Teaching spatial thinking in nonprofit studies: A case study

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# Abstract

Most data have a spatial component, and data relevant to the nonprofit sector is no exception. Understanding spatial aspects of the nonprofit sector may provide valuable to social entrepreneurs guiding location choices, as well as information for funders to facilitate resource allocation. As a result, spatial thinking is quickly becoming an essential component of critical thinking and decision making among nonprofit professionals. This case study presents a local nonprofit data set, along with code and examples, to assist the teaching of spatial aspects of the nonprofit sector.

# 1 Introduction

Data are an increasingly important component of nonprofit operations, as managers and other organizational members regularly employ a range of data in an effort to evaluate or improve programs, communicate with stakeholders and donors, and satisfy accountability concerns (Mayer & Fischer, 2022). Several programs focused on nonprofit management have taken note of this emphasis, a search of existing course offerings in the Seton Hall University database (Mirabella, 2022) revealed 10 courses focused on working with data with titles such as “data analytics for public and nonprofit managers,” “data analysis for social impact,”   
“data analytics/Metric in the nonprofit sector,” and “nonprofit data-based decision making.” Importantly, data increasingly have a spatial component which can provide crucial context (Huang & Wang, 2020). Yet, using the same database, a search for “spatial,” “space,” and “geography” returned no results. Nonprofit scholars have also called for increased attention to spatial aspects of the nonprofit sector (MacIndoe & Oakley, 2022; Never, 2011) as well as in organizational studies more broadly (van Wissen, 2004). This brief article presents a case study of Cuyahoga County’s nonprofit sector, included data and code, intended to assist with teaching about nonprofit geography.

# 2 The Importance of Spatial Thinking

Nonprofit organizations often provide benefits to those nearby. These benefits may include services associated with the mission of the organization, or auxiliary benefits, such as employment, improved communication and goal alignment, or good will (Haslam et al., 2019; Marwell, 2004; McQuarrie & Marwell, 2009).

# 3 Case Study

Courses in schools with nonprofit programs

“Data Analysis for Social Impact” – penn

Direct Marketing & Donor Data Management – Nebraska

Data Analysis – USF

Data Analytics for Public and Nonprofit Managers – University of Athens ohio

## Research Data in Nonprofits - Oklahoma City University

Data Analytics/Metrics in the Nonprofit Sector – columbia (ny)

## Research for data driven change - Azusa Pacific University School of Social Work

## Data Analysis for Public and Non-Profit Managers - California State University, Los Angeles

Nonprofit Data-based Decison Making – CWRU

## Data Adminstration in Human Services Organizations - Louisiana State University in Shreveport

No relevant hits for “space” or “spatial”

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