

TruServe:

The CRH's homegrown system helps non-profit organizations improve performance.

By Kristine Henke

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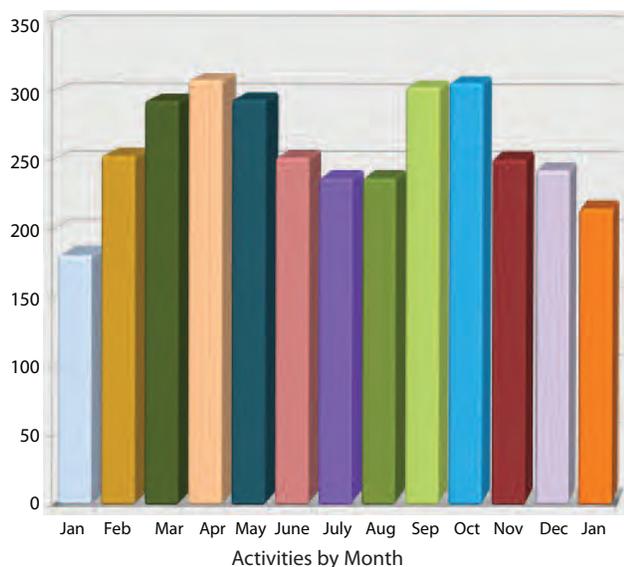
It's no secret—budgetary times are tough. Federal, state, and local budgets are being trimmed. Among many things, the budgetary environment we are living in can seem to foretell a precarious future for non-profit agencies. Those working for causes that are important to the well-being of our communities, states, and country can feel the threat of losing dollars. One thing non-profit organizations can do to combat this pressure is recognize that this new environment requires them to emphasize accountability, reliability, and responsiveness. In order to do this, agencies need the ability to establish what they have done and establish the effect of their actions. To assist in this matter, the Center for Rural Health (CRH) has created a product: TruServe.

TruServe is a web-based tracking system that allows non-profit organizations to show what they are doing on a day-to-day basis. The Center for Rural Health, a non-profit organization within the University of North Dakota's School of Medicine and Health Sciences, is highly reliant on grant-funding. So, TruServe was created

to track outcomes of the work the CRH does. TruServe strengthens an organization's ability to collect measurable outcomes so that organization can establish the effect its programs have, furthering greater understanding of the effect of the funds used for those programs. TruServe collects program data to facilitate planning, information dissemination, program reports, resource allocation, and staffing. The current environment for virtually all organizations is one that emphasizes organizational performance. Data collection and measurement are elements used to determine performance.

TruServe works only as well as the information its users enter into it. Users can enter technical assistance they provided, a meeting they held, a presentation they gave, or any other number of tasks they have completed. They enter what the activity was, when it was held, the location, a short description about the encounter, the amount of time associated with the activity, and some other identifying information. For example, a user could enter a technical assistance call they had concerning a community needs assessment. They could enter whom they talked to, what organization that person is with, what grant the assistance correlates to, and what information they provided to that person. This provides evidence of the effect of effort. Additionally, it provides both a reliable database and one that allows an organization to develop a consistent and rational means to measure and report performance.

Once the information is in the system, the true magic can happen. All information entered into TruServe is able to be used in a variety of ways by any of its users. The strength of TruServe is the program's ability to take entered information and use it to create

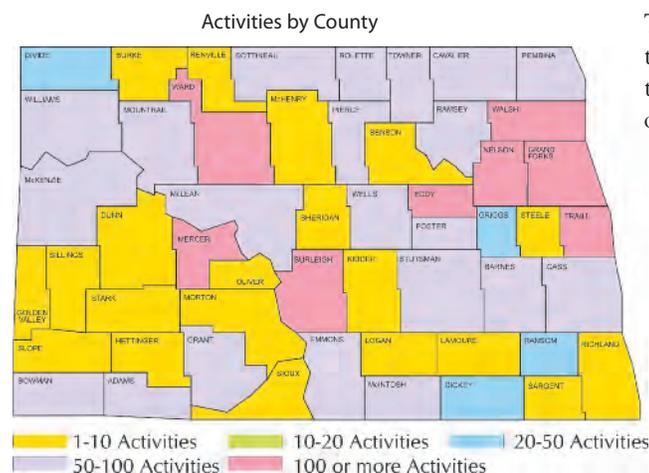
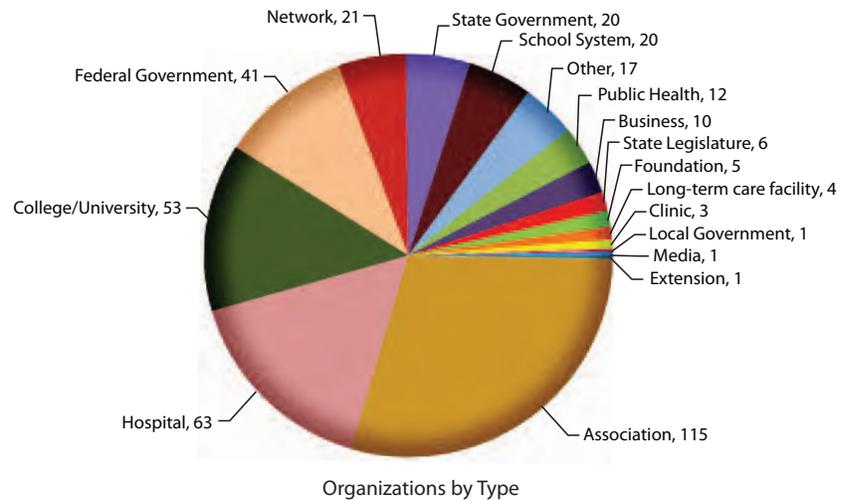


reports and maps at the click of a button. When an activity is captured in the system, you can run a report on any piece of information you have entered. If you wanted to show all the times the Center for Rural Health has worked with Watford City, N.D., for example, you could do that. If you wanted to show how the CRH interacted with Watford City with only one or two specific grants, you could do that too. The reporting and mapping section is the most robust because the reports and maps are fully customizable. If an organization wants to show how it affected a state, it can do that visually, which can be very powerful. The development of TruServe came out of the realization people have had over the past few years of the need for a system that can quantify, display, and disseminate organizational performance findings in a useable and presentable format. There were a few other State Offices of Rural Health who heard about the Center's system and wanted to review its technology process. The Center knew there was a need for similar organizations to be able to capture what they are doing and use that information to show a variety of things about their organization. Currently, the Center for Rural Health has a partnership with the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health that allows them to offer TruServe to all 50 State Offices of Rural Health. Knowing the importance of

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being able to show funders, stakeholders, policymakers, and others what is being done with those precious grant dollars, the CRH is looking to keep expanding TruServe with the help of the University of North Dakota's intellectual property office. By using TruServe, organizations worried about crunching budgets and showing the need for their cause can worry less, save time, and show results in this tight budgetary environment.

For more information about TruServe, visit <http://bit.ly/tdRTUB>.



The TruServe software graphs data into chart form, shown by the three examples on pages 18 and 19. Non-profit organizations can use this information to improve performance and to demonstrate their organization's effectiveness.