

More Than Money: Data, Fundraising, and Your Nonprofit

Scenario: RankMyProposal

Armando works for a large housing non-profit organization in San Francisco called HousingForAll. HousingForAll has recently submitted a grant proposal to the city government to receive up to \$300,000 in grants for affordable housing projects. The city has been receiving hundreds of applications per grant and, with recent budget cuts, has decided to use a software called RankMyProposal.ai to automatically screen and rank proposals. The city estimated that using RankMyProposal.ai could cut down the applications for human review to only 25 applications, saving dozens of hours of human review time. The company assured the city government that this screening was merely a “formality” and would mostly eliminate poorly formatted and incomplete proposals that would have never made it onto the list of proposals that the city would seriously consider funding. Agreeing to have your grant application screened by RankMyProposal.ai is a requirement. The city is hosting 4 workshops for community organizations to learn more about the process. The first one is scheduled for 3 weeks from now.

Armando is conflicted: He has heard that RankMyProposal.ai’s algorithm is biased against womXn, POC and other minorities and has assigned lower “feasibility” scores to proposals that mentioned team members that had “female or non-white sounding” names. Armando’s team is very diverse and he feels that the bias of the software may negatively affect HousingForAll’s chances.

On one hand, he really needs this funding and thinks that he has a decent chance of receiving it, given his strong track record of successful housing projects. The city has informed community organizations that they will not be able to consider proposals that are not submitted through the portal or that don’t “agree” to RankMyProposal’s terms and conditions.

On the other hand, he has significant ethical concerns about the software and, on a practical level, does not want to use his organization’s limited resources putting together a funding proposal that has slim chances of being accepted by the city even if his team does use RankMyProposal.ai to submit.

Prompt questions: Use your remaining time to think through the following questions, alone or together in a group.

Question 1 & 2: On your own, take two minutes to consider the following 2 questions. Feel free to jot down notes on a separate sheet of paper.

- How would software like RankMyProposal impact **your** organization/community?
- Based on what you have read, what concerns does RankMyProposal raise for you? What benefits can you see to using this software?

Question 3: **Group Activity - in your small groups, discuss the following:**

- Imagine you all worked in the same issue area in the same geography and learned that a public funder was using this system. (10 minutes)
 - Write a list of questions for the public funder from non-profit organizations in your area. What do you all need to know about the public funder's system?
 - What questions do you want your public funder to be able to answer about the software they are using? What questions would you need answered to feel confident in their use of AI?
 - Where would you go for expertise/ who would you ask if you had concerns about RankMyProposal.ai and its impact on your organisations' funding proposals?

As a group be prepared to report out to the whole:

- Share one impact RankMyProposal might have on an organisation's work that was discussed in your group.
- Name one place your group would go to get expertise or if you had concerns about how RankMyProposal would impact your org?
- Name two questions you want your public funder to be able to answer about the AI software they are using to determine funding allocations?