



DIGITAL SKILLSETS FOR NONPROFITS:

*A Briefing Paper for
Foundations*

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 **TECHIMPACT[®]**
IDEALWARESM

WHY SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS THAT LACK TECHNICAL SKILLS?

If we told you the nonprofit sector has a systemic problem that foundations can help solve, you'd probably assume we were talking about funding. But we're not—at least, not directly—because what we're talking about is not a funding problem at all, but a people problem.

Nonprofits struggle to recruit and hire leaders that embrace technology and can speak the language sufficiently to grasp and articulate challenges and hire skilled technology staff to implement solutions.

By emphasizing digital skillsets and facilitating professional development, your foundation can help its grantees overcome this problem and magnify their impact dramatically. In short, you wouldn't fund a nonprofit whose staff lacked the financial, management, and communications skills necessary to succeed.

Organizations led by people with well-developed digital skillsets are better positioned to use technology to maximize their efficiency and effectiveness. Just as executive directors don't need to be accountants to be effective financial stewards of their organizations, they don't need to be IT experts to steward the technological progress. They do need to meet a minimum level of digital literacy.

Idealware worked with a number of nonprofit leaders, executives,

and technology experts to research and publish [*Digital Skillsets: An Imperative for Today's Nonprofit Leaders*](#) to help organizations better understand why and how to prioritize these skills. Our hope is that this knowledge will build upon other work done by organizations such as NetHope to inspire funders to recognize the vital role strategic technology initiatives play in transforming the way organizations do work.

The following is a summary of key takeaways from our research.

“You can't grow without tech,” said Khuloud Odeh, Vice President of Information Technology and Chief Information Officer at the Urban Institute. “Even if you survive, you aren't going to make the impact that you can with tech.”





WHY ARE DIGITAL SKILLSETS CRITICAL?

As technology continues to accelerate the pace of change, it's incumbent on nonprofit leaders to keep up. In the course

of a day, executive directors will improve their nonprofits' impact on their communities by using digital skills in the following ways:

Executives with digital knowledge and funder support can recognize and take advantage of opportunities.



To make data-driven decisions and strategies.



To increase efficiency and help their budget-constrained organization do more with less.



To expand reach and connect with constituents.



To ask the right questions to evaluate candidates' experience, knowledge, and abilities when hiring and find the right people to lead technology initiatives.



To understand and prioritize risk management initiatives across their organizations.



To deepen relationships with clients, constituents, and supporters, and facilitate mission delivery.

This can help them position themselves as innovators and leaders sector-wide, and fundamentally change the way programs are run or services are delivered by making them more cost-effective, easier to manage, and better at meeting the needs of the communities they serve.

**DIGITAL LITERACY IS AN
IMPORTANT SKILLSET
TO BUILD AT ALL LEVELS
OF THE WORKFORCE.**

An organization's leader needs to model behaviors and attitudes, and understand the importance of programs that provide that training to ensure that staff at all levels have the skills they need.

HOW CAN YOUR FOUNDATION ACT ON THIS RESEARCH?

Nonprofits are typically risk-averse—primarily because they have to demonstrate to funders, donors, and board members

that they are making effective use of their limited funds. But innovation requires a certain level of risk.

HERE'S HOW YOU CAN HELP:

- Fund grantees to attend technology conferences.
- Give scholarships or reimbursement for technology workshops, webinars, and online courses.
- Host technology workshops.
- Share educational resources on your website and social media.
- Alert grantees to new resources and learning opportunities.
- Fund development of sector-specific tech resources, especially for small orgs.

Facilitate access to peer advisory groups and mentoring.

“

Leaders who are engaged and open to new ideas will generate excitement and engagement, while those who lack interest or curiosity breed a generalized resistance to change or poor decision-making based on incomplete information.

”

–Alix Dunn, Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society fellow

WHERE CAN YOU LEARN MORE?

Download Idealware's white paper, *Digital Skillsets: An Imperative for Today's Nonprofit Leaders...*

<https://www.idealware.org/reports/digital-skillsets/>

ABOUT TECH IMPACT

Tech Impact is a nonprofit on a mission to empower communities and nonprofits to use technology to better serve the world. A leading provider of technology education and solutions for nonprofits, it also operates award-winning IT and customer experience training programs designed to help young adults launch careers.

In 2018, it expanded its education and outreach capabilities by merging with Idealware, an authoritative source for independent, thoroughly researched, impartial, accessible resources about software to help nonprofits and the philanthropic sector make smart software decisions.

Visit www.idealware.org to find more resources, or learn more about our other work at www.techimpact.org.

AUTHORS AND CONTRIBUTORS:

Karen Graham,
*Director of Education
and Outreach*

Chris Bernard,
Managing Editor

