



# In Pursuit of Excellence

Indicators of Quality in Nonprofit Academic Centers





## How to Use This Document

NACC is committed to supporting its members in their pursuit of program excellence—in whatever shape and form a specific member organization may serve the nonprofit sector. The indicators offered here should be viewed as the basis for further discussion and as a beginning in our understanding of high quality nonprofit academic centers as they seek to serve the needs and build the field of nonprofit sector and philanthropic studies.

In pursuit of this dialogue, we hope this document will be useful to our members in a variety of contexts. These might include:

- As a source of goals and/or objectives in center and program planning
- As a source of measures that will demonstrate achievement and effectiveness
- As a tool that both suggests and informs dialogue about partnerships and collaborations
- As a resource for academic departments and schools as they seek to create or strengthen centers within their own institutions

We recognize that the pursuit of quality and excellence is an on-going endeavor that requires continued commitment and engagement. And we look forward to the discussion, dialogue and debate that this document creates.

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## Introduction

The growth of nonprofit and philanthropic studies programs over the past 20 years has been accompanied—and often propelled—by the establishment of college and university-based academic centers that are focused on the nonprofit sector. These academic centers are often involved in a variety of activities including the education of nonprofit leaders and managers, support of nonprofit research by scholars from a variety of academic disciplines, and the provision of technical assistance and support to nonprofit organizations in their communities.

With the emergence of the field of nonprofit and philanthropic studies, directors of the early nonprofit academic centers began looking for opportunities to share information and ideas to strengthen their programs and advance the field. The Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC) was formed in 1991 by a group of these leaders and today represents more than 40 academic centers throughout North America. Membership in NACC is open to academic centers at accredited colleges and universities anywhere in the world.

As a membership association, the mission of NACC is to *support academic centers devoted to the study of the nonprofit/nongovernmental sector, philanthropy and voluntary action to advance education, research and practice that increases the nonprofit sector's ability to enhance civic engagement, democracy, and human welfare*. Central to building the field of philanthropic and nonprofit sector studies is institutional support and recognition of academic centers as a focal point for this activity. As the field both matures and expands, nonprofit academic centers must ensure the quality and sustainability of their educational programs and activities. Recognizing that centers have distinct missions and programs, NACC is dedicated to strengthening these centers, however their missions are demonstrated, as one way to secure the long-term viability of nonprofit and philanthropic education. Identifying benchmarks or indicators of quality of these enterprises is just one effort toward this commitment.

## Creation and Purpose of the Indicators of Quality Initiative

In pursuit of its goals to support academic centers and advance the field of nonprofit and philanthropic studies, NACC has undertaken a series of program initiatives with generous support from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. These have included:

- Defining a *Core Curriculum* for graduate level nonprofit management and philanthropic studies programs;
- Assessing the *Knowledge Base* of resources for the field, particularly to support teaching the core curriculum and to identify gaps in the available literature; and
- Articulating *Indicators of Quality* that would both lead to and result from strong academic centers.

As a companion effort to the Curriculum and Knowledge Base initiatives, the purposes of the Indicators of Quality Initiative are:

- 1) To improve the quality of the educational enterprise in the field of nonprofit and philanthropic studies.
- 2) To identify quality through reference points and benchmarks that can guide the development of the field and of academic centers and programs.
- 3) To enhance the legitimacy of the field of nonprofit and philanthropic studies.

Additional benefits of this effort include a better understanding of viable education program options, an enhanced measure of accountability within the field, and a wider awareness of the value added by the work of NACC and its member centers.

## **NACC's Indicators of Quality**

As noted above, NACC is committed to supporting its members through activities that not only strengthen the larger field of nonprofit sector and philanthropic studies, but also enable its member institutions to be more successful in delivering a wide array of programs and services that respond to the nonprofit sector's needs. These programs and services represent a range of activities including, but not necessarily limited to, undergraduate and graduate education, research and related scholarly initiatives, technical assistance, professional development and non-credit educational programs, and management support. Our members serve the field at all levels of society—local, regional, national and international.

As a follow-up to the Curricular Guidelines Initiative completed in 2003, the Indicators of Quality Initiative was originally designed to identify those measures that would demonstrate high quality graduate-level academic programs focused on nonprofit sector and philanthropic studies. As the project unfolded, however, our discussion broadened to include issues of quality as they relate to center structures and institutional arrangements, and the work of centers beyond degree-based education. We found it difficult to isolate these dimensions given the interdependent nature of these activities. As a consequence, the indicators of quality provided here include characteristics and measures of quality as they relate to centers themselves as well as educational, research and service endeavors.

We are also mindful that the relationship between inputs, indicators and outcomes as they relate to high quality and effectiveness are interactive and dynamic. In many ways, the indicators we offer can be both a necessary input into a highly effective program as well as a consequence of such a program. Teasing out this relationship is beyond the scope of this report. We think it important, however, to acknowledge this "chicken and egg" dimension as we articulate our understanding of how one might recognize high quality academic centers that are focused on the nonprofit sector and philanthropy.

It has also become clear from our work that nonprofit academic centers are involved in a wide range of activities. Given our commitment to the articulation of quality indicators across this range, we are aware of the size of this task. There is also a recognition that the field continues to rapidly grow and expand. However, we remain committed to this work because we realize the critical role that an agreed-upon set of indicators could play in ensuring our field's reputation, stature and impact.

Therefore, the framework that we propose and the indicators of quality that we offer in the following sections should be viewed as a first step in an on-going dialogue about the creation and longevity of high quality nonprofit academic centers and the work they undertake. Given the diversity of these centers, some dimensions will have more relevance than others. For newer or smaller centers, they might be viewed as goals or objectives to which they aspire. For others, they might be considered standards to assess their current situation or activities. These indicators should not be viewed from a lens of accreditation. Rather they are offered in a spirit of support and encouragement as we seek to ensure strong and successful academic centers that pursue their respective missions with creativity, vitality and responsiveness.

### **A. INDICATORS OF HIGH QUALITY NONPROFIT ACADEMIC CENTERS**

#### **A.1 Academic centers are engaged in a balance of activities in research, education and service that reflects their particular mission, purpose(s) and foci.**

- There is a clearly defined mission statement and current activities can be linked to mission and stated purposes.
- There is an on-going effort to ensure alignment between mission and a center's programs and activities.
- The center's balance of activities accurately represents its commitments locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

#### **A.2 Centers value and emphasize community engagement.**

- Centers seek to involve members of various stakeholder groups in the programs and activities of the center, including efforts to bring practitioners and faculty into dialogue about current issues in the field.
- Centers can demonstrate strong relationships with local and related organizations.
- Centers provide opportunities for participation by community leaders.
- Students are involved in community-based internships, community-based research, applied research and/or project consulting.

#### **A.3 Centers are responsive to the needs of an increasingly diverse nonprofit sector.**

- The diversity of the sector is represented in the types of projects and activities that are undertaken by centers.
- Faculty, staff and students represent the diversity of the communities in which they exist.
- Centers are involved in outreach and admissions, seeking to ensure a diverse student and participant population.

#### **A.4 Centers are recognized in the community as a "preferred provider" of information on the sector, applied research, technical assistance and/or management support.**

- Foundations and other funders invest in the work of the centers.
- There is a regular and on-going demand for information, support and assistance.

#### **A.5 Centers are viewed by university administrators as one of the campus' exemplary instruments for university engagement in the community.**

- Deans and other university administrators demonstrate interest in center sustainability through core budget support.
- Centers are "preferred locations" for new university hires.
- Collaboration exists between centers and other university programs.
- Centers are recognized as the central information source for information related to the nonprofit sector.
- The research, teaching and service of involved faculty is acknowledged in the promotion and tenure process.

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### **A.6 Centers seek to ensure their continued quality and effectiveness.**

- Evaluation systems are in place which provide on-going feedback as to the effectiveness and responsiveness of center activities.
- Evaluation systems incorporate feedback opportunities from both internal and external stakeholders.

## **B. INDICATORS OF HIGH QUALITY RESEARCH**

### **B.1 Centers are engaged in research that builds theory and expands the knowledge base.**

- Research addresses gaps in the current body of literature, e.g., the need for more accurate and detailed information about the nonprofit universe.
- Research conforms to the highest academic standards and results in publications in peer-reviewed venues.

### **B.2 Centers are engaged in research that is relevant and responsive to current issues within the sector, within specific nonprofit organizations and within the larger community.**

- Research both reflects and derives from engagement in nonprofit and philanthropic communities, i.e., scholarly inquiry informs practice and practice informs inquiry.
- Research results are made accessible to practitioners.
- Systems and mechanisms are in place that foster dialogue between faculty and community practitioners.

### **B.3 Centers promote research activities that involve a community of scholars.**

- The pool of scholars writing about nonprofit and philanthropic studies continues to grow and includes an increasing number of scholars representing a diversity of fields and disciplines.
- Research is published in high quality academic journals representing a range of academic fields and disciplines.
- Researchers who publish in nonprofit and philanthropic studies are recognized within their respective disciplines for their contributions to the field.

### **C. INDICATORS OF HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION**

#### **C.1 Centers are involved in the development and provision of a curriculum that responds to current issues and needs of the field.**

- The curriculum reflects the latest scholarly and practice knowledge.
- The curriculum is regularly reviewed to ensure responsiveness to the field.
- The curriculum incorporates the dynamic nature of a diverse sector that spans the globe.
- The curriculum reflects the goals of the host degree or program.
- Masters and doctoral- level courses and doctoral degrees in nonprofit and philanthropic studies continue to expand.

#### **C.2 Centers ensure an educational program that is responsive to the needs of its diverse stakeholders.**

- A significant number of students are enrolled in nonprofit and philanthropic studies courses.
- Students report that the curriculum is responsive to their goals and expectations.
- Community key informants indicate that the curriculum reflects and incorporates key issues in the field of practice.

#### **C.3 Centers ensure that both subject matter and pedagogy is responsive to the diversity of the field as well as the diversity of students.**

- Issues of diversity and inclusion are incorporated into all courses.
- Special programs exist to build cultural competency.

#### **C.4 Centers ensure that teaching is directed to achieve student-related outcomes.**

- Students develop and effectively apply critical thinking and analytical skills.
- Student competencies improve observably and measurably.
- Graduates of nonprofit and philanthropic studies programs progress in their careers.

#### **C.5 Centers ensure the involvement of highly qualified faculty.**

- Departments give high priority to teaching performance in the selection and supervision of faculty.
- Adjunct faculty are carefully recruited and supervised.
- Faculty who teach nonprofit and philanthropic studies courses have been recognized by their peers for their teaching excellence.
- Faculty receive favorable student evaluations, particularly with regard to student reports of significant learning and professional development.
- A majority of instructional faculty are permanent, full-time appointments within an academic program.



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## Indicators of Quality in Nonprofit Academic Centers

### **C.6 Centers ensure a model of pedagogy that reflects a diversity of learning styles and developmental needs.**

- Faculty routinely incorporate a mixture of pedagogical approaches.
- Faculty use a variety of instructional tools that maximize learning.
- Distance learning and/or on-line learning opportunities are available.
- Faculty incorporate a variety of tools and modalities to assess student learning.

## **D. INDICATORS OF HIGH QUALITY SERVICE**

### **D.1 Centers provide services that are responsive to the needs of the targeted market.**

- Programs are regularly offered that respond to the needs of the market area (e.g., local, regional, national, international).
- The number of participants in service-related activities and programs increases.
- The number of requests for assistance from the field increases.
- Nonprofit sector leaders report that programs and activities are meeting their needs.

### **D.2 Centers provide opportunities for professional development and non-credit education.**

- Noncredit and non-degree programs and workshops are available.
- The number of national distance learning opportunities increases.
- Service programs receive local, regional and/or national recognition.

## The Work of the Indicators of Quality Task Force

As a member- and volunteer-driven organization, NACC members and colleagues are the key participants and knowledge managers of NACC's program initiatives. The Indicators of Quality Task Force was organized under the leadership of Co-Chairs Pamela Leland and Judith Sidel and comprised directors of NACC member centers. The work of the Task Force was informed by in-depth discussions of the full NACC membership at its meetings between 2003 and 2005. John Palmer Smith and David Renz, past Presidents of NACC, provided additional leadership support and guidance.

### Members of the Task Force

**Robert Ashcraft**

Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Management  
Arizona State University

**Norman Dolch**

Institute for Human Services and Public Policy  
Louisiana State University-Shreveport

**Kathy Kretman**

Center for Public and Nonprofit Leadership  
Georgetown University

**Pamela Leland, Co-Chair**

Center for Community Research and Service  
University of Delaware

**John McClusky**

Nonprofit Management and Leadership Program  
University of Missouri-St. Louis

**Kathy O'Regan**

Public and Nonprofit Management and Policy Program  
New York University

**Judith Sidel, Co-Chair**

Center for Women in Government & Civil Society  
University at Albany – State University of New York

**Nora Silver**

Nonprofit and Public Management Program  
University of California-Berkeley

**Darwin Stapleton**

Rockefeller Archive Center

**The Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC) is a membership association** comprised of academic centers at accredited colleges and universities that focus on the study of nonprofit organizations, voluntarism and/or philanthropy. Established in 1991, NACC is the first group entirely dedicated to the networking and support of centers that provide education and research about, and academically-based service for, the nonprofit/nongovernmental sector and philanthropy.

**Arizona State University**

Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Management

**Boston College**

Center on Wealth and Philanthropy

**Case Western Reserve University**

Mandel Center for Nonprofit Organizations

**City University of New York**

Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society

**Cleveland State University**

Center for Nonprofit Policy and Practice

**DePaul University**

Public Services Graduate Program

**Duke University**

Center for the Study of Philanthropy and Voluntarism

**George Mason University**

Nonprofit Management Studies Program

**Georgetown University**

Center for Public and Nonprofit Leadership

**Georgia State University**

Nonprofit Studies Program

**Grand Valley State University**

Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership

**Harvard University**

Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations

**Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis**

The Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University

**Johns Hopkins University**

Center for Civil Society Studies

**Louisiana State University-Shreveport**

Institute for Human Services and Public Policy

**The New School**

Nonprofit Management Program

**New York University**

Public and Nonprofit Management and Policy Program

**New York University School of Law**

National Center on Philanthropy and the Law

**North Park University**

Axelson Center for Nonprofit Management

**Northwestern University**

Center for Nonprofit Management

**Portland State University**

Institute for Nonprofit Management

**Regis University**

Nonprofit Management Program

**Rockefeller Archive Center**

**Seattle University**

Center for Nonprofit and Social Enterprise Management

**Seton Hall University**

Center for Public Service

**University at Albany-State University of New York**

Center for Women in Government & Civil Society

**University of California-Berkeley**

Nonprofit and Public Management Program

**University of California-Los Angeles**

Center for Civil Society

**University of Delaware**

Center for Community Research and Service

**University of Maryland University College**

Nonprofit and Association Management Program

**University of Michigan**

Nonprofit and Public Management Center

**University of Minnesota**

The Public and Nonprofit Leadership Center

**University of Missouri-Kansas City**

Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership

**University of Missouri-St. Louis**

Nonprofit Management and Leadership Program

**University of Pennsylvania**

Center for Community Partnerships

**University of San Francisco**

Institute for Nonprofit Organization Management

**University of Southern California**

Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy

**University of St. Thomas**

Center for Nonprofit Management

**University of Texas at Austin**

RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service

**University of Washington**

Nancy Bell Evans Center on Nonprofits & Philanthropy

**University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**

Helen Bader Institute for Nonprofit Management

**Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University**

Institute for Policy and Governance

Nonprofit and Civil Society Program

**York University**

Nonprofit Management and Leadership Program

11/06



**NONPROFIT ACADEMIC CENTERS COUNCIL**

10900 Euclid Avenue  
Cleveland, Ohio 44106-7167

Ph: 216.368.0969  
Fx: 216.368.8592

[www.naccouncil.org](http://www.naccouncil.org)