



**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Welcome to the Untapped Philanthropy Podcast.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

We're your hosts, Fluxx's Co-founder Kerrin Mitchell and Neon One's Tim Sarrantonio. We've spent our career learning how to leverage technology and data in the social sector to better connect and serve our collective causes, constituents, and communities.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

In this podcast series, we profile leaders, public figures, philanthropists, and industry experts to explore the fascinating intersection of funding, technology, and policy. We're here to analyze the most formative topics and trends that shape the present and future of philanthropy. Hello. Hello. Joining us today on the podcast is Trista Harris, a forward-looking philanthropy expert, internationally renowned for her passionate advocacy for leaders in the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors. And Trista's work has been absolutely so impactful. It has been featured everything in esteemed publications like Chronicle of Philanthropy, Forbes, CNN, New York Times and the like. But she's also a very accomplished author of two books, How to Become a Nonprofit Rockstar and Future Good. She serves as a president of Future Good, which is also a consultancy dedicated to assisting visionaries in shaping a brighter future. And we could not be more happy to have her here today as she's truly one of those passionate advocates for our sector using all of her tools of futurism, which is really the theme of today, to address a lot of the most pressing challenges we have. So Trista, welcome. Thank you so much for joining us. We can't wait to dive into today.

**Trista Harris:**

Kerrin, I'm so excited to be here with you today with Tim as well. Happy to be here.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Awesome. And we would love, a lot of the listeners may know you, but we want to do a little bit of an intro. Tell us what brought you to philanthropy.

**Trista Harris:**

So I've worked in the social sector since I was 15 years old, and I've known that I've wanted to work in the social sector since I was 8. So my mom volunteered in a community center. I spent a lot of time there and just was really excited by the idea of a place that is grounded in community where you can get your basic needs met and then you can engage civically and meet your neighbors and create art and do beautiful things. And so my friends would be drawing their Barbie dream home and I would be drawing my dream community center with the slide from the third floor to the first floor and a zoo along the side and daycare for kids and all of those sort of things. So the sector has always been the place. I started on the nonprofit side first programmatically and then fundraising.

And then I got my first job as a foundation program officer. I worked for a community foundation that was based in St. Paul, Minnesota and had a really varied portfolio and got to deeply know the needs of the local community. Was there for a few years and then led the Headwaters Foundation for Justice, which is a social justice community foundation also based in Minnesota. And that was a place where we funded community organizers and they created really great change and enjoyed that work so, so much and really enjoyed learning about the power of philanthropy, especially when it's used to supercharge



community. It decided to take a role leading Minnesota's community of grant makers, the Council on Foundations that's based in Minnesota. And in that space it really was about helping grant makers create a more equitable future, helping them be really strategic about the grants that they were making, making sure that we were moving both the state and the country forward through their grant making. And then about five years ago started my consulting firm, FutureGood, so I could dig deeper into this futurism work, which has been a thread of my career for the last, I don't know, 10 or 15 years now.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

And actually for real quick, some people may not know what futurism is. Do you mind giving us a little bit of a debrief on what you do because it is such a unique thing and you may be the only one in our industry doing that right now in terms of applying these tactics to the social sector. Do you mind exploring that a little bit for folks?

**Trista Harris:**

Of course. So often people think of it as like magic eight ball work. They're like, are you looking into a crystal ball? And definitely what's going to next?

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Tell me about my future.

**Trista Harris:**

Really what it's is, it's looking for signals of the future that exist in the present. And so what I'm trying to do throughout my work is to notice transformation and change that's often happening outside of our sector and then translating those trends to help us figure out what does that mean for nonprofits and foundations. So I started my futurism work when I was at the Headwaters Foundation. I had the joy of being a brand new executive director in 2008 when the stock market collapsed. So it was a couple months into the job and our endowment went down between 30 to 50%.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

I can imagine that must've been such a strange time, yeah.

**Trista Harris:**

Not a fun time to be a grant maker that suddenly has no funds to give away because we've been trying to do some multi-year grant making and be a good grant maker, all those good things. And I ran into a book about futurism and the focus of the book was how to use futurism to get a business advantage during times of crisis. And I was like, this is a time of crisis. And so we started bringing those tools to our grantees and helping them, most importantly, decide what they wanted the future to look like. So we were living in a really sort of hard time and helping them envision what do we want to look like at the other side of this? And what is the work that we have to do now to make that future happen? And so as we started introducing those futurism tools, they started aligning on a shared picture of the future.

I think that's a big challenge in our sector is either we don't know what success looks like, we haven't really thought about if we a hundred percent met our mission, what would the community look like 20 to 30 years from now? What would be different as a result of our work? And so we helped our grantees do that. And as a result of that work in the next couple of years, they had 10 legislative wins, which was the most in our organization's history. Things like first in its country, homeowners bill of rights to deal



with the mortgage foreclosure crisis. We had alternative teacher certification to diversify our state's teaching force, and then we had marriage equity in the state of Minnesota. So it really lit this spark in me that people that do good for a living, these are the tools that should be in their hands. And it isn't just for professional futurists like me, it's for all of us to learn these skills and implement them in the issues and communities that we care about.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

What I love about this conversation, Trista, is kind of the parallels even in our journey. I got my start in 2008 as grant writer. I wasn't writing grants for very long, but we might have even read the same book. My influence from futurism was Amy Webb, *The Signals Are Talking*.

**Trista Harris:**

Ooh, that's a good one. No, mine was Flash Foresight, but that is a really good one.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

It's a good one, but she's very corporate deterministic in it in some ways. And so what I'm going to love about this conversation is that you bring such a fresh perspective to a sector that needs this type of thinking. But one of the things that would be interesting, we kind of like to take a pause here and talk about moments. And especially as a futurist, sometimes when you reflect on individual moments, you almost have to fight that to be like, no, that's not a trend, that's not a thing. But I think it's important to start this to say, is there a moment of generosity that does stand out to you that almost exemplifies the future that we hope to build?

**Trista Harris:**

Yeah, I think it's interesting. I have always in my career been really dedicated to both strategic and community driven change. So that when you invest in ideas that communities have to create transformation, that is where real change happens and that there are great ways to give away money that create big change. And there's ways that aren't so great. And I think a moment of generosity that stood out for me is I've moved to California since, but I used to live in Minnesota and right before Christmas there was an apartment fire probably half a mile from my house. And it was a low-income building. It had displaced all of the residents, everybody had survived but had lost all their belongings and didn't have renter's insurance and just was really, really difficult. And an anonymous donor came out a few days later and gave a million dollars to be split evenly amongst the residents to help them transition.

And I was sitting with a friend and I'm reading this article and I go, that is the dumbest gift that I've heard of. That is a million dollars and you're splitting amongst all these families. A million dollars, you could change rules about making sure that there's sprinkler systems inside of low-income housing. That's something that wasn't here. You could solve this for thousands and thousands of families instead of just this, I don't know, 60 or 50 families that were impacted and this is just a drop in the bucket for this problem and why didn't they think this out? And my friend goes, can't people just be nice? And I was like, you are right. This is a lovely, beautiful thing that is transformative for these families that have gone through so much. And yes, I can think of a hundred other ways where you could have a larger impact, but philanthropy is love of humankind and this piece of seeing a need and seeing somebody that is hurting and the urge to you can't fix all the problems, but let me fix that one is something that's important. And even though all of my work is about what is the most beautiful future that we can create and what does an equitable future look like and how can we really scale some of these ideas, I have to



constantly remind myself, don't lose the love of humankind that is the center of our sector and the work that we do.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

And that's sort of connectedness, connecting yourself to a community, to your house, to your life that you once knew in the case of those displaced folks and connecting to each other. I think that, yeah, to your point, that is the essence of what differentiates humans from everything else that builds. They build communities. So that's really beautiful. I love that. And as we look at this, Tim, I mean one of the things we've been talking a lot about in sort of what we wanted for 2024 for us was saying, how do we talk about that collective and what does that look like going forward? I know you have some thoughts on that and we were excited to explore those with you today Trista as well.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

Yeah, I mean, we're recording this in January, and so there is just a plethora of trends, articles everywhere, but let's be real. A lot of that is just marketing bullshit. And so that's just a bunch of articles to help people get clicks to buy their services.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Or newly written Chat GPT articles that have other articles. So many of those in the last week, I think one hit my inbox this morning, I was so excited. It was like the five trends of blah, blah, blah. And I was like, yeah, oh no, this is not.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

I wrote a LinkedIn thing on anti trends, which was basically behaviors that are changing. They're not a trend. It's more what is the behavior of people that's changing. And when you get down to it, we can debate semantics, but Trista, what is changing because that's what futurism ultimately embraces, is there is a constant evolution that we are going through as humans in our society and in this case very importantly the philanthropic sector. And so as somebody who deeply pays attention to this, what are you seeing that's not a clickbait article trend, but a real game changer coming in 2024?

**Trista Harris:**

Well, as somebody that every year writes my predictions for the field you can go to, [wearefuturegood.com](http://wearefuturegood.com). I've got my 2024 predictions, and I think the headline is, we are living in a time of rapid transformation and change. And there's a saying, it's meant to be a curse, may you live in interesting times, and we are living in interesting times where the climate is changing so quickly, maybe we're living through the collapse of democracy, we've got school shootings and Covid and all of these things that just sort of add up in this very stressful way. And in the sector we have a ton of transformation and change. Fundraising has been really difficult for organizations. We have this huge push to focus on equity and racial equity in particular, that now there is a clawing back that's happened since then. And so there is this transformation and change that's happening in the field and humans are not made for this pace of change.

So we're living in a time of exponential change where the pace of change gets more intense and faster year after year. And when I talk to leaders in the field, what I often hear from them is I feel like I'm so behind. I feel like I'm so stressed out. If I could just get to the bottom of my email inbox, everything would be fine. What they're not realizing is that this is just the pace of change of society in this moment. And the human brain is made for us to live in a village of a hundred people where we can walk



everywhere. It is not made for the world that we live in today. And so no wonder everybody feels so stressed out. No wonder everybody feels like, I wish we could go back to the good old days. And I'm not sure when those good old days were supposed to be, but it really, we are living in a time where 2024 is going to feel quaint in a couple of years and we'll go, oh, I wish it was calm like then.

So I think the challenge for us in the field is that futurism is a set of tools that helps you understand - one, to predict what's coming next and prepare for it before it happens so that it isn't the constant transformation and change that you're responding to. But two, also how to shape the future. So the future is not this bad thing coming towards us. Every decision that we make today decides what the future looks like. And so in the sector, I think it's really important for us to build this futurism muscle mostly for our sanity. So there's a study from BetterUp Labs that says that people that are high in future mindedness are more optimistic about the future and have lower depression than their peers. And I think that's really true when you have a picture of the future that you're working to create, and when you understand the future forces that are coming your way, something that could be a crisis really becomes an opportunity that helps you sort of transform and change. I can dig into a couple of the trends that we're paying attention to for 2024 if that'd be helpful too.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

What'd be really interesting is actually to take those trends. I mean at the risk of being like, yeah, tell us more, but actually saying not only here's the trend, but helping people to think about how to incorporate that or what to do with that. Because I think a lot of times, to your point, it's a transition in the way people think it's moving so quickly. It's a transition in the culture often of what we're trying to do, which is why it's so hard to change quickly because culture does take a little while to change and then there's a change in operational tactics. So I'm wondering, as you walk through those, would you humor us to say, how would you also think about incorporating those?

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

And even one layered request on top of that is how have you organized your brain to get to that point? Because futurist thinking is a different set of discipline that is a bit of an outlier because there's a big difference between optimistic and blind naive, toxic positivity with no basis behind it. So I love that data point, but to even kind of understand the process a bit would be fascinating.

**Trista Harris:**

Oh, I love it. Well, let's start with the mindset thing. I think that's really important.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Let's do it. And we can go trend by trend and by all means, we are so excited to listen in and so please. I love it.

**Trista Harris:**

I love it. So there's a framework that we use called stop, look and go and stop is stop loving the problem. And I think the big mindset shift and challenge that we have in the sector is that we spend a lot of time and energy, if not most of our time and energy loving the problem. So what that can look like is, let me tell you how large the racial disparities are when it comes to high school graduation rates. Let me tell you about the lifespan decrease in communities of color as a result of Covid. We get in this space where we feel like describing the problem is actually doing something to fix it. And the challenge in that is that we use a lot of energy, but none of that is actually making things better. And so I think the first thing we



have to do to really move to this place of a futurist mindset is that we have to stop loving the problem in our grant applications for foundations.

We have to stop asking our grantees to love the problem, tell us how bad it is compared to all of the other proposals that we have in front of us today. And instead, what we need to ask people is what are you building? What does it look like if it's fixed? What does it look like if this problem is fully solved? Because in that space of creation is really where you get to solutions that you might not find if you're stuck in the problem space. The next step is look, and that is looking for signals of the future in the present. So there's a saying, the future's already here, it just isn't evenly distributed. I've taken lots of groups on things called field trips to the future where we go someplace else in the world that is already living the future that we want to have.

I took a group of funders to Sweden to see the future of early childhood education. If you fully invested in funded a system, what would it look like? And when you look for those signals, it helps you find new paths to get there and it gets you aligned on what that picture of success looks like. I think there's a saying, we can send a man to the moon, how come we can't solve poverty? Well, we know if the man is on the moon, but how do we know if we've solved poverty? Do you mean for families? Do you mean for individuals? Do you mean in the United States? Do you mean globally? Do you mean a living wage? What is it that you mean when you say solve poverty? And so I think a lot of our challenges in the sector are about being really clear about what success could look like and using those ideas to strengthen new ideas that you can try in your organization.

The last step is go, and I think this is a really big stretch for a lot of folks in our sector. We are so afraid to fail. And when I talk to audiences, what people often say is, yes, all this is great. I should definitely try things. But what you don't understand is we are serving the most marginalized people in our community. We can't possibly fail them. And what I would say very gently is you're failing them slowly, so things are getting worse, faster than you are able to make it better with the interventions that you're using. And if we don't find new ways of solving problems and getting to the root causes of many of these issues, we're going to be fighting these same dragons for many generations to come. So I think on the mindset space, it is about really changing the ways that we approach these issues.

But the other part now coming back from a couple week break, there is a really important space for boredom. And when you are constantly inundated with information, you can't make new connections. And so when you're standing in line at the grocery store or you are waiting in traffic, we're listening to podcasts, we're sitting on our phones, we're constantly in new information. And I encourage people to just have space where you're sitting in silence, just have spaces where you're bored. Because in that space, you often find a connection between two ideas that turns into something that's really useful. And so I think the challenge for us in the sector is how do we make that spaciousness in our day-to-day work? I encourage people to set aside 5% of their time for the future, just a couple hours a week. And during that time have some Google alerts about future of whatever issue you're interested in, early childhood education, self-driving cars, rural communities, whatever your issue is. And then when those Google alerts come once a week, spend that time reading the articles and then just imagining what does that mean? What does that mean for our grantees? What does that mean for partner nonprofits? What does that mean for me as a human being that lives in this community and lives in this world? What are the opportunities? What are the challenges that exist? Because it allows you that space to think of a different future.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

One of the things that I think I'm struggling with for on behalf of some of the organizations that we serve, because a lot of the work that we focus on is the 90% of nonprofits in the US making under a



million dollars. And we even launched a cohort of nonprofits to not just say, here's some free tech. Yes, you can give that type of stuff away, but you also have to guide people and you have to say, this is the context and this is why. But the biggest problem, and this connects to what you're talking about Trista, is they'd say, this sounds great. I do not have the time, and especially for under-recognized communities, which is where we're focusing this program on. They love the idea, but they really are struggling with how to get there. So what have you seen in your work to help address that? Because your work is so centered in equity, and I imagine that you've at least experienced how to navigate that a bit.

**Trista Harris:**

Yeah, I think when it comes to these future trends, communities of color and under-resourced communities are actually best positioned to harness these trends because they're not well served by the current systems. And so if I'm a gigantic nonprofit organization that has been well funded over time, I'm not going to try something new. It's been working for me. And what happens to many of those organizations is a shock in the system like Covid happens or racial reckoning happens and the whole thing falls apart because you aren't resilient enough to be able to kind of bob and weave and move in the ways that are needed in different moments. What I find with small organizations is that they show up in really amazing ways because they're not tied to the current systems and they notice these transformations before some of the larger organizations do. So I think that there really is, there is space for those organizations to be able to create big change when it comes to the time piece, this is the challenge that we all have.

And I had a job very early in my career where we kept track of our time in 15 minute increments through these very complicated reports that took about an hour at the end of the day to fill out, and the data never went anywhere. So I've really fought against this idea of tracking time, and I have realized in my solid middle age that it actually is useful to understand how your time is being used and how you're spending it and what things are aligned with your goals as opposed to everybody. And so I've done a couple time studies for myself, and what I realized is when I need to do trend sensing work and sort of make connections that don't exist already, I cannot do it in 15 minute increments between meetings and I can't do it at the end of the day when I'm brain dead.

And so for 2024, my calendar is blocked off in the mornings so that the work that is important to me and important to my organization happens before I've used up all my willpower, it's happened before anybody else's pulls on my time start to happen. And then the other pieces are still there, but they get less attention than they would normally. And I think for small organizations, it's really easy to constantly feel like you have to be so responsive. A funder sent me a message at 7:00 AM and I need to respond right away. And all of those sort of things. I think there is a real gift in not engaging in what other people need from you for a little chunk of time in the morning so that you can think about what's important to you and then be responsive later on the day.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

And to your point from earlier too, it's only getting worse because people are becoming more and more transactionally focused around just getting things done and not letting that space exist for breathing energy into thinking and where your time and commitments go, your energy follows. So it's very interesting is it almost becomes this cyclical kind of nightmare for everyone where they just sit there processing things back and forth and don't question why or how to improve it.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**



It's almost the breeding ground for where the phrase, we've always done it this way. That's where it comes from.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

And it's when people look at it and say, well, and one of the things I am very curious to ask you about is people are always asking us what's going to be automated? When are robots taking our jobs? All those things. But the truth is the humanity comes from those moments in the morning, like you said, that are thinking and connecting and putting things together that are novel that aren't transactionally based. So it's such an interesting thing to keep the humanity in place too.

**Trista Harris:**

When I started FutureGood in late 2018, one of the things that took so much my time with scheduling meetings, and it just was surprising to me how much back and forth I was doing trying to, oh, how about Tuesday? Tuesday doesn't work? Oh, but Wednesday, all of that. And then I found Calendly and I was like, robot, please take my job. I don't want to do this. Please take that off of my plate. And I think with a lot of these AI tools, let's have humans do the work that only humans can do. Let us be creative and create new things and deepen relationships and be thoughtful about new solutions. And when it comes to writing the grant report or writing the application, what are the ways that we can lean into AI to take publicly available information or private data about our organizations and turn it into something that is useful so that our staff time really can be spent on the things that only people can do.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Yeah, that makes sense. And in terms of, then I have about 7,000 questions after that about tools and methods, but what would you like to do, Trista? Do you want to dive into some of the tools and methods and the tactics on that kind of stuff that you would put in place? Or do you want to, what are the other trends that you want to hit upon?

**Trista Harris:**

Yeah, let me start with the trends and then we'll dig into the tools a little bit. Cool.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

I could take us down a rabbit hole.

**Trista Harris:**

I love it. No, I love it. I think AI is the big one, and obviously it's what everybody is thinking about. I've been following AI for probably the last 15 years or so, and everything that I've tried has been miserable. So you're trying to figure out how to use the tool and you're like, I could have had it done by now. This is dumb. I don't want to engage in this. And when I tried Chat GPT after it was first released, I was like, oh, okay, well, here we are. We're on the ride. This is,

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

The train is flying right by.

**Trista Harris:**

It's gone. Where did this not even come from?





**Kerrin Mitchell:**

It just went right by us.

**Trista Harris:**

It's gone. And now I'm trying to figure out what to do as I sit in the dust. And so when it came out, I wrote a blog post and it was like, was AI going to take my nonprofit or foundation job? Probably, but it's for the best. So it is going to take the repetitive pieces of your work. And that's great because what we want is space for humans to do the things that only humans can do. I think the challenge is AI works well when you learn how to prompt it, when you figure out what the biases are that exist within these different systems and learn how to push against it when your organization develops values and rules about how AI gets used. At FutureGood, everybody on our team is using AI for different parts of their work, and they're experimenting and they're sharing with each other what works and what doesn't work.

I often will get something that is written by one of my team and sent to me and I go, this looks like the robot wrote it. Please fix it. It is great for your first draft, but it should never be something that I see. So you have to really tighten that up after it's helped you sort of think through the ways that you want to structure what you're saying. And so I think with AI, it is about us learning those prompt pieces, learning how to interact with it, and then never using it for decision-making. This is the piece in the social sector that I think is critically important. Decisions should be made by humans. We should not be using AI to decide who's going to get healthcare in your organization. We shouldn't be using AI to decide what students are getting extra support and which ones aren't.

It can be a data source for humans to make those decisions, but we cannot put human decision making into the hands of robots. And I think the other part that I'd love to have the corporate sector, but the social sector to really be talking about is that we need to figure out how to tax these tools. So companies are using AI to replace human beings, which is totally expected, but what should happen is the industrial revolution, we went from 80 hours a week to 40 hours a week of work because we had new tools and structures that allowed us to be more effective. With this AI and robotics revolution, I think that we should move from 40 hours a week to 20 hours a week of work, but what we have to do is build things like universal basic income. We have to increase what people are getting paid for the human work that they are doing. And I think the best way to do that is to tax the tools that we have in place. And if we don't start having these conversations, it's going to be really hard to get everything sort of pulled back in after it's left the gate. And so let's talk about what these tools mean for society, but let's not lose the society piece.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

I think that's such an astute observation on it, because even if you look at the historical elements on the labor and interaction with technology, when left unchecked, the innovation when given in the hands of profit and profit alone said, okay, now we can use this to extract even more labor out of people. And it wasn't until there was an identification by labor itself to say, no, we want a 40 hour work week. We want leisure. That's what we want, and that needs to be our time. And I don't think it's utopian now. That's the beauty of futurism too. But I also love the call out of don't give the launch codes to Skynet as well.

**Trista Harris:**

I had a good friend early last year that I was at a conference of people that lead social service centers, and most had never heard of Chat GPT. And so we were sort of talking it through, and it was a faith-



based organization, and their pastor and residence used it to write the dinner prayer. And so he sort of said, oh, this is a better story than the one that I picked. I see why I picked it. It's great. And so I'm talking this through with my friend. She said, I don't know what this thing is that you're talking about. I said, have I not talked to you about AI? Oh my God. And so she pulls it up and she signs up and she's playing with it, and she goes in the science fiction movies where the thing happens and then everything's bad.

And I'm like, yes. And she's like, this feels like that moment. And I said, it might be, it probably might be, but it also has the potential to transform society in really amazing ways. And if people like us are using these tools for good, that is how we get the better future that we're looking for. So it isn't step back on the sidelines and say, oh, I think it could get the launch codes, and we're all in big trouble. It is really engaging with the tools. And I provide feedback all the time on all the different AI tools that I use where I'll ask for future trends. I'll say, what are things that I should pay attention to in the future of rural communities or what's important for AI in inner cities? And when I get those results back, when I ask about AI in rural communities, it'll say, let's use it for smart agriculture. Let's use customized education for students that maybe have less access to teachers. Let's figure out how to use it for economic development in these communities. When I ask it how to use AI in inner city communities, it talks about crime rates and it talks about sentencing. And so my feedback to it is who also would like these tools used for economic development, better education and real transformation people that live in inner cities. So if you are getting responses back that are inequitable or racist or whatever, tell it you don't like it because that's what...

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

That's exactly right. And I think people as users or consumers really I'll just say of information these days, taking in the Snapchats which started there and the quick things. Then obviously now we've got TikTok and all the other things that are afoot. We're so used to digesting in information that to your point, you are a co-author in helping to create this. So the AI apocalypse doesn't need to be here. It's in our hands to be authors as a part of that. And I think that's the part people don't realize is you have just as much of a responsibility to help that future as you do to just watch it happen. And I think that's a big part of AI that people don't quite grok yet.

**Trista Harris:**

As a happy Gen Xer that had to take a computer class to learn how to use a mouse. One of the things that I remember hearing probably in high school or maybe early college was if the internet is great, but when you are on the internet, most of the time you should be typing or interacting, not just consuming.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Oh, that's a good one.

**Trista Harris:**

And I think that we have moved to this place where it is just about consuming, consuming, consuming. And we need to get this value again, that the real power of the internet is our ability to share innovations and ideas and excitement and transformation and all of those things in this space. But that does not happen when you're just scrolling.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**



And that's the thing I look at. I mean, not to get all meta on that, but I look at the teenagers in my life, for example, bless their heart, and they consume, and while one device is loading, the other one is being used to wait for the other. It's like the switch off of information. And when you ask them, what do you think creation looks like? To their definition is that of an influencer. It's like their friend that goes in and does shock videos or whatever. It's just such an interesting thing where when you think about, it's almost like rebranding what content creation means for people and helping to create the new world that isn't just digesting this kind of surface stuff.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

My 6-year-old twins, and 8-year-old, soon to be 9-year-old daughter, got, they don't have phones, but they were playing one day. Good for you. Well, what we did was my wife for Christmas gave them basically, they don't sell music players basically anymore.

**Trista Harris:**

Right? Right.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

And so we wanted to just have something that was an iPod and not connected to the internet.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

When I was a kid...

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

When I was a kid. This is a fascinating.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

I have really cool vinyl.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

Well, this syncs up with the elements because think about the utility of design because Trista, this connects to a very early item that you talked about for AI, which is the ugliness of the early adoption. Gen X and geriatric millennials, which I am.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Yeah, you're an elder millennial. Take it, own it. Not geriatric.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

I'm a geriatric millennial. That's the elder, whatever we want to say. But we live through the garbage of trying to do LAN parties with computers being dragged to our friend's house, or I'm going to figure out Napster and who knows if I'm going to download whatever. And we understood the internet was put together, but I was reading a book by Taylor Lawrence called Extremely Online, and it talked about how the newer apps and the experience of using the internet has been amplified. And that means you don't really understand what's behind it. And so even my kids, they're taking selfies with the fake phone, and I don't teach them that. They're learning that through the content that they're digesting, but it's also



understanding is that a value that I have as an old cranky dude, or is that the future think or is that a bad future, a good future? I don't know yet what it looks like.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Let's talk about this in terms, let's take that exact analogy and take it in terms of grants and data and the kinds of things, to your point of training. I think that's exactly right, which is that my value, that's the question we have to ask ourselves even as, and I'll take it from the Grantmaker perspective, a foundation or someone or government entity who's giving monies out, who wants to say, how do I make sure that I am making available the data that helps to train these models for good? Or how much of it's proprietary stuff that does need to be secured for any number of reasons, whether it's PII, whether it's just my own secret sauce, which I would hope people would be starting to share. But I'm curious what your take is on that Trista, because so much of this is about, well, if you join this part or this collective or this giving circle or this whatever, and you release the data, these are things that can then help to frame it. I mean, what's your take on how people should be thinking about this? What level they engage?

**Trista Harris:**

Very early in my career, I worked for an organization that provided health coverage for people that were uninsured through, we worked through hospital systems so they could pay for primary care for low income individuals. And I remember I had a meeting with a nun who came in fully dressed and yelled at me that they had the uninsured handled and we needed to get out of her territory. And I was like, I feel like you don't have it handled. I feel like maybe this is a bigger problem than just one organization can manage. And I think in the sector, we really have gotten to this place of it is our proprietary way to solve this problem. These are our relationships, this is our thing. And what I would love to see in the nonprofit sector is an open marketplace of ideas. Where I had this, I dream probably 15 years ago, that we have all these online fund raising platforms where you can sort of search, I'm interested in early childhood education in this city.

What are the organizations? Give me some data points about them. Who do they serve? What are And individual donors use those tools all the time to choose who they're going to give to. I would love to see foundations use those tools to give to nonprofits. And so for nonprofits to be able to say, here are all the things that we're doing. Here's our picture of the future that we want to create, and here's our strategies to get there. And here are results that we've had. Here's how much it costs. Here's all of our data. And that is open to all of the foundations and all of the other nonprofits so that people can start looking to each other as one partners in the work. I can't tell you how many people I've met that have newish nonprofits and they're like, oh, we met with this family and they also need housing, and they also need job training.

They also need this. And so now we're starting all these programs. Call somebody that is two blocks away that is an expert at that and refer, why are you trying to meet all these needs? You're great at this one thing. Stop trying to do all the things. And so in the sector, I think we have created sort of this nonprofit Hunger Games where a few will be chosen and you've got to cut each other down to be able to get there. And what I would love for us to get to in the sector is it is all of us against the problems. And we each have different ways to get there. Funders have different values about who they're going to support and different issues that they're interested in. Who are the right partners for you to be able to create that transformation and change. And I think that many of these tools can help that entire kind of marketplace of ideas be more visible.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**



So if I'm a small nonprofit, for instance, and I'm grappling with this, what are some practical ways that we can also, because we can talk to you all day, but let's also kind of end a bit with before we go into our final segment, which is some fun, rapid fire questions. How can somebody begin to empower themselves? So I'm starting to make time in my day, I'm being more mindful, I'm also paying attention to things happening around me. What other things can be put into their framework, their everyday work to start to build toward this future?

**Trista Harris:**

I think the big thing that nonprofits need to do is develop relationships with each other, to connect in person, virtually. It's really through those connections that you find the insight that allows you to move forward to the next level of impact for your work. And also, I think it's really important that we spend time outside of the sector. So futurism is often used by business leaders to decide what you want to buy next. It's used by the government to figure out who is going to hate us next. It's not used by people who do good for a living. But when I spend time in those futurism spaces, I learn about amazing transformation and change I never would have heard of if I was only spending time in nonprofit conferences. And so, think about where else you can develop relationships. What are the places that are really on the cutting edge of whatever the causes that you care about and spend time there, even if it isn't in our sector only.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

So we talked through a bunch of different trends today, and I think there's a fair amount of not just things that we can learn, of course, about what futurism is, how to apply it to social sector and social good, but ultimately there are tools and things out there. So Trista, tell us what your advice is for getting started here.

**Trista Harris:**

Yeah, for sure. So we've created FutureGood Studio in a partnership with Target to make futurism accessible to people that work in the social sector. So it is a three month long cohort where you are with a group of other future focus leaders in the sector, both on the foundation and nonprofit side. And we're teaching you how to use these tools and how to implement them within your organization. I think it's great to pay attention to trends that are happening externally, but the really important piece is what are you going to do about it? What's going to be different in your organization as a result of having these insights and how do you use that to really strengthen the communities that you care about? And so FutureGood Studio is a place where you can really dig in and learn those tools. So we've got cohorts that start three times a year and people can learn more at [wearefuturegood.com](http://wearefuturegood.com).

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

So actually what's really cool, I do have to admit, Trista, I am in your Spring cohort. So I'm so excited for the upcoming three months. I'm going from the end of January through the end of April, and it's so exciting to be connected with other major folks in the industry who really care about it and bring their own unique lens to how to think about this future role. So I'm totally plugging it as well. I'm ecstatic to be a part of your programming and thank you for the opportunity.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

Yeah, I'm a little jelly if we're going to be honest.



**Kerrin Mitchell:**

I already was like, Tim, make it happen. He was like, yeah, I'm going to do it...

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

She Slacking me and I'm like, oh gosh, I got to go figure out the budget. But another discussion, another time.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

He can do it "in the future".

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

In the future is what I said. So let's draw this. Let's initial conversation to a close.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Yes, that's fair. Okay, so we always enter podcasts on a rapid fire note, and usually it's a bunch of random questions that are completely wacky and weird, but I'm changing it up. And Tim didn't even know about this until I just told him, but we're going to do a word association game with you. I think that'll be kind of fun. So we're going to say a word related to your field, and you have to respond for the first word or phrase that pops into your head. Are you ready?

**Trista Harris:**

I'm ready.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Okay. Sustainability

**Trista Harris:**

Or our peril?

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Oh!

**Trista Harris:**

Let's start out light.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

Just that. Just a little bit of that. I'm like, lighthearted. Kerrin, walk me through this segment. Are we allowed to comment or are we just moving forward?

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Tim, you're always allowed to comment. This is,

**Tim Sarrantonio:**



I know we're always allowed to comment.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Alright, next one is equity

**Trista Harris:**

Under attack

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

Cybersecurity.

**Trista Harris:**

I think we need to tighten it up, especially in the social sector. Let's be really thoughtful about our data. It's critical.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

It's a little more than one word. We'll allow it because it's the first time we're doing this.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

I would hate to have someone do this with me. My words would be significantly less eloquent.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

You would hate this if it was turned around. Well, I'm going to take over the next one then. Artificial intelligence.

**Trista Harris:**

Ooh, Jarvis. For me. And for you.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

Ooh, I like that. As a person who named his daughter after Tony Stark's Secretary Pepper Potts.

**Trista Harris:**

Oh my goodness. I love it.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

I didn't know actually why Pepper got Pepper's name. That's so funny.

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

Yeah, that's why. See, we we're throwing in personal anecdotes this year in 24.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**



You know what my dog's name is, it's Snacks. That's how I've named Snacks because that's what I thought it'd be funny if you were like Snacks and all the dogs were like, I love snacks. And then Snacks would come running. So that was mine. I like your version better. The Pepper. Pretty cool

**Tim Sarrantonio:**

Kerrin, it's why don't you round us out with the final word.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

The final one, philanthropy,

**Trista Harris:**

Love of humanity.

**Kerrin Mitchell:**

I love it. Trista, thank you so much for obviously joining us today. It was an absolute joy to hear about you, the work you're doing at FutureGood. And our listeners can learn more about both Trista and FutureGood at [wearefuturegood.com](http://wearefuturegood.com). Trista, thank you.

**Trista Harris:**

Thanks, Kerrin. Thanks, Tim. It was so fun to talk with you both today. I appreciate all you're doing to build a better future.