

The Permeable Community

A better world through strategy, sustainability, accountability, creativity, community and connectivity

The Permeable Community is new framework for achieving social good. It's like a 21st century Town Hall. Focused around an online portal and a data platform, it connects people in all sectors who are working for social good. It opens communities of place or interest so that people and organizations can join together to solve social problems or take advantage of opportunities to enhance the social good. It promotes a focus on outcome management and results, accountability, the use of data in decision-making, community benefit, transparency, creativity and innovation, sustainability, and a long-term view. Anchor organizations bring the Permeable Community to their communities and help to populate and promote it. Online tools, training materials and resources are supplemented by remote or on-site assistance that trains the trainers in each community. The open source structure and values promote new and existing products and tools to connect to the Permeable Community.

The goals of the Permeable Community are to:

Build stronger, more resilient communities

Increase personal connectedness

Build on social and cultural opportunities

Improve decision-making for social benefit

Increase philanthropic giving and investing

Solve systemic social problems

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Why Create the Permeable Community?

Just as a human cell needs a semi-permeable membrane to thrive – to allow nutrients to enter and waste to exit—so our communities, as living organisms need a permeable structure to fully utilize the power of supporters.

Imagine you are Maria or Horace, members of a community in a small city. You want to help to make a difference but you don't know how to get involved. Organizations that are doing good work don't know how to find you or how to identify volunteers who have the specific skills they need.

Now imagine that you are the executive director of a social service nonprofit trying to prevent teens from dropping out of high school. Last year you served 100 teens. Is that good? How did the teens benefit? How does that compare to the students who did not participate in a special program? How will you know if the techniques you are using are the best ones for the population you are serving? How will you innovate as the students' needs and challenges change over time?

Currently, our communities are not permeable. For people seeking to volunteer or donate, communities can seem downright airtight. A tangle of nonprofits serve various communities but they often don't work together because they are all competing for funds from the same donors. Collaboration is expensive, is often not a fundable activity and many nonprofits are barely keeping their doors open because of reductions in their funding.

Communities, large and small, often wrestle with the same problems every year and find it difficult to develop a consensus around plans to focus resources and time on solving specific problems and building social infrastructure.

Technology has transformed the way we interact but in many ways the social sector still develops strategy, collaborates and makes decisions the same way we made them in the 1940's. Part of the problem is that we awash in a sea of

information, but are not able to access the information we need to make informed decisions.

Foundations and other funders lack sufficient resources to solve problems themselves, but find it challenging to identify partners to co-fund projects and potential grantees that can truly demonstrate their effectiveness.

Government and policymakers are challenged to fully engage citizens and to undertake strategy across silos. People seeking services find it challenging to identify different types of services and to assess which ones are most effective and likely to really help them. The media, fragmented as it is, needs help seeing the big picture and the stories that illustrate and inform the forces at work in communities.

All sectors are challenged to incorporate the right data to inform their decisions.

How can we get everyone who is working for social good on the same page?

We can create the Permeable Community—a new way to achieve sustainable social good—

The two pillars of the Permeable Community are

The Community Engagement Platform—an online web portal that helps people, organizations and communities connect to each other and shares their insights and tools with others

And

The Data Platform—provides information, analysis and trends to inform nonprofit, government, private and community planning and decisions. It is at the core of a new culture to increase the rigor of social sector planning and action.

The Community Engagement Platform Connects Us

The “spine” of The Permeable Community is an internet portal that enables individuals and groups to work together on high-impact work for social good. It is a virtual tool that facilitates personal interaction. The Data Platform provides the information to make good decisions.

The **Community Engagement Platform** (CEP) will be co-created with a high-tech company that has a fundamental interest in promoting social good. Connected to the CEP is the **Data Platform**, which houses, aggregates and correlates information from public, quasi-public and private sources to facilitate analysis, decision-making and evaluation of programs for social good.

Together, the Community Engagement Platform and the Data Platform provide a place where:

Community leaders, nonprofits, small businesses, corporations, community members, people seeking services, government, media and others can share information and use the talents of all involved to solve social problems and make the most of opportunities.

Communities can plan together and identify key issues on which to focus and work cooperatively. They can post the results of their work based upon agreed-upon indicators and can recruit donors, volunteers and other talent. They can also organize around their key issues and convene organizations across sectors to solve problems. They can utilize tools such as the Community Creativity Kit to help them incorporate innovation throughout their planning and their work.

Individuals can keep up-to-date on community issues and campaigns and can participate in issues and work that interest them. They can post profiles of their expertise and interest in working for social good, and get help finding volunteer roles that are fulfilling in organizations that use volunteers’ time wisely. They can do research about issues, accessing articles, webinars, videos and other material. They can connect with others who have the same interests, and make donations to causes and organizations. If they are seeking services, they can identify the services available and make informed decisions based on the organizations’ information and effectiveness data.

Nonprofits can post profiles that import data from their tax returns and other sources. Nonprofits that are managing to outcomes can post progress dashboards so that donors can make informed decisions based on their strategies and the effectiveness of their work. They can assess the needs of their core clients and can see which other organizations are serving the same constituency, both in their region and elsewhere. They can also assess their constituency’s needs over time and understand the data behind the trends. They can team up with other agencies, government, companies and individuals to achieve community-level goals. They can actively look for volunteers and participate in collaboratives with others. They can post tools and insights they have developed that may be of help to others working on similar issues.

Foundations can connect with others, including nonprofits, government, and other foundations, who are doing work that could connect to their own, access data to assess community needs and progress, and use nonprofits’ new focus on outcome management to assess the effectiveness of their work.

Government agencies can connect to issues that are important to them, and communicate about those issues across agencies and siloes. They can access information about trends among their constituents and use the aggregated data to make decisions.

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Businesses large and small can support community work on key issues to help provide a great environment for their employees and to help in recruiting. They can connect their community engagement programs to existing work and help their employees connect to valuable volunteer roles. They can advance their cause marketing and make connections to the individuals who are interested in the causes they support.

Individuals and organizations can stay externally focused and up to date through Innovation Updates – analysis of news and trends from the point of view of futurists, economists, artists, entrepreneurs, young people, disenfranchised people, and others. The Innovation Update includes the “stock price” of big-picture issues – brief snapshots of how we’re doing as a culture.

The Data Platform — Decisions Based on Facts Not Hunches

The Data Platform provides information for decision-making on the agency, community, state, regional and national basis. Currently, public agencies collect data, but it is often difficult for nonprofits to access, the data is in different formats, so it is difficult to aggregate, it is difficult to analyze. In addition, private data, such as information from utility companies, universities or the nonprofits themselves could add a significant dimension of understanding to the public data. Even if these organizations were inclined to contribute data, there is no central repository for it.

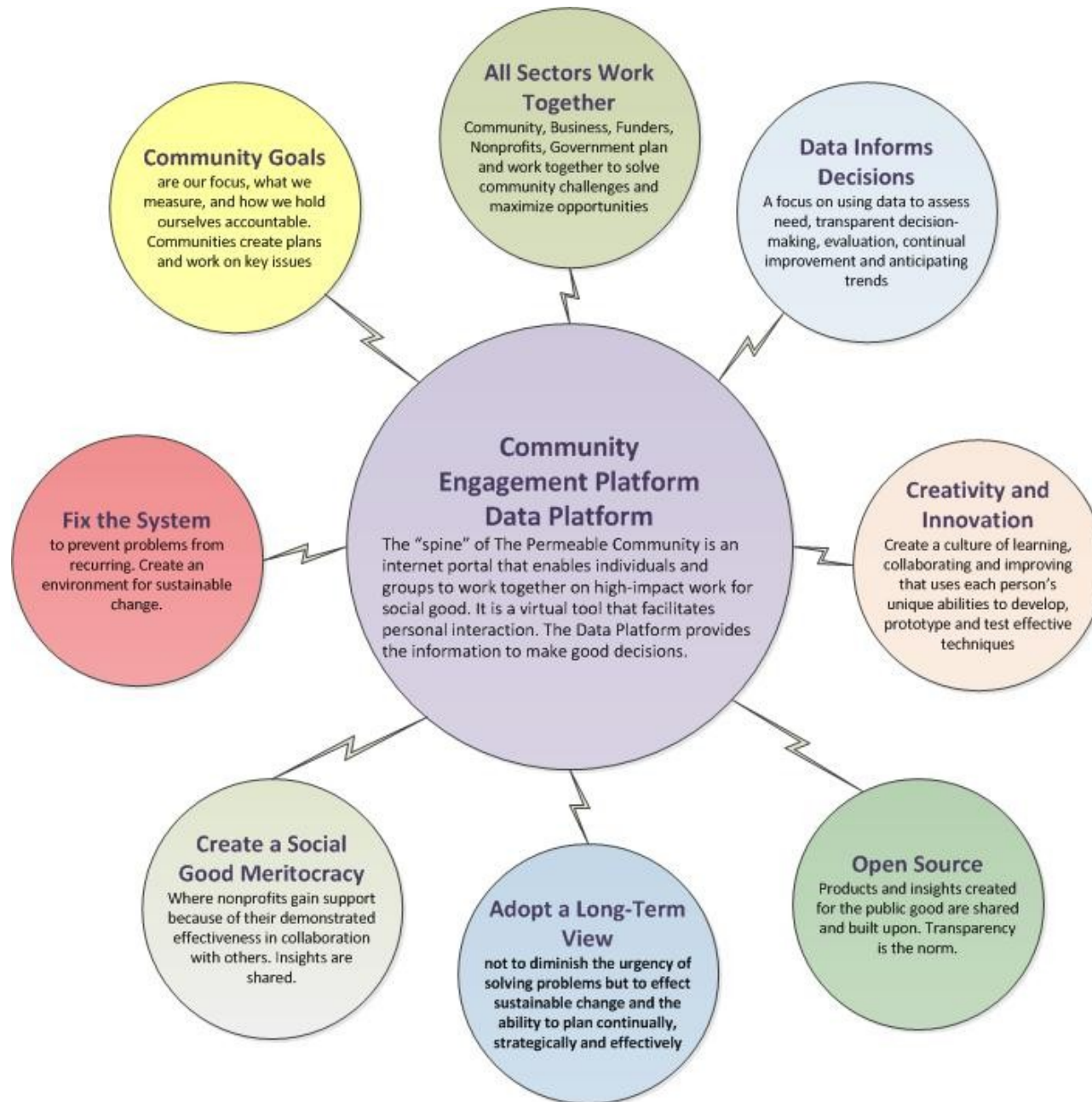
The Data Platform combines this data, maps it, compares it, analyzes it and generates information about trends. Privacy issues will be addressed and no individual-level information will be reported.

The following types of decisions will be assisted by the Data Platform:

- What are the most pervasive problems in our community?
- Where are these problems most and least severe? What populations are most affected?
- How has the incidence and severity of these problems changed over time?
- What other factors may be affecting the trends and how have they changed over time?
- Are our agency-level or community-level interventions working?

The Data Platform will help to promote a move to an outcome-based culture in the social sector. Researchers will delve into the data, promoting insights and trends through the communications vehicles available in the Community Engagement Platform. Communities will receive assistance to select indicators of their effectiveness and to choose data that will inform these indicators. The Data Platform interacts seamlessly with the Community Engagement Platform to inform the work to achieve social good.

The Permeable Community — A Visualization



How Will The Permeable Community Be Structured?

Each Community Connects to the Hub and to Each Other

The Permeable Community will be a Social Benefit Corporation. Even though it is nonprofit in intent, a corporate business model will provide the flexibility for the innovation necessary to make The Permeable Community a success. The organization will seek grants from foundations and corporations and donations from individuals.

Once the Community Engagement Platform and Data Platform are created, the Hub (central office) will work with organizations that want to bring The Permeable Community to their region. These organizations would include community foundations, United Ways and other entities. In addition, nonprofits and individuals can sign up themselves. However, The Permeable Community will work best when there is a critical mass of organizations, individuals and community data in a region. The Hub will work to make sure this implementation is strategic.



Revenue Structure Maximizes Dollars, Brains and Hearts

Investors provide funding, support, inspiration, expertise and passion. With more people engaged, there will be more ongoing support and more brainpower and influence focused on the desired results.

Revenue Structure

- Nonprofits and the public will be able to join the Permeable Community and use the Community Engagement Platform and the Data Platform for a low yearly membership fee.
- Companies will pay a yearly membership fee to join the Permeable Community
- Government entities will pay a yearly membership fee
- Community Foundations and United Ways will be approached to anchor the work in each community and to support the community-specific expenses such as planning costs and volunteer coordinators. They will pay a yearly fee to make The Permeable Community available to their constituents.
- Gaming opportunities for social good connected to the Community Engagement Platform will generate funds and visibility for the nonprofits and the Permeable Community
- Social enterprise funds will be earned by creating new products using the aggregate data and other insights generated by the Permeable Community
- Startup funds will be solicited from partner organizations to include a large technology company and the host of the Community Engagement Platform and Data Platform; national foundations, from which new funds will be solicited to avoid removing funds from the currently tight environment. In addition, federal government funds will be solicited.

The investment in this infrastructure will save countless hours of work and increase the effectiveness of the work while engaging many thousands of new donors and volunteers in the heavy lifting that will be required to accomplish our goals.

We must focus our efforts on initiatives that will amplify the results of our work in order to build a more effective, successful future.

The Permeable Community will ultimately be self-sustaining. At first, it will require an infusion of funding but will ultimately channel resources much more effectively than the current system.

Each community will realize significant increases in individual giving, as potential donors better understand their passions and interests and how they can become involved. In addition, organizations like the United Way will have the opportunity to include the collaborative community “Campaigns” in the offerings to workplace donors, and will be able to provide access to webinars and other communication vehicles about the Campaigns, increasing the funds that are contributed. The new crop of volunteers will be able to expand their involvement to become donors. Community Foundations will also raise more funds in this new environment and will play a key role in helping communities to take full advantage of the Permeable Community.

The Community Engagement Platform will be built upon a powerful existing structure by an innovative company that has a major focus on the common good. The open source architecture will be advanced by volunteer programmers and crowdsourced to optimal effectiveness. Government and foundation funding will support the development of various aspects of the CEP and will support the Data Platform in its entirety.

Income will also be generated through social enterprise, merchandise sales, and gaming platforms built into the CEP. A Social Enterprise hub, built into the CEP will help people to start social enterprises to both do good work and to help to support the CEP, which may also include a shopping portal.

