

# Building Financial Sustainability for Near-Term Literacy and Long-Term Career Target Outcomes

Michael Wong 27 February 2015

At a TEDxReset conference, futurist Tom Frey predicted that over two billion jobs will disappear by 2030, about the same time that many of Philadelphia's current fourth-graders will be just starting out in their post-collegiate careers. Such bold assertions were supported by examples of self-driving cars, already a technical reality, that could displace large numbers of employees including taxi, bus, limousine, and delivery drivers. Other examples included manufacturing and retail jobs, which could incur substantial hits if 3-D printing enables consumers to make many products at home, without the need to purchase them from stores. And finally, given an *MIT Technology Review* journal article that pointed to some research that suggested that nearly half of U.S. jobs are vulnerable to computerization, concerned citizens are rightfully striving to determine which core competencies are valuable not only for fourth-graders but also for the larger community and their sustainable careers.

As for core competencies, much press has been

published on the value of STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education, yet being able to graduate with such a degree is often predicated upon one's ability to read the exam and write an appropriate response in a set period of time. Many students in STEM fields struggle to complete their degrees in four years, or drop out, according to [a 2010 University of California, Los Angeles study](#). The study, conducted by UCLA's [Higher Education Research Institute](#) (HERI), observed that nearly 22% dropped out after five years (UCLA HERI, 2010). As such, supporting literacy can and should be part of a community's STEM strategy.

Still, funding these and other worthy initiatives continues to be a challenge for a number of nonprofits. As Professor Kasturi Rangan (Co-chairman of the Harvard Business School's Social Enterprise Initiative) commented : "There is no doubt that corporations are engaging in less philanthropy, but that is not necessarily bad as long as they cut the ineffective ones and consolidate those that are synergistic to their business. Corporate social responsibility should be treated as a business discipline and practiced with the same professionalism and rigor as other aspects of a firm's strategy. For example, many of the programs that come under the umbrella of 'climate change' have the potential to benefit the environment as well as a company's bottom line" (Lagace, 2009). While many nonprofits' staffs understand the importance of determining these linkages with their funders, focused

execution is often lacking.

One best practice to consider is The Salvation Army-Boys & Girls Club Greensboro (North Carolina) because the nonprofit's daily playbook includes tactics that mirror Fortune 500 analogues, including:

- Purposeful direct engagement between board members and frontline staff: Instructors' face-to-face conversations with board members enable the latter to listen and to understand the challenges for the entity and subsequently become even more energized with helping the nonprofit with its continued efforts for literacy and other key target outcomes.
- Consistent brand messaging of the nonprofit's purpose and strategy: Jamie Cooper's (the executive director) "elevator presentation" about the group's mission, vision, strategies and target outcomes communicates not only a clear picture of their strategic intent but also a differentiated value proposition that can be contrasted to other competitors' requests for funding. Moreover, the team's communication's strategy has delivered compelling messages that resonate with their funders.

As for results, the team is about to kick off its ground breaking for a brand new Boys & Girls Club and multipurpose community center facility that will house

learning and technology centers, performing arts space, music labs, recreation facilities and community spaces that will serve over 2,500 youth in the Greensboro community. The \$7.6 million dollar capital campaign will provide significant potential within the organization's three priority outcomes of academic success, good character and citizenship as well as healthy lifestyles, which can in turn help support the future career prospects of the youth who are served.

## References

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## Author Bio

**Michael Wong has over 20 years of strategy, marketing, and sales experience at a number of Fortune Most Admired Companies including Apple Computer, AstraZeneca, IBM, and Merck. His insights**

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