes [Minzer et al., 2014, p. 551]).

Consultation services

- Direct management support offered through consultation services (example metrics: number of hours, number of clients, demonstrable individual and organizational outputs and outcomes achieved).

Dimension 5: Community Engagement

Community engagement underlies many of the activities and metrics presented in the academics, research, and education and management support dimensions. Nevertheless, nonprofit academic centers engage and serve their community in other ways, and community engagement constitutes a dimension for assessment unto itself. Nonprofit academic centers play a linkage and interpretive role in collecting and disseminating useful knowledge to the community regarding the nonprofit sector. This dimension has two subdimensions: knowledge broker and community connector and advocate.

Nonprofit academic centers can provide a bridge between academics and practitioners and serve a mutually beneficial function. Centers can interpret academic research for practitioner audiences and facilitate the use of evidence-based management (EBM) practices in nonprofit operations. EBM is the concept that scientifically derived knowledge is the appropriate basis for making organizational decisions (Rousseau, 2006). From this point of view, managers should rely on the best available scientific evidence, which is proven reliable and valid (i.e., repeatable over time and generalizable across situations), to pursue desired outcomes.

Knowledge broker

- Reliable source of expert, up-to-date information on issues relating to the nonprofit sector in the community (example metrics: number of information requests, number of referrals).
- Development of readable syntheses or summaries of academic research (example metrics: number of published summaries, range of summaries across substantive management areas).
- Monitoring and reporting policy and legislative developments important to

nonprofit organizations (example metric: number of policy or legislative reports).

Connector and advocate

- Profile of faculty skills and construction of database to better understand/track faculty expertise and to facilitate connections when center receives nonprofit request (example metric: number of community-initiated connections facilitated).
- Profile of nonprofit community and construction of database to provide bridge to nonprofit organizations and community when faculty submit request to center (example metric: number of faculty-initiated connections facilitated).
- Map of state-wide nonprofit community and build database to support teaching, research, and job-related goals.²
- Support (or opposition) of issues and policies relevant to nonprofit organizations and community development (example metric: number of op-ed articles authored by academic center personnel).
- Creation of social capital (bonding and bridging) and trust in the nonprofit sector (see Putnam, 2000).
- Increased level of volunteerism (example metric: annually assess the number and amount of time individuals volunteer) and amount of giving (example metric: annually assess the amount of individual, corporate, foundation, and government giving to nonprofits).

Discussion

Based on the nonprofit accountability and capacity-building literatures, our review of nonprofit academic centers' websites, discussions with knowledgeable directors of nonprofit academic centers, and interviews with stakeholders of a center, we developed an assessment framework comprising five dimensions: administration, academic support, research, education and management support, and community engagement. In the preceding sections of this article, we confined our discussion regarding the utility and application of the proposed framework to one type of nonprofit infrastructure organization, nonprofit academic centers housed in colleges and universities. That focus struck as appropriate not only because we were responding to a specific charge from our university but also because the colleges and universities that host these centers face the challenge of demonstrating their standing and contribution in the community as well as their effectiveness and value to key stakeholders. Scholars of higher education have noted that "performance-based accountability regimes have become increasingly prevalent throughout government. One area where this has received considerable attention in recent years is higher education, where many states have adopted funding policies that seek to tie institutional funding to objective measures of performance" (Rabovsky, 2012, p. 675). In publicly supported as well as private colleges and universities, leaders are called upon to show relevance as well as results. In our view, with their emphasis on performing research, teaching, and public service that strengthens nonprofit/nongovernmental organizations, philanthropy, and voluntary action "critical to building healthy, successful communities" (NACC, 2013), nonprofit academic centers can assist their college and university hosts in meeting this crucial challenge.

As we discussed at the outset of this article, nonprofit academic centers constitute but one type of nonprofit infrastructure organization. Our detailed examination of NIOs revealed similarities and differences across them, as summarized in table 1, so that, with suitable modifications, we can extend our framework to the assessment of this larger family of organizations. The assessment framework is applicable and useful for a range of organizations that coordinate and

Table 3. Relevant Assessment Dimensions for Nonprofit Infrastructure Organizations

Type of Infrastructure Organization	Admin.	Academic Support	Research	Edu. & Mgmt. Support	Community Engagement	
					Knowledge Broker	Connector & Advocate
Nonprofit Academic Centers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sector Support Organizations			✓		✓	✓
Management Support Organizations				✓	✓	
Intermediary Organizations			✓		✓	
Community and Civil Society Support Organizations						✓

deliver essential services that enable nonprofit organizations to operate effectively and more successfully (Smith, 1997, p. 89-90). Table 3 illustrates the alignment between the dimensions in our framework and the main types of nonprofit infrastructure organizations that we have identified and distinguished (see table 1).

With their macro-service focus on the nonprofit sector as a whole, sector support organizations publish and sponsor research that illustrates major trends and developments for nonprofit organizations and translates the findings into implications for practice. Further, they monitor the legislative and policy environment as well as general trends with respect to need for the various services of the nonprofit sector. Accordingly, the most relevant dimensions of our assessment framework for sector support organizations are research (Dimension 3) and community engagement (Dimension 5), including both the knowledge broker and community advocate subdimensions.

Given their service focus on nonprofit organizations and their staff, management support organizations are concerned with building nonprofit capacity and professional development. Thus, the relevant dimension of the assessment framework consists of education and management support (Dimension 4), specifically the measures concerning non-credit-bearing instruction and consultation services. In addition, management support organizations provide the knowledge broker function of community engagement (Dimension 5). Another type of NIO, intermediary organizations, aims to provide activities that promote research to community partners, host or facilitate research presentations, and otherwise share and broker information and knowledge. Accordingly, the pertinent dimensions for their assessment comprise research (Dimension 3) and the knowledge broker criterion of community engagement (Dimension 5). The service focus of community support organizations and civil society organizations is the local community, where these entities strive to build social capital and facilitate cross-sector collaboration. Hence, the most relevant dimension for assessment is community engagement (Dimension 5) with an emphasis on community connector and advocate, i.e., the framework can be most useful in assessing the community engagement work of these NIOs.

Conclusion

This research provides a new typology to comprehend the variety of nonprofit infrastructure organizations as well as a framework to guide their assessment that the field has heretofore lacked. To develop our framework we began with nonprofit academic centers. We determined that these entities are prominent members of a larger family of nonprofit infrastructure organizations, whose responsibilities, functions, and even nomenclature are amorphous and confusing. To address this complexity we developed a typology that we feel brings greater insight and understanding to this category of NIOs. Based on the typology, we show how our

framework might be productively applied not only to nonprofit academic centers but also to the different types of NIOs. As we stated earlier, the assessment framework represents our effort to advance study and practice in this field.

Our analysis suggests lessons for the management and leadership of nonprofit infrastructure organizations. The assessment framework identifies five assessment dimensions, strategies for measurement, and various sample activities and metrics. Given the extended number of possible activities and indicators that the different NIOs might pursue, the assessment framework is no substitute for management: Organizational leadership must determine and prioritize the dimensions, subdimensions, and measures that have greatest applicability and importance to them. Second and related, such a crucial determination of prioritization cannot, and should not, take place apart from stakeholders: NIO leadership must identify key stakeholders, solicit their views and preferences, and ensure that their assessment activities balance the demands and goals of this diverse collection. Stakeholder analysis constitutes a key managerial function (Bryson, 2016).

Our recommendations for NIOs mirror the commentary and advice bestowed on the nonprofit field more generally in regard to stakeholder analysis. NIOs must first determine credible and/or influential stakeholders (Renz & Herman, 2016, p. 279) and then collect and ascertain from them pertinent assessments. Nevertheless, NIO leadership must bear in mind that, as some acknowledge (e.g., Renz & Herman, 2016), evaluation is not an objective practice, and effectiveness in nonprofits and the organizations that serve them is a social construction. Leadership must still determine ways and methods to balance diverse stakeholder interests (Tschirhart, 1996). Renz and Herman assert that “effectiveness is whatever significant stakeholders think it is, and there is no single objective reality ‘out there’ waiting to be assessed” (p. 279). With “no commonly agreed basis for judging... effectiveness, much less a single, objectively ‘real’ measure” (p. 279), NIO leaders must solicit stakeholder input when choosing the appropriate metrics and performance indicators.

A third implication for management and leadership of nonprofit infrastructure organizations points to both a strength and limitation of our analysis. Abramson and McCarthy (2012) maintain that nonprofit infrastructure organizations are not serving the sector as effectively as they might with respect to providing quality services and addressing critical challenges. Our assessment framework can alert the leadership of different types of NIOs to the respective dimensions in which they might justifiably undertake activities and for which they might be held accountable. In addition, we have counseled NIO leaders both to concentrate on the most pertinent dimensions for their organizations and to examine and balance their activities to meet stakeholder preferences. Yet, our framework and related recommendations constitute only the “data” step to addressing the concerns expressed by Abramson and McCarthy (2012). Although collecting these data would represent a significant advance for many NIOs, a more basic question is whether these entities are making a positive difference for the dimensions and the constituencies they prioritize.

To begin to answer this question, NIO leadership will need to build on the data step to progress to the “evaluation” step, i.e., to conduct analysis of the data assembled to ascertain whether or not (and, if so, to what extent) their organization is having the desired effect (“moving the needle”) on the selected dimensions. Implementing the analysis step will likely present a challenge to many of the nonprofit infrastructure organizations that are the subject of our inquiry but no less so for the nonprofit sector more broadly, which often finds itself short of financial and human resources. Meeting it would likely prove helpful, if not crucial, for obtaining and/or continuing the support for nonprofit organizations of their funders and other

key stakeholders. If nonprofit infrastructure organizations are committed to strengthening nonprofit effectiveness and capacity to “promote the health of the nonprofit sector” (Abramson & McCarthy, 2012, p. 423), they might well develop and extend their evaluation skills both to model this expertise and to aid other nonprofit organizations that could benefit from their assistance.

Notes

1. “The ARNOVA-L listserv was established in 1991 and has been in continuous service since that time. It is one of the oldest and most successful email discussion lists in the social sciences. The list enables us to facilitate the rapid sharing of concerns, interests, problems and solutions among interested researchers, teachers, practitioners and students. Participants come from nearly 40 countries; although the majority are from North America. They represent a broad cross-section of researchers, teachers, students and practitioners interested in nonprofit organizations, voluntary action and philanthropy” (ARNOVA-L, n.d.).
2. See the Indiana Nonprofits Project (n.d.).

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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