Tim Sarrantonio:

Hello everyone. Today's an exciting episode. Focused on benchmarks, nonprofits, data. There's a lot here, and we can definitely lean into all the tactical things that people can do with data, which there are a lot, and we're definitely going to be talking about that, especially specific to the new report that we're going to dive into today. But we also want to look at this through the lens of technology. Yes, we'll touch on even artificial intelligence. Which is so hot right now.

But we're going to look at this through the lens of how can this be accessible and equitable for everybody to kind of use and understand. So Kerrin, what are you excited about for?

Kerrin Mitchell:

This is the good stuff. It's where we're taking all of this concept in theory that we hear about. We're throwing it into an execution. You know, I think the best thing we can do is bring in people like Abby Jarvis to join us today to kind of untangle this Gordian Knot. Abby is a Senior Content Manager at Neon with Tim. And she is a self-professed - I love this - nonprofit nerd, an avid hiker, tropical gardener. As someone in Hawaii, I can be like, yes. Get behind that.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Great following Instagram if you know her.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Fairytale enthusiasts, which I can get behind all of these things. So, Abby, thank you so much for joining us today. So excited to have you.

Abby Jarvis:

Definitely. I'm really excited to be here.

Kerrin Mitchell:

All right. Do a little intro for us. What brought you to philanthropy? How are you arriving to us today, and what lens are you bringing to the conversation?

Abby Jarvis:

Well I've been in the nonprofit tech industry for a little over 10 years at this point, which is really wild to say. And I've been at NeonOne for a little over a year. So when I started in this industry, my job was to manage social media and to start a blog. I quickly learned that I don't love social media marketing, but I do love industry research and sharing that research in a way that helps nonprofits connect with their communities and really just make a bigger impact in the world. And I fell in love with it 10 years ago. I'm still in love with that. A decade later.

Tim Sarrantonio:

So, one of the things that, you know, Abby, we talk about internally at NeonOne is the kind of moments of generosity. Because those stick with people. It's not about giving, it's about the emotional feelings that people have. So what's one moment of generosity that stands out to you in your career, your personal life? This is something we ask everybody here, but you're a little bit more intimately familiar why we ask this, because, you know, we, this is kind of our thing at Neon, right? But let's hear about yours.

Abby Jarvis:

So I thought about this for a while and there were so many things that I could talk about, but the one that stuck out to me most was a couple years ago, my husband and I were invited to participate in a peer-to-peer campaign. Happens every year, and it raises money for an organization here in my hometown Lakeland, Florida called Lakeland Volunteers in Medicine. They're a nonprofit clinic and they do a tremendous service and our community. So to raise money for this campaign Dave and I ran an event at a local pub. And it was really cool. We had like a laptop set up. We had talking points, and we were really just spending time with our friends and family who came out to support us and to, to donate to this campaign. But watching our friends and then other patrons that we didn't know come together in this neighborhood pub to raise money for that cause was really beautiful. And the kind of the crowning moment of it was a few weeks later, I found out that one of the people who attended that event and donated, discovered this nonprofit through that event and ended up getting healthcare that they didn't have access to as a result of that campaign. So watching someone not only support a great cause because they were our friends and they wanted to be supportive, but actually like, get some pretty life-changing services, was really beautiful.

Tim Sarrantonio:

That's really beautiful. And, one of the things that stands out about that story, Abby, is that connection that you're able to make with that and to also introduce other people to it. And a lot of times these are seen at the ground level. People know that this type of stuff is happening, but when you start to scale up and you start to look at things en masse, that those nuances are lost. And what I really loved about the email report that we're going to be talking about and unpacking today is you kind of get both. And we looked at the landscape of email specifically, and I'm going to ask you kind of unpack why we did that for us. But one of the things that I feel we're lacking, and Kerrin, I'd love to k kind of hear your insights on this too, is when we're doing sector research, one of two things ends up, unfortunately happening now. One is that we're looking at for-profit data and making nonprofit operational decisions based off of that when we should be looking at nonprofit specific data. And then the other piece is that it's not right sized. That things like impact, things like effectiveness, things like engagement are very through the lens of the 3% of nonprofits that make more than 5 million a year. And so there's these discrepancies and inconsistencies that you start to kind of make these downstream assumptions and interpretations. And I think it's critical to identify these issues early on when we're designing reports and things like that. Why Abby, when we were, maybe tell us a little bit about the report itself and why it was important that we approached it for nonprofits having this type of data specific to email, specific to the types of size organizations that we looked at. Tell us a little bit about the report and why we did it this way.

Abby Jarvis:

So the report represents every email that went out through our systems at NeonOne in 2022. And of course we did some data cleanup to remove some outliers that could throw off the results. But we looked at campaign performance. So we looked at performance benchmarks that you would normally find in any kind of email messaging system. And then we went a step further and we broke down each of those benchmarks into two individual benchmarks. So one of those focuses on small nonprofits, and those nonprofits have lists of between 250 and 999 people. And then we looked at large nonprofits that have lists of a thousand contacts or more. And we decided to do it that way because as Tim you kind of mentioned there's a real need not only for nonprofit specific data in the sector, but for nonprofit specific data that as much as is possible speaks to the unique needs of small nonprofits and larger nonprofits. So we chose to focus on that kind for two reasons. And the first reason, of course, it sounds really silly to say, but nonprofits are not for-profits. And the people who are engaging with nonprofit organizations

don't do so for the same reasons they engage with for-profits. So it would be kind of futile for a nonprofit to try to reach their audiences in the same way for-profits do. So when I buy something online or if I pay for a service, I'm not connecting with that company on an emotional level. But when I donate to my favorite nonprofits, that is both a practical and an emotional engagement. And because my emotions are tied to that nonprofit, I am much more willing to engage with them than I am willing to engage with the for-profit. And I think that's true for most donors. So we'll read nonprofit newsletters, we'll read their blog articles, we'll engage with them on social media. I'll give them my phone number, but I won't do any of those things with the for-profit. And nonprofits are kind of universally like that. Their supporters engage with them very differently. So when nonprofits borrow their engagement cues and their best practices from for-profits or even those, those big nonprofits organizations with whom people won't do things like read newsletters or open emails or provide additional information, they're missing out on an opportunity to engage their community. And then you and I, Tim, have talked about this pretty extensively, but like you said, a lot of the nonprofit specific data does come from those very few organizations that are processing millions of dollars online. And at least I see a lot of discouragement and a lot of stress in those small nonprofits because that is the data they're drawing from. They'll see a large organization raising tens of thousands of dollars following these specific best practices, and they feel like they have to produce something similar. And there is so much pressure inherent in that to hit specific engagement metrics or reach goals or process a certain number of donations. And when you and I talked about this, we really identified that the data available to those small nonprofits, and even more importantly, the best practices based on that data, make those small organizations feel like they're failing if the appeal they send doesn't perform the way they want. So when we analyzed that data for our report, that data revealed that small nonprofits are winning in a lot of different areas, but many of them are still striving to hit numbers in new strategies that don't work for them. They're not able to celebrate their successes because all they see are these outside numbers that won't work for them. So when they have data that is specific to them, it's much easier for them to start tracking their own benchmarks and setting their own goals and learning what can work for them instead of trying to do what works for Charity Water or Amazon or the other large organizations that they have historically looked up to.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I think what's really interesting about the way you frame that you're, you know, the, what's getting lost oftentimes is people's idea of why they use the data and what are they using it for. And the question that people forget is who is the audience? And when we're talking about this idea of being able to mobilize money, you're talking about queuing in on everything that could be, you know, when data is in, narrative visualizations, raw data form, those three come together and can kind of inspire explanations and engagement and enlightenment. And they can be a catalyst for movement. And I think that's the thing that, like you said, nonprofits have to kind of use all of those things because they're tapping into the humanity of what it is. And I think that's the part that, again, people don't realize how important storytelling is in that. And to your point, what mobilized you into action, you know, was the ability for you to connect to that human story at the end of it. So it's such an interesting concept about like how is data used and why those big numbers? Why to some degree sometimes the 132 different data outcomes that can be called out in, in genomes and things that are valuable to many, many people, but not to the nonprofits themselves, not to the ability that they can come in and tell their story and mobilize people in the way they need to. It helps to tell other stories. And I think that's what we all forget, is it can't be one reign, you know, across all it has to be who is the audience, what is the role they're using, what do they care about? What are their pain points? And that should be the thing that

defines, that kind of information and metrics. So I totally get you on that. Adding the humanity back. It's got to come through the nonprofits in that sense.

Tim Sarrantonio:

What was interesting the past few weeks in, since the reports come out, besides the fact that it's, by all metrics, wildly successful people care about this.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Right.

Tim Sarrantonio:

At the same time, the Fundraising Effectiveness Project released their fourth quarter report for 2022. And I was very intimately involved in that release and it came out at the Association of Fundraising Professionals International Conference. And it was very fascinating because Kerrin, we brought that report up with Chantal in one of our previous conversations. And it was so interesting because she was astounded by some of the donor retention numbers. Yet on the ground, one of the big criticisms that has come up. And I even had a diner conversation with one of our partners who's involved in it this morning about this very topic. And he basically says, Michael Buckley of the Killoe Group is this type of data doesn't tell small nonprofits anything. They don't already know.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Right.

Tim Sarrantonio:

And that's the key difference I think that we need to start shifting is we need to stop being observers and more actively guiding folks too. But you know, that's just one kind of little deviation on our conversation I want to bring up is that this stuff has to have more of a clear point in what people are going to do with it.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And the point has to be answering that, that how and why, right? Yes. And I think that's the thing people realize too, is that, and maybe it is the same data, I mean maybe data optimization here is actually about increasing the utility of that data. So it's like same data for different purpose. But the whole point is it has to have a purpose, it has to have an audience, it has to be something that resonates with that receiving kind of party or person or whatever it be, so that you're actually in a position where you're actually building that story for them. So the different, same data can be different purposes, but there has to be different that take into account the how and the why of what you're trying to accomplish. And I think that's something that we always forget and we blindly kind of just say, these are the metrics, you know, how do you play into 'em? So it, it's very interesting and it has to work for the grantees. So, you know, I know you're both intimately familiar with this report and 1500 nonprofits over, like thousands and thousands of campaigns. Tell me some of these other significant findings. Cause there's a lot of stuff in there.

Abby Jarvis:

Yeah. Choosing one or two significant findings is going to be a real challenge for me. Okay, so I kind of alluded to it already, but the biggest overall takeaway, at least for me, is that nonprofits, little nonprofits are outperforming their larger counterparts in some really amazing ways. And I think my favorite example of this came from when we analyzed the average amount raised per email campaign. So when we looked the average nonprofit in all nonprofits raises about $5,600 per email campaign. And of course we broke this down into large and small nonprofits and we found that large nonprofits raise around $6,500 per campaign. Small ones raise around $3,500 per campaign. And at the surface level, if you look just at those figures, it looks like the larger nonprofits campaigns are more successful, right? They're raising more money per email campaign. But when we took things a step further and calculated the average amount raised per email contact in a campaign, so the average number of people that received a particular email, we found something really wonderful. And we discovered that the average large organization, so remember that's a thousand contacts or more per email, raised around 88 cents per contact. In the small groups with 250 to 999 people raised more than $6 per contact. So at first glance, yes, it looks like larger nonprofits are raising more overall, but small nonprofits are doing a much better job connecting with their audience and inspiring them to give generously. And I think that tells a really beautiful story about the way smaller nonprofits are connecting with their audiences. And I hope that findings like that, and I mean that's only one example. Small nonprofits outperformed their larger counterparts and a lot of different areas, I hope that encourages smaller teams who feel that pressure to grow their list or hit the totals or whatever achieved by bigger organizations. They have a lot to be proud of.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I think one of the other interesting things that we did here that was special was we partnered with an agency called Nonprofit Operating System. And we had them run through the Da Vinci model of Open AI. So this is where the AI comes in, folks. This is our red meat, for that. This is a tech, you know, focused conversation today. And we did actually analyze emotional sentiment of the subject lines and preview text. And this is where the importance of nonprofit data for nonprofits comes in because the words, the phrases, the things that people say are so specific to our sector, even the emojis that people used are very highly specific to the audience that they're talking to. And so that was some of the other fun stuff, was kind of what drove engagement. Abby, you know, before we kind of move into the larger questions of audience development and what these types of reports might be helping in the broader story that we're telling across, not just, you know, email, right? Like the broader focus of these types of research projects. Let have a little fun though and talk about the AI side, the emotional insights that we glean from the data. Do, do you want to give us a little bit of an overview of what happened there?

Abby Jarvis:

Yes. So Cherian Koshy, the man that runs the Nonprofit Operating System came back with some subject line analysis, some sentiment analysis. And then he even looked at some words and phrases that can either tank your engagement rates or improve them in subject lines and in preview text. And I had a blast reading through his notes and his findings. I was not particularly shocked to see that positive emotions have a tendency to inspire the best engagements, although I know that I myself definitely fall into what I call rage donating sometimes. So if you are listening and you like me, tend to respond to rage donating, don't do that in your subject lines in preview text positive feelings perform better. So keep that in mind.

Kerrin Mitchell:

That's a really good term that I actually haven't heard.

Abby Jarvis:

Oh yeah, it's, I got to stop that.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Oh, rage giving? Yeah,

Abby Jarvis:

Rage giving.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I mean, that's funny because I'm on the foundation side. So we don't talk about rage giving as much , but like, I totally do that. Like on a personal level, I'm like, I am going to change the world with this one button.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Kerrin, this is why our podcast is so fun. Because we're both going to be like, you do what in your world?

Kerrin Mitchell:

I can't. No, no, no. I do that personally. But I would love the, the concept of like, foundations rage giving.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Imagine like a big foundation just going like, this is our rage gift. It be Fascinating. Keep going, Abby. Sorry. Keep going.

Abby Jarvis:

No, you're good. I really enjoyed that because I know especially with so much going on in the world, it's very easy to dwell on the problems that nonprofits are solving when we now see that people respond not to the problems necessarily, but to the potential solutions to those problems. So I thought that was really great. Hilariously, the three words that tank engagement are reminder, member, and meeting. So if you're listening to this, I hope you take away that you should never, ever send an email with the subject line Reminder, member meeting because you will get terrible open rates. And then Cherian very eloquently noted in the report that nonprofits, I think tend to default to sending non-emotional subject lines. I'm sure we could have a whole episode on why that may be the case. But he really encouraged people to look at what the AI revealed about how people respond to emotional words and phrases and subject lines. And I hate using the phrase lean into, but I can't think of a better one. He would encourage people to lean into sending more emotional subject lines. It will help your engagement. And I loved that finding.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Yes. And, Kerrin, I know when we were discussing this discussion yesterday that I was going to throw one question at you, but I'm going to throw a different one at you.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Oh, are you?

Tim Sarrantonio:

Because you don't know the answer. This one, we had to actually remove one word, in particular from the data set because it skewed the results so much. And this is a very loaded question, so I apologize, but I'm going to give you a shot. What do you think the one word we had to remove was, and it's not like Tuesday.

Kerrin Mitchell:

But where was it?

Tim Sarrantonio:

In the subject line. This word, this one word was in the subject line. It outperformed everything to such a degree. We're talking by like a thousand percent.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Oh. So it's a, a good line. I was thinking it was a bad line.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Was, it was a good word to drive engagement. But we had to remove it. It's a funny word. What do you think that one word is?

Kerrin Mitchell:

Oh, I was going to say it was something like urgent or something.

Tim Sarrantonio:

If you were listening to this podcast at this point, go find where we've published it and like, comment on which word you think it is at this point. What do you think it is?

Kerrin Mitchell:

I was going to say something like urgent, but that's not the right, you said it's more funny. And so that's not funny.

Tim Sarrantonio:

It's not funny. That's not funny at all. Urgent isn't funny.

Kerrin Mitchell:

No, I know.

Tim Sarrantonio:

For our listeners, I'll speed it up. It was cannabis. The word is cannabis.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Wait, what?

Abby Jarvis:

<Laugh>

Kerrin Mitchell:

In the header line, the open rate was like a hundred per..., what?

Tim Sarrantonio:

It was so good. It was so good.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I don't..... There's literally like zero chance I would've gotten that right.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I know. That's why it was fun to ask.

Kerrin Mitchell:

If I said that, by the way, if that wasn't right, I said that you guys been like, what is she talking about?

Tim Sarrantonio:

Oh, if you got it out of the gate, it would be more impressive.

Kerrin Mitchell:

You've been so concerned for me, like, Kerrin, that's not appropriate on the Podcast.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I think this does lead into the next part of the conversation, which is, does the storytelling that you want to tell to the audience, that audience who wants to know about cannabis really loves hearing about cannabis?

Kerrin Mitchell:

That's amazing. Well then, yeah, digest, I mean, there's a top for every pot on those things. So, okay, let's talk about that. So different people need to tell different stories, funders, board senior leadership programs. If people are listening now and say, okay, I'm not in the cannabis business, but I want to start somewhere. What is your suggestion on where to start?

Abby Jarvis:

I am going to take off my research hat and I'm going to put my marketing hat on, especially content marketing because I tell everyone to do this all the time. So if you are a nonprofit, you're trying to figure out how to tell stories to a bunch of different people, I want to encourage you to remember that different audiences don't necessarily require different stories. So instead of starting with the list of all of the people that you need to talk to and trying to come up with a story to tell each of them, do it backwards. Start with the story and then tweak it for different audiences. I that sounds very trite on its own. So I'll give you an example. I was on the board for a nonprofit here in my hometown and we heard a story about a little boy who joined one of our summer education programs. And when he started, he didn't really speak, he couldn't read, he didn't engage with other kids in the program. He didn't engage

with anybody. He was completely shut off. And at the end of the program, he was speaking, he was learning to read, he loved playing with other kids. He was always trying to help. He would hold doors. He was the line leader. He cleaned up toys and he made all of these huge strides in just a few weeks. Now I was on the board. So the story kind of punctuated the conversation about our strategic planning for the summer programs for the next year. But it really highlighted to us the importance of executing that strategic plan and doing it well. So we could help other kids like him. But we used the same story in a fundraising appeal that funded those summer programs and then we shared it with major donors at our big annual fundraiser and invited them to continue making a difference in students' lives like his. It circulated through the staff and the leadership at the nonprofit. And when we were talking to them, it was framed as a celebration of all of their hard work and the success that they've had. And it really reiterated that their hard work was making a difference. So it was just one story, but we told it in lots of different ways to different audiences with different kind of slants to it. So just start with one story and then tell it everywhere and then use that story to segue into the conversations you need to have with different groups. So if you are talking to your board, tell your board how they're making a difference and share that story as an example. Motivate your donors to continue to be involved. Encourage your staff and celebrate them. Use it for campaign specific appeals. Don't stress yourself out trying to find a unique story for every audience that is exhausting and you'll stress yourself out. Do it backwards. One story. Lots of audiences.

Tim Sarrantonio:

That kind of brings up an interesting point because we're talking about research, we're talking about a lot of different things and there's a big push to humanize data in our sector. But there's not clear action around it. And I personally think that a lot of this comes down to philosophical questions around what we value and what we put cultural investment in. But especially when it comes down to the importance of storytelling. Even for our report, Abby, we found one email and told a story around that one email, right? The most engaging email of 2022. So what role does humanizing data play when it comes to this?

Abby Jarvis:

So I'm going to ask you a question and I can see your face in my head when I ask this.

Tim Sarrantonio:

You're allowed to do that. I guess she's allowed to do that Kerrin. Yeah, go ahead.

Abby Jarvis:

I have heard the phrase humanized data to talk about a lot of different tactics. Can you expand a little bit on what exactly you mean when you are talking about humanizing data?

Tim Sarrantonio:

So when I went through the philanthropic psychology course for the Institute for Sustainable Philanthropy, they actually did outline some of the impacts of using individual images or individual statistics versus like using a story to represent the larger impact. And I think when I think about it, it's humanizing data is getting back to the core point of why I joined the nonprofit technology sector in the first place, which is that data is simply electronic representation of human relationships. That's it. That's the whole shebang for me philosophically. So when I talk about that, it's how do you get the person to come alive through these large data sets, these big numbers, right? All this type of stuff. And that's why I love start with one story, but even when we were discussing things for creating the report, we approach

data analysis differently too. So that's kind of how I would answer it. And I don't know if I did an an adequate job for you, Abby, but that's, that's how I'm going to answer it.

Abby Jarvis:

Yeah, that makes a ton of sense. And this is a problem that we encounter in the nonprofit tech industry and I suspect it is a challenge in the nonprofit industry as well. So I'll speak for myself. When I look at data, especially if I'm looking at very large datasets like the ones you and I looked over for this report, it is really easy for me to reduce the nonprofits represented that data set to a monolith. I find it easy for me to forget that each data point represents real nonprofits, real people, real campaigns, real impacts. And those stories and experiences and those needs and dreams are reduced to a percentage point or a ratio or a graph. And I know this is something we encounter a lot in the nonprofit tech space, especially when we're doing research. And like I said, I imagine this is a challenge for nonprofits too, whether they're looking at benchmarks or their own donor data, it's really easy for them to make donors a monolith, not individual people. It's easy for me to make groups of nonprofits a monolith, not real life fundraisers and leaders and people who are changing the world. So I think you and I have talked about this kind of extensively and I have to be succinct, but there are two problems that I kind of see with this. So one, I think it makes us less empathetic. So when you and I are pouring over a spreadsheet with tens of thousands of rows, or if I look at a big data set and I forget the organizations that are behind that data, it's so easy for me to say, well this best practice is what the data says we should do. And it's easy to forget that that best practice, even if it is backed by good data, maybe beyond the reach of some of the people reading that research. So when I hyper focus on the results, I have to work really hard not to forget the real life people who will act on that research. So you mentioned some of the recent data from the fundraising effectiveness project. So we'll pick a point. The most recent report shows that the number of individual donors is dropping and it's dropping pretty rapidly and it's really easy to panic. It's easy for us to place blame and point fingers and talk about the huge issues that the nonprofit industry wrestles with every day. But when we look at that data with empathy, we can start having really constructive conversations and we can ask like, alright, individual donors are down, why? Are nonprofits struggling with retaining and acquiring donors because they don't have the tools they need? Why don't they have the tools they need? Are donors burned out after the Covid 19 pandemic and all of today's unrest and economic uncertainty? How do we address that? Are the fundraisers burnt out and overwhelmed by everything they need to do? And if that's true, like how can we help? How can we solve those problems? So I really believe that interacting with data is only helpful if you bring empathy for the people that data represents to the table. And then I know you and I have talked about this too, the other issue I see is that not humanizing data can make us really lazy. It's easy for me as a writer to throw research out there without also sharing what nonprofits can do with it. So I can say something like, yeah, well the data shows that Friday afternoons are the best day to engage your audience with email and just leave it there.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Which is true by the way, which is true.

Abby Jarvis:

It's that it's much harder to say, okay, well data shows that Friday afternoons are good for engaging your audience, but no two non-profits have the same audience. So that might not work for you. Use this as the basis of an experiment and then tell people, here's how to run an A/B test. Here's how to compare performance. Here's the next thing to try. If your Friday email doesn't perform the way you want. And if you're a nonprofit fundraiser or a board member or consultant is easy to say, yeah, well sending the

same monthly update to our recurring donors is fine. It's not negatively impacting our retention rate. We don't need to do anything with it. While forgetting that the real people, the real donors on the receiving end of that repeated form email are slowly disconnecting from your cause. It's so much harder to say, hey, the data shows that our retention rate is okay, but let's take a deeper look at how our recurring donors engage with us anyway. Let's experiment with switching up the email. Let's talk to people and ask what they want from us. So I know you love data, I love data. Data is so useful, but it's only useful when you combine it with the real life humans behind it. We can't let data be a crutch and we can't let it rob us of our empathy. And we have to guard our connections very intentionally to the people behind those numbers.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I think that's actually really interesting because to your point in bringing back this little AI kind of concept too, is that like, at the end of the day, the tone, the flavor, the context that only humans can provide is the thing that AI can't. That's something we have to feed it to be able to make it useful too. And so I look at this and say, you know, when you say don't rob us of our empathy, like I think that's right. The connections that people behind the numbers, like that's the thing that, that is unique to us. So I do love that point you just made. Let's talk about the capacity of nonprofits to really get into this. I mean, obviously in the land of, you know, being able to get this out and going, everyone have infinite resources and be able to do it. But what are the types of things that you would sort of call out to them to say, you know, here are tools out there or maybe start with that and then I have a follow up question for that of what you would ask of grant makers. But let's maybe start with that first kind of concept of just quick tools that you think are out there that can help.

Abby Jarvis:

I think perhaps the most available tool is simply a calculator. I know that sounds a little ridiculous.

Kerrin Mitchell:

An abacus like...

Abby Jarvis:

I think it's maybe it sounds a little silly because I am talking about a report that's full of data, but I would tell people who work for nonprofits, the benchmarks in this report are important and they're useful and they're a great place to start evaluating your own performance and a great place to start identifying opportunities to improve. However, your own data will be a more effective beacon for you if you track it correctly. Look at the industry average for clickthrough rates and open rates and engagement. But don't just stop there. Don't take my word for it when I say that you should send your donors an email on Friday. Look at your own numbers, look at the email service provider you're using and look and see, okay, Abby says that you should try sending emails on Friday. What happens when I send an email on Friday? Is it working? Don't say, okay, well it looks like I have a pretty decent open rate compared to the rest of the industry. Ask yourself, how can I improve my open rate? What little tweaks and changes can I make? And sometimes that's as simple as calculating your own metrics on a calculator and just keeping track of them somewhere. Of course, you want to use tools that give you insight into those data points. It's really a pain to try to calculate your open rate by hand. But some of the really important indicators that you're doing a good job reaching your audiences those engagement metrics. And then things like average amount donated per campaign, average amount donated per contact, average amount donated per segment of contacts, are all really valuable. And you can pull that regardless of what service you're

using and you can track your own progress using our research as a starting point, but building on it from there.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Awesome. And take that one step further in now, let's look at this idea of if you could give that same or give a piece of advice to the grant makers that are asking you to, you know, provide a lot of this information. If you could ask one thing of them, what would that be?

Abby Jarvis:

I'm going to open with the caveat that I am most familiar with individual giving. I'm less familiar with the ins and outs of grant making and reporting to grant makers, but I do know that grant makers often rely really heavily and sometimes they rely solely on data to understand the impact that their grantees make with the money that they're giving. And I think that has the potential to be really dangerous. Of course, data and reporting is important, but when a nonprofit has to hit benchmarks or report impact in a purely data-based way, it's really easy for granters to lose sight of all of the nuances and all of the challenges inherent in some of the work those people are doing. You can't reduce a nonprofit's impact to a percentage point without losing sight of the different challenges they face. And you can't look at a nonprofit that's hitting the benchmarks and hitting the milestones and they're performing really well and say with confidence that they are effectively serving their community. And then on the other hand, you can't look at a nonprofit that's not hitting those goals and say that they're failing. So if you're listening and you're a grant maker and you really do want to make an impact in the world, please don't rely solely on someone's progress towards an arbitrary milestone. Talk to them and humanize it and seek out information about the circumstances and the challenges a grantee is facing. Of course, you want to look at the data, but combine that data with real life human conversations. It's really the only way to get a complete picture of what's happening.