



FUTURE-PROOF YOUR GRANTEES

10 Ways to Fund Nonprofits for Long-Term Success

March 2020

 **TECHIMPACT**[®]
IDEALWARESM

WHY YOU SHOULD SUPPORT TECHNOLOGY

Wouldn't it be nice if you could fund a single project that would have a positive impact throughout all of your grantees' programs and services? There is: Technology capacity building.

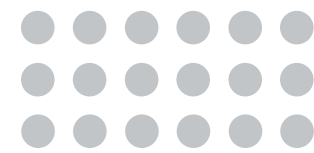


Technology in and of itself will not save lives or end world hunger. But it can have a powerful effect on every organization's mission. Properly supported, the right technologies can build your grantees' effectiveness and efficiency and multiply the impact of your other grants and programs.

Many foundations are reluctant to support technology projects. As a result, many nonprofits are reluctant to directly ask for that support.

Tech Impact Idealware created this guide as a resource to bridge that gap. What's inside:

- Why nonprofits need your help with technology.
- How you can fit technology capacity building into your current work and granting guidelines.
- 10 ways you can support your grantees' technology capacity.
- Examples of foundations that have successfully implemented those tactics.
- Resources to help you implement your own technology capacity building program.



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WHY TECHNOLOGY IS IMPORTANT

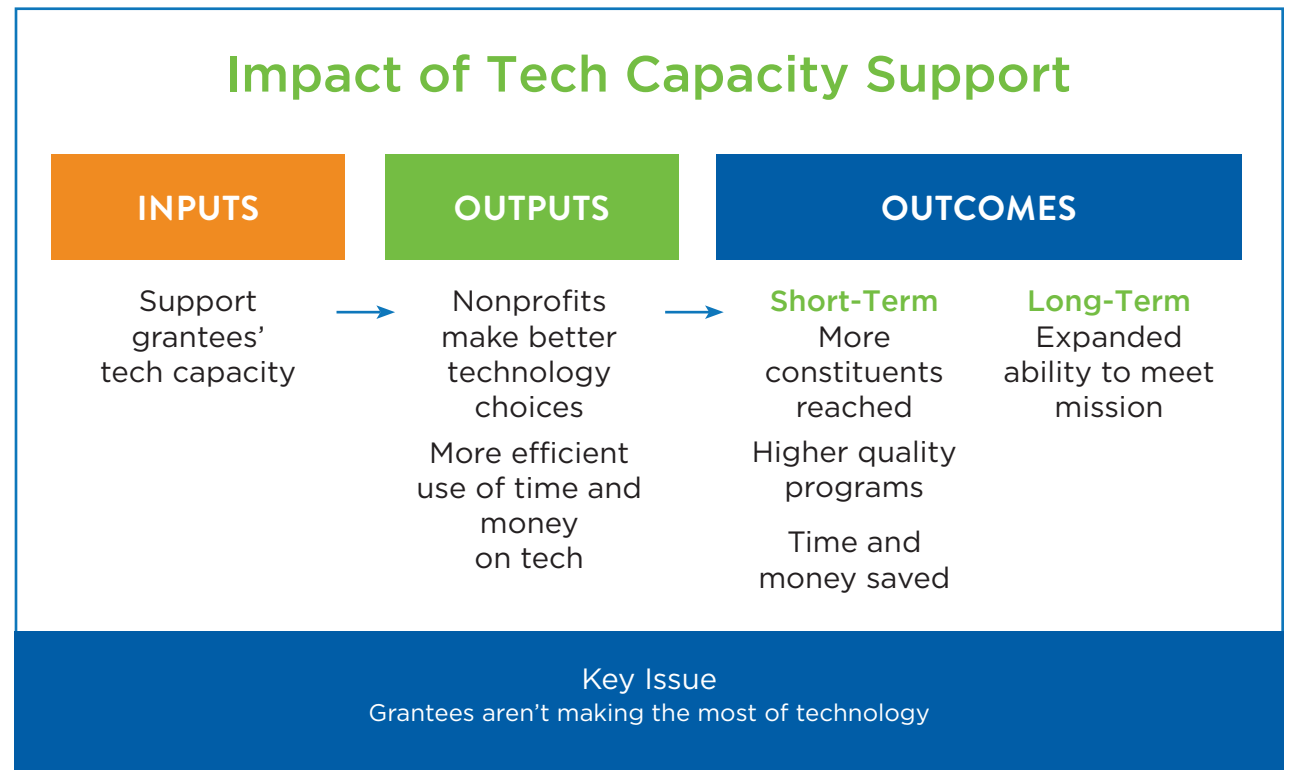
Too many foundations dismiss technology as peripheral to the important work they fund. But even a small investment in your grantees' technology can have a large impact on their missions.

Investing in your grantees' technology infrastructure—whether purchasing actual hardware, helping them choose software, building technology skills, or providing technology help—has a direct impact on their work. Technology may not feed hungry people, but it can allow a nonprofit to feed more people, better reach the people who most need food, and provide additional high quality services.

For example, the new database you fund enables a nonprofit's staff to manage and update constituent information faster

and more reliably than their old Excel spreadsheets. They can now spend less time searching for information and more time directly serving constituents, and serve their clients better because they know more about them. And they can more effectively reach out to possible partners and funders to substantially scale the number of people they serve over time.

The power of a technology investment is particularly large for the vast majority of nonprofits that are understaffed and that have under-invested in technology. The staff and leadership often have a deep skill and passion for their missions, but no specific technology skills. Even straightforward technologies may provide a new window into more effective and efficient ways to do what they do best.



WHAT TECHNOLOGY MEANS TO A NONPROFIT

Technology applies in many different ways to a nonprofit's day-to-day operations—some are similar to the foundation and corporate worlds, and some very different.

Technology is a collection of tools and strategies that support how an organization works toward its mission. If a nonprofit is using the wrong software—too big, too small, or too low-quality—or not using software at all, technology is taking time away from the organization's mission instead of supporting its work.

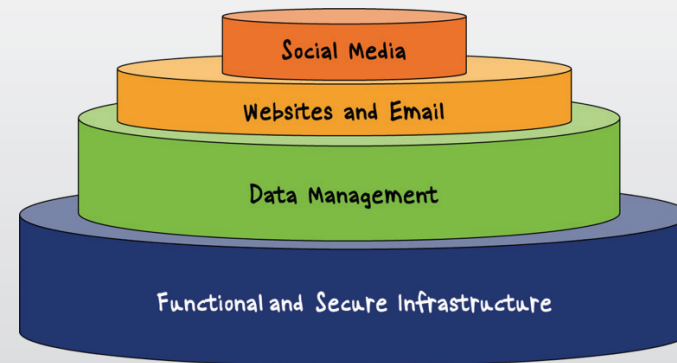
Consider technology as a pyramid: a hierarchy of technology needs. At the bottom of the pyramid is a functional and secure infrastructure, the base of effective nonprofit technology. It doesn't make sense for a nonprofit to think strategically about how technology can help its

mission if staff can't share files, don't have a word processing program, or can't reliably access the internet. The issues on this level of the pyramid tend to be similar across all organizations from nonprofits to foundations to corporations, but many nonprofits tend to be very small—and all-too-frequently understaffed—making it critical to ensure that solutions are right-sized and easy to manage.

Beyond infrastructure, it's also important for nonprofits to think about how they manage data. A constituent management system for clients, donors, and anyone else who's important to the organization can help efficiently collect, manage, and report on that data. Constituent systems tend to be very specifically tailored to nonprofits, or even a particular sector.

The Tech Pyramid

The Technology Pyramid provides a useful way to conceptualize how technology fits into the nonprofit world.



It's also important for nonprofits, like any organization, to think about communications. A website is an organization's online public face and should be tailored to its goals and brand. Broadcast email is the organization's online mouthpiece—how it sends resources, updates, and other information to an entire list of constituents at once. Finally, social media—including Facebook, Twitter, or blogs—is an effective way for nonprofits to move from simply talking to their supporters (like through email blasts) to talking with them. In addition to providing an online voice, social media also lets organizations build and foster their community of supporters online.

It's not necessary for nonprofits to work from the bottom up—in many cases it may be more practical to think tactically about individual needs rather than sticking to a hierarchy—but they'll likely get more “bang-for-the-buck” by getting the bottom levels in order first. It doesn't make sense to worry about Facebook and Twitter, for instance, if staff can't accomplish basic tasks like reliably accessing the internet.

Barriers to Technology

The right technology can support nonprofits and improve how they work, but all too often a number of barriers stand between an organization and effective technology. These include:

- Lack of knowledge as to what can best help them.
- Lack of money to buy the hardware or software they know they need.
- Lack of staff time to figure out complex technology issues.
- Lack of knowledgeable personnel to support technology.
- Fear of technology or change.
- Thinking of technology as peripheral to their mission.
- Well-meaning advice that steers them to solutions that can't be supported.
- Using solutions that don't have any external support available.
- Turnover of staff members who understand the technology infrastructure.

Every one of these barriers can be overcome.

UNDERSTANDING GRANTEE NEEDS

Before you can effectively provide help, you need to know where your grantees are struggling.

It's important to understand what your grantees' most important needs are. Nonprofits' needs differ depending on sector, staffing, and what help—if any—they might be getting from other foundations or networks. An assessment of your grantees can help you evaluate how you could best make a real difference for their organizations.

This doesn't mean that you should send a staff member with a clipboard to visit every grantee—in addition to taking a lot of time, that would also be intimidating. Grantees commonly feel that admitting problem areas to funders will jeopardize their eligibility for funding, making any data you collect directly unreliable at best. How can you get honest feedback?

One way is to contract a third party who can talk to your grantees or conduct a survey and make recommendations as to which projects would have the most impact.

Or, you can use an inexpensive online tool such as SurveyMonkey to ask grantees about their core needs.

Sample Survey

Based on Idealware's experience with technology assessments, we've created a short sample survey to inspire you.

	YES	NO	I DON'T KNOW	N/A
Does each full-time staff member have reliable access to his/her own computer, with internet access?				
Do you have a file server to help staff share files?				
Can staff members update the text on your website without knowledge of HTML?				
Do you send out a periodic eNewsletter?				
Have you done any fundraising appeals by email?				
Do you have a database (not Excel) where you can easily track and manage your donors?				
Are you tracking constituent data in more than two different systems or spreadsheets?				
Are you tracking metrics to help you evaluate the success of your programs?				
	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
We know who to go to when we have a more complex technology issue.				
We can easily create the lists of constituents that we want for programs and outreach.				
We can measure how well we're achieving our goals using online communication tools.				

TECHNOLOGY IS A MULTIPLIER FOR YOUR MISSION

When considering your mission, it's important to think of technology not just as computers and software, but as a toolkit to help grantees make the most of your support.

As earlier discussed, technology is a tool to help nonprofits meet their missions. It provides both short- and long-term impact to help grantees further their work. By building technology capacity, you pave the way for grantees to become more self-sufficient with technology in the future.

It's all too easy to quickly decide that technology doesn't fit into the work you fund, or within your grant guidelines. You may say, "We're not familiar with technology and need to stick close to our mission. We'll leave the technology stuff to the foundations that specialize in technology." Unfortunately, few foundations specialize in technology, and the only way most nonprofits can

fund their technology infrastructure is to convince foundations that are passionate about their mission to provide funds in ways that can be used for technology.

If you think of technology capacity building not as a program in and of itself, however, but as a multiplier that increases the effectiveness of grants you've already made and will make in the future, it fits within any foundation's mission. In the case of communication technology, it can help grantees reach more constituents. It can help grantees work smarter by reaching the people that need their services. By improving their technology infrastructure, nonprofits can provide higher-quality services as well. By using the right technology, organization staff

can work more efficiently, spending less time finding physical files or dealing with slow or outdated systems and more time working directly with constituents. And it can help them collect the data that tracks the programs your foundation supports.

Technology is important to every nonprofit, and is therefore tied to every foundation's mission. It provides a toolkit to ensure your grantees are making the most of your other grants.

“Providing technology information to our grantees leverages the money we've already invested—it helps maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of their projects.”

— Polly Seitz, Director, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Local Funding Partnerships

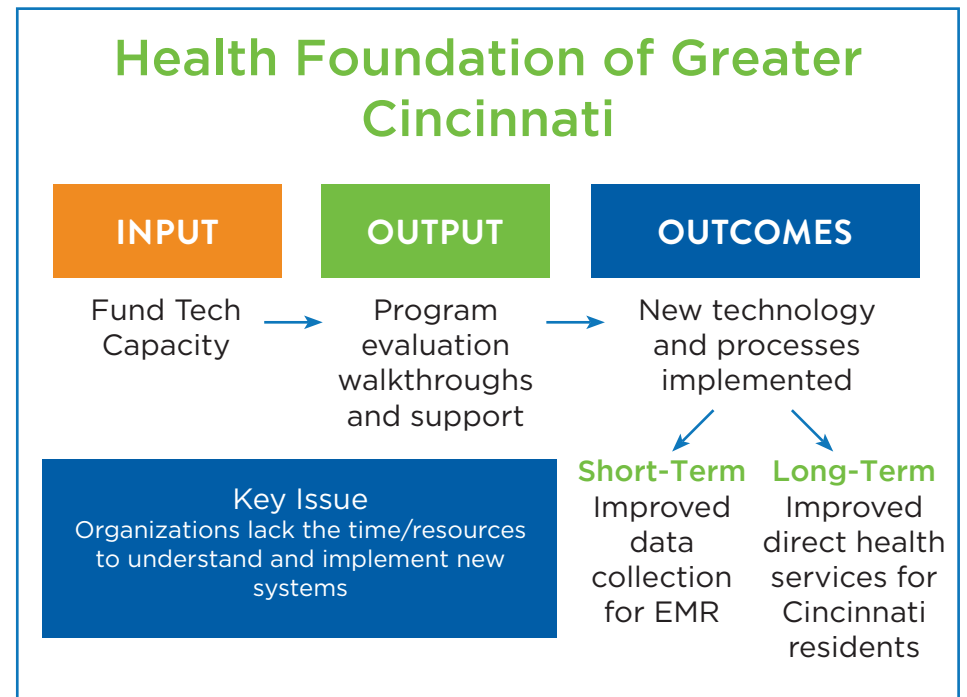
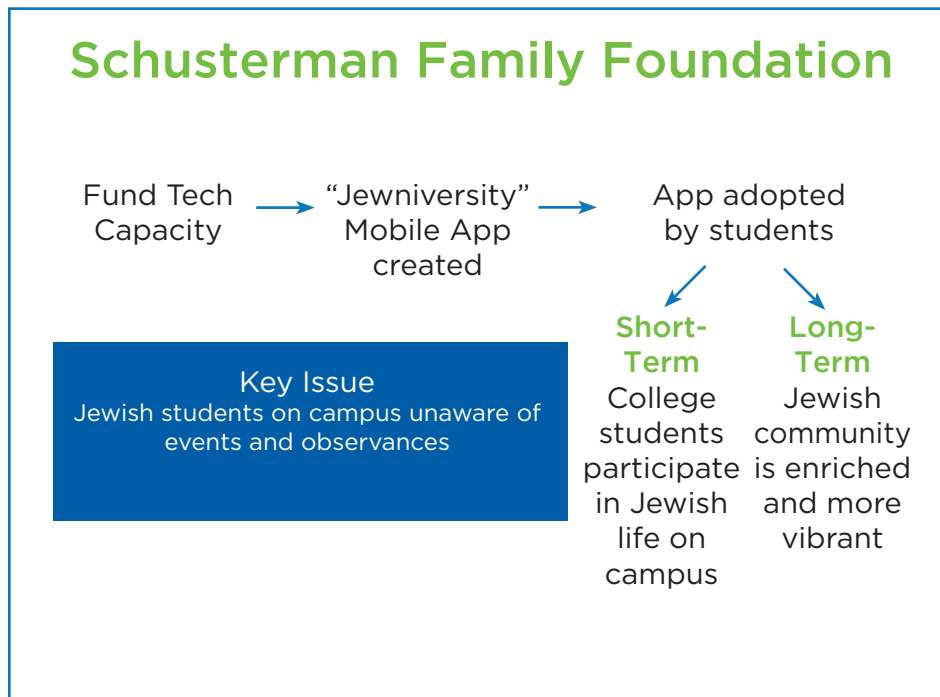
Case Studies

The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, a large foundation that promotes vibrant Jewish life among other focus areas, joined with two other foundations to create the Jewish New Media Innovation Fund, a pilot program providing a pool of grants for technology projects. One of the inaugural recipients was the Jewniversity Mobile App, which includes a calendar of campus events, holidays, and activity recommendations for Jewish college students.

This app was built on the premise that college students could still find opportunities to engage in meaningful Jewish experiences even while adjusting to new schedules, which speaks directly to the purpose of the fund and the mission of the Foundation.

Several years ago the Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati started a conversation with its grantees about adopting electronic data management systems. The foundation learned that organizations had difficulty selecting,

understanding, and implementing these case management, outcomes management, and electronic medical record systems, and began providing consultation, technical assistance, and funding for several grantees in this area. Participating grantees improved their data collection strategies, were better equipped to comply with external reporting requirements (including the foundation's reporting requirements), and were able to begin using data to support program improvement.



TACTICS FOR SUPPORTING TECHNOLOGY

Technology can make a world of difference for your grantees, but how can you best support it?



In the first section, we walked through why it's important to consider supporting your grantees' technology capacity. In this section we'll talk about how to do that. We've highlighted 10 different tactics for supporting your grantees' technology, from smaller methods that take relatively little time or investment to implement up through more advanced or resource-intensive methods. You'll also find case studies of how real-life foundations have successfully implemented these tactics.

In the last section, you'll find advice for where to start, including how to get buy-in from your own organization.

1. NEWSLETTERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Communication channels that let you reach a large number of grantees at the same time, like email newsletters and social media, are effective and low-cost ways to provide your grantees tips and links.

While you might not realize it, you likely know about a lot of resources that could help your grantees. Sending out an eNewsletter is an easy, regularly scheduled way to share those resources. You can include a mix of different tips and resources along with a few resources specifically related to technology. By sending grantees a set of tips as part of a scheduled email, you're much more likely to get them to perceive those resources as helpful advice rather than an edict from a funder.

Social media like Facebook and Twitter can also be a useful channel to share other people's technology resources. Unlike email, social media allows your grantees to discuss the resources you

share and lets you answer their immediate questions.

What sort of resources can you share? In addition to simple tech tips, look to blog posts, articles, or reports from consultants or tech capacity-building organizations like NTEN, TechSoup, or Idealware. You can also use your communications to let grantees know about upcoming technology trainings, either in-person or online.

This tactic requires little time commitment—only what's needed to find the resources or tips to share—and virtually no monetary investment, so can be a great place to start in helping your grantees with technology.

Case Studies

The Community Foundation of Sarasota County, Florida, sends out a monthly eNewsletter that includes online resources to grantees and the community-at-large. In addition to more general capacity-building resources, each eNewsletter used to include a "Tech Corner" with resources from nuts-and-bolts tech tips to guides for strategic uses of such technology as social media. This tactic was a low-investment way for the foundation to establish itself as a network hub for its community, which it continues by sharing these resources via social media.

The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, a large Jewish foundation, is using Twitter, Facebook, and its own blog to share online resources with grantees. Its communication staff spends a few hours a week posting from two to 10 times per day, with one post every other day about technology. In addition to sharing resources, the foundation also passes on what it is learning about technology and shares its own expertise. Overall, the foundation has found success in this tactic by thinking of itself as both a hub of technology resources and a model for its community of grantees.

2. SHARING EXISTING RESOURCES

Consider linking your grantees to the vast number of existing resources that can help them with their needs.

Many people and organizations already offer free and helpful technology resources—just providing easy access to these existing resources can be a very useful step. Consider creating a virtual resource library on your website or elsewhere that can point grantees to such helpful online resources as articles or reports.

You could also buy a specific book or set of books to distribute to all of your grantees.

Don't underestimate your own tech knowledge, either. By making your own staff members available to consult with grantees, you can help provide your own knowledge and get a better idea of their technology needs.

Case Studies

A private foundation with a focus on organizations that support underserved youth created a virtual resource library for grantees. Fund staff use this space to post free and low-cost events, training, and online resources for grantees, and update it quarterly. This site includes best practices and technology resources on such core nonprofit areas as fundraising and communications. The feedback from grantees has been positive—the library provides a number of valuable resources they probably wouldn't have discovered or known about on their own.

Additional Resources

Where can you find technology resources to share with your grantees? Here's a list of technology support and capacity-building organizations that provide good technology resources:

- **Tech Impact Idealware.** Provides articles, reports, and trainings on a wide variety of nonprofit software, including data management, email and communications, and fundraising, as well as information about how nonprofits can evaluate software for themselves. www.techimpact.org
- **NPower.** Connects nonprofits with pro bono IT support and training. www.npower.org
- **NTEN.** Provides tech tips, research, training, and events. www.NTEN.org
- **@NPTechBlogs.** This Twitter feed automatically consolidates blog posts created by a number of nonprofit technology experts and consultants.
- **TechSoup Global.** Provides articles and resources on technology and software in addition to a marketplace of software discounted for nonprofits. www.TechSoup.org

3. TRAINING

Online or in-person training is an excellent way to help build grantees' technology knowledge, and can take many forms—from the small and simple to large and intensive.



Many nonprofits don't have anyone on staff with a background in technology, and may lack the basic skills and knowledge that could make a big difference. Training empowers your grantees to make good technology decisions on their own. You can help by letting grantees know about upcoming training provided by other organizations, or foster learning by purchasing ongoing seats in existing training programs to let grantees attend for free.

Or consider hosting your own. Whether simple hour-long webinars, in-person half day courses, or multi-day conferences, training events can be great ways for grantees to learn from experts, foundation staff, and each other. Expect contracting an expert trainer to cost only a few hundred dollars for an online seminar up to a few thousand for a live day-long workshop.

Case Studies

When the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis recognized a need among its grantees for technology planning, it worked with Idealware to design an eight-month-long training course. The program starts with a full-day in-person training and continues with six monthly webinars before concluding with another full-day in-person workshop. Throughout the course, participants

complete “homework,” meet with a small peer group of fellow classmates, and develop their own technology plans step-by-step. In the final, in-person workshop, participants each present their tech plans and their next steps for moving forward with their technology infrastructure.

Training Possibilities

How can you support your grantees through training? Here are a few possibilities:

- Send grantees links to interesting trainings.
- Invite grantees to watch an online training with you.
- Purchase seats in webinars or live workshops for your grantees.
- Purchase seats to on-demand, recorded trainings.
- Bring in experts for informal Q&A sessions.
- Invite your own staff to train grantees on topics they know about.
- Contract someone to conduct a webinar for your grantees.
- Contract someone to conduct live half- or full-day workshops.

4. PEER CONVENINGS

You don't necessarily need to provide the expertise yourself—think about how your grantees can learn from each other.

Your grantees all have some things in common: They all do work that relates to your mission, and they all struggle with similar technology issues. But some likely have insights into these problems. These organizations have a lot to gain by talking to each other about their experiences. By providing a space for your grantees to have these discussions, you're building their technology capacity while also helping them create a support network.

Think about forming a peer learning group or regular meet-ups for your grantees to talk with each other and learn about technology. These sessions can be in-person at your foundation or a local community space, and won't cost you anything but the space—and perhaps a few refreshments. You could also consider hosting a group via conference call or video conference, like Skype or Google Hangouts, instead of in-person.



Case Studies

Community Foundation Santa Cruz County has established a set of social media peer learning groups about Facebook. Three staff members from each interested organization meet monthly for six months to support each other in the creation and implementation of a specific social media experiment. In addition to the meetings, the program includes two

conference calls with a visiting expert from the Packard Foundation. Packard provided the expert time without charge, so this program costs the foundation nothing but the staff time invested in organizing the learning groups.

Should Your Staff Attend?

When you facilitate peer learning groups for your grantees, should someone from your foundation attend? There are some useful reasons to participate:

- Can you learn more about your grantees' needs?
- Could you find new technology projects to fund?
- Can you share your own expertise with participants?

But there are also strong reasons to sit out the discussion:

- Will your grantees feel uncomfortable sharing failures or difficulties in front of you?
- Will grantees feel that they have to “show off” in front of you?
- Do you have anything to add to the discussion?

5. TECHNOLOGY AS A PROPOSAL LINE ITEM

If you decide to fund technology, you don't need to necessarily create a new type of "technology grant." Simply allowing grantees to include technology costs as a line item in proposals will encourage them to think about and share their needs in this area.

Even if technology isn't part of your foundation's granting guidelines, there's likely nothing to preclude you from funding it as part of a project. After all, you may already be funding such things as evaluation expenses and travel costs, which are typically just considered a cost of effectively carrying out a project. In the same way, technology is simply a cost of doing business in today's world, and should be thought of as a necessary program expense.

Allowing a budget line item for technology like you would with evaluation costs signals to your grantees that you value technology and gives them

permission to think strategically about how technology can serve their missions. It also encourages them to be transparent about the real costs of technology instead of hiding them in other line items or trying to stretch the allowable general operating costs to include them.

Case Studies

The Verizon Foundation includes technology costs as a line item on its standard grant application. The Financials section asks for a typical breakdown of direct costs—those defined as specifically directly attributable to the project—into 10 categories. In addition to typical categories like "Employee Salaries &

Benefit," "Materials & Supplies," and "Travel," the foundation provides lines for applicants to itemize costs for "IT Hardware" and "IT Software." Allowing these budget items as part of the direct costs rather than requiring them to be pulled into the "Other" section or hidden in the extra allowable 15 percent overhead costs signals that the foundation considers technology to be an integral part of many projects.

What Should You Ask in Your Proposal?

You might encourage program officers to simply ask about technology in their site visits to better determine whether grantseekers feel well-equipped to address technology needs. To help understand how technology fits in, consider:

- Including "Technology" as an expense line item in a standard budget form.
- As part of a narrative, asking, "How will you use technology to support this project? Will you need additional software, hardware, or skills beyond what you already have?"

6. TECHNOLOGY CAPACITY GRANTS

You can, of course, offer grants geared specifically at helping individual organizations build their technology capacity.

Nonprofits have trouble securing funding for technology. There are virtually no foundations that specifically focus on technology capacity; in practice, most nonprofits are reliant on earned income, individual donations, or general operating grants to cover technology expenses. Giving even a small grant could make the difference between being able to implement a new constituent database and continuing to use an inefficient (or nonexistent) system.

If you're concerned that your grantees won't use a tech grant effectively, it can be helpful to ask them to cross some sort of threshold before they can be eligible. For example, at the conclusion of a technology training program, participants could be invited to apply for a grant to put into practice what they learned. Through this method you can ensure that your grantees know how best to use the

grant and can evaluate and choose the right technology to meet their needs.

Case Studies

A Midwestern foundation wanted to help area nonprofits improve their fundraising and constituent data-management abilities. It planned to give grants to help in this area, but first it partnered each interested nonprofit with a fundraising consultant, offered one-on-one phone consulting with donor management software experts, and commissioned a webinar about donor data management best practices. Those that participated were then eligible to apply for a tech capacity grant. The foundation's upfront investment in building grantees' knowledge helped to ensure that the resulting proposals would focus on each organization's most-pressing needs.

Who Will Review Proposals for Technology?

If you're funding technology—either specifically or as part of a bigger project—you'll need someone who understands technology for nonprofits to review proposals. Do you have that knowledge on staff, or will you need to look outside the foundation? Don't assume that your own CIO or IT staff have the right set of skills—the technology to support a nonprofit program or needs can be very different than that to support a foundation. Consider sending one of your technology staffers to trainings or conferences, like NTEN's Nonprofit Technology Conference, to help them get up to speed on the differences and stay abreast of new trends. Or you could build a relationship with a consultant who can be on hand for review when you are unsure of the merit of a technology proposal.

7. PROVIDING DIRECT TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT

Consider providing help-desk services or support with small technical projects using your own staff or volunteers, or by hiring someone specifically for that role.

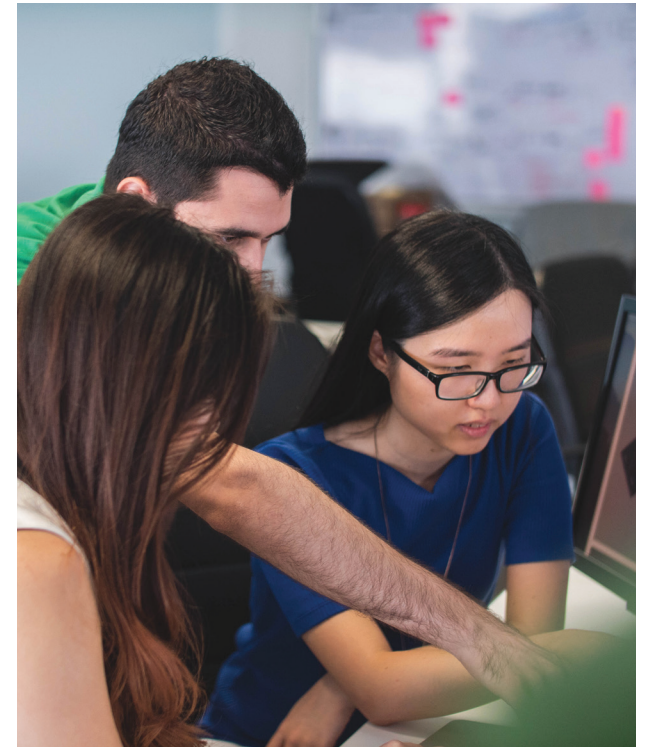
Many smaller organizations struggle not only to fund and implement technology, but to support it as well. It often doesn't make sense for a smaller nonprofit to hire a full-time IT staff member. By providing tech support to your grantees—whether through training, answering their technology questions, or providing a “circuit rider” who can visit the organization and support technology needs—you reduce individual IT costs and provide all of your grantees with the same level of support.

This model also allows and encourages your grantees to learn from each other. A circuit-rider, for example, can take what's been working for one organization and apply it to another so that each organization doesn't have to learn the same thing themselves.

Case Studies

The Pierce Family Foundation supports its grantees' IT and technology needs with a circuit rider—a technical generalist who does phone consulting and site visits to help each individual grantee. The circuit rider is able to provide general technology guidance and help to implement straightforward solutions—everything from installing virus protection software and troubleshooting databases to helping to evaluate where technology can have the biggest impact. By working directly with grantees, the circuit rider is also able to identify where additional help or funding could best be put to use.

The Coastal Community Foundation of South Carolina saw a clear need in its community of grantees for centralized



tech support. To meet this need, it created the Palmetto Technology Hub, a website that connects the community of nonprofits with skilled volunteers. The hub operates as an ongoing help ticket program—grantees submit a support ticket when they have an IT issue, and one of the program's 40 volunteers responds and fulfill the ticket. Around 40 support tickets were filled in 2011 and participant organizations were quite positive about their experience.

8. CREATING NEW RESOURCES

If your grantees need a resource that doesn't yet exist, consider creating it— or funding someone to do so.

What should you do if your grantees are struggling with an issue and you can't find any existing resources to help them? Consider creating a new resource. If it's useful to your grantees, it will likely be useful to other nonprofits as well, giving you even more bang for the buck.

In fact, your own staff may well have knowledge to share. Your foundation has had to figure out its own technology infrastructure—what you've learned through that process can be a valuable resource for your grantees. Simply putting out regular blog posts or short videos from your own IT staff on specific or general tech topics can be very helpful.

If you want to address a specific topic, however, it can often make sense to hire a consultant or outside organization. This doesn't have to be a terribly expensive proposition—you can fund an article or

informal video for under \$1,000. More detailed reports or research will obviously be more expensive, but a number of possibilities for resources and partners cost less than \$20,000.

Case Studies

Seeing the growing and widespread use of infographics in the nonprofit sector and an absence of resources for nonprofits looking to create their own, the Annie E. Casey Foundation decided to step in and fill the gap. Working with Idealware, it created a research report to help organizations understand data visualization, best practices for using infographics for marketing, and how to create them on a budget.

What Resources Could You Provide?

There are many ways to use your own tech knowledge to support your grantees. You could...

- Write articles about best practices for tech in your focus area.
- Create and distribute research surveys and present your findings.
- Write short blog posts with tech tips or your staff's personal experiences with technology.
- Fund or research reports or reviews of software and other tech topics.
- Post short videos in which your IT staff answers tech questions submitted by grantees.
- Create a workbook for grantees to evaluate their technology needs.

9. BUILDING TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS

If your grantees have a very specific set of needs, consider building a technology platform to meet them.

Several funders have seen success in building a software package or supporting a shared implementation of a package for their communities of grantees. Instead of funding one-off purchases of software, it's possible to create or provide a single platform that meets the needs of many organizations. This could make sense especially in the case of a set of grantees that need functionality that's too specific to a particular nonprofit niche for vendors to be able to affordably create software to support it. And if all your grantees are using the same system, they can share tips or other knowledge with each other, potentially bringing the community together.

While this approach can be very useful for some communities, it's often more expensive than expected. You'll need to think through who will support the platform over time—do you want to

be in the business of maintaining and distributing software, or will you fund an entity to support it in the long run? Before starting down this road, make sure it actually fills an important gap for your community—this should be a tactic of last resort.

And always keep in mind the directive, “First do no harm.” For some organizations already overwhelmed by multiple systems, the burden of one more can do more damage than good.

Case Studies

Integrated ticketing and constituent management systems are an essential tool for performing arts organizations, but many organizations don't have the resources to implement an optimal system. To remedy this, the Pew Charitable Trust and William Penn Foundation supported a subsidized

version of the Tessitura ticketing system for performing arts grantees through the Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia. By sharing this implementation, these nonprofits can now access this powerful software for much less than it would cost them individually.

What Technology Could You Provide?

You could...

- Provide subsidized licenses for a particular system to your grantees.
- Work with vendors to customize and support an implementation of their systems.
- Customize an existing platform or provide money for the expansion of an existing open source system.
- Build a new system from scratch.

10. FUNDING TECHNOLOGY CAPACITY PROVIDERS

By funding the nonprofits that build the technology capacity of the sector, you can raise the technology savvy not just of your grantees, but of all nonprofits.

There's a network of U.S.-based and international organizations that exist specifically to provide technology expertise for nonprofits. These organizations provide such resources as researched articles and reports, trainings, consulting, conferences, discounted software, and more.

It doesn't make sense for each nonprofit to work through their technology issues on their own. They share similar questions and seek software to fill similar needs. These nonprofit technology intermediaries help connect organizations to best practices, existing knowledge, and others who have had similar experiences instead of forcing them to reinvent the wheel.

These intermediaries themselves are mostly small nonprofits that struggle to provide high quality resources while still keeping them free or inexpensive for nonprofits. By funding these

organizations, you'll allow them to reach more nonprofits and put out more resources, boosting the capacity of the whole sector.

Case Studies

Patrick Collins, the Chief Information Officer of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, funds a number of tech capacity organizations. "It's often hard for a foundation to support technology grants for their grantees," he says. "There's a limit to how much direct technical support they can provide—because one size doesn't fit all, and some foundations simply don't have the expertise to assess technology-based proposals. It seems to me that the best bang for the buck is to support technology capacity building through a third party. Organizations like NTEN, Idealware, NetHope, and TechSoup do work which is so much broader and deeper than any one foundation can do."

Examples of Technology Capacity Providers

- **Tech Impact Idealware.** Provides researched, impartial and accessible resources to help nonprofits make smart software decisions.

www.idealware.org

- **NTEN.** The membership organization of nonprofit technology professionals.

www.NTEN.org

- **NetHope.** Enables humanitarian organizations to better serve the developing world through smarter use of technology.

www.nethope.org

- **TechSoup Global.** A nonprofit connecting nonprofits and public libraries with products and resources needed to make informed decisions about technology.

www.techsoup.org

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Of course, these tactics to support technology are only effective if you can put them into action.



It takes planning and opportunity to implement a program to support your grantees' tech capacity. Change won't come overnight, and it's possible that you'll meet actual resistance within your foundation. In this section we'll talk about how to overcome those barriers and get started. It may not be easy—if it was, you wouldn't be reading this right now—but success breeds success, and each program you implement will be easier than the one before it.

CONVINCING YOUR ORGANIZATION

If we've convinced you that it makes sense to do more, how do you convince your foundation?

Trying something new isn't easy. If you want to roll out a new technology support initiative, you'll likely need to get buy-in from your organization. How do you go about it?

It's helpful to start out small and prove that it can work for your foundation. Gather a few allies internal to your organization and think through what team or department is best-suited to think about your technology capacity-building strategy—and then to execute it. It can also be very help to talk to people at other foundations who have done something similar.

If you run into resistance, help your colleagues think through whether their concerns are linked to your ability to partner with grantees to meet your mission or are more a product of fear of change or technology. We've provided some common objections in the next section.

Think of simple, straightforward tactics you can implement now. Keep track of your progress, measure your success, and gather evidence for why your foundation should continue to support technology. Success, even at a small scale, breeds more success and leads to staff buy-in.

How Will the Program Fit Into Your Organization?

What internal team might “own” technology capacity building?

The program staff. Perhaps each program officer will think about how capacity building fits in for their program—and you can work with a single program for a pilot.

- **The IT team.** Your own technology staff might be a conduit to help the foundation think through how best to support grantees' technology needs.
- **The communications team.** In some foundations, the marketing staff works directly with grantees to build their skills, especially in online communications.
- **The grants management team.** Your grants management team may be the people who work most closely with grantees and can be an interesting ally or home base for capacity building.

SOME COMMON OBJECTIONS

When you talk to people about supporting technology, you may hear some objections. We've likely heard them all. Here are some of the most common, with our responses.

- 1. Supporting technology costs too much.** It doesn't have to cost anything. There are a number of things you can do—like providing links to existing resources or hosting convenings—that cost nothing and only take a few hours of time.
- 2. We don't know enough about technology to support it.** There are experts who would love to help you. Reach out to a consultant or nonprofit technology support intermediary for advice.
- 3. Technology isn't part of our mission or grant guidelines.** Technology is important to every nonprofit, and thus ties to any mission which involves supporting nonprofit work. Technology is an enabler that will maximize the effectiveness of your other grants.
- 4. Technology changes too fast—if we start supporting it, we'll never be able to stop.** Technology does change. Like any other nonprofit need, you're not likely to permanently solve your grantees' technology issues... but that doesn't mean you can't make a huge difference, even with a one-time investment.
- 5. We've never done something like this before.** If you want to support your grantees' effectiveness, you'll need to start somewhere.
- 6. As a funder, we can't provide advice without it seeming like we're giving a mandate.** It's important to keep in mind that your words carry a lot of weight for your grantees. But many funders successfully provide information and resources that help nonprofits without mandating a change. Be clear in your communication about the difference between direct requests and helpful hints.
- 7. We tried it before, and it didn't work.** There's many different ways to approach capacity building—if one doesn't work for you, it's well worth trying another.
- 8. Nonprofits don't know what technologies they need.** If you're unsure that your grantees know what their own needs are, provide training or resources before considering direct funding support.
- 9. Nonprofits have more-pressing direct needs.** Sure—however, technology is well worth considering at a similar level of priority as other capacity needs.
- 10. We don't know where to start.** Never fear—that's exactly what's coming next...

GETTING STARTED

You know that technology is important to your grantees... but how do you get started? Here are 10 simple steps you can take to build the technology capacity of your grantees.

- 1. Gather allies.** Who else in your foundation would be interested in helping you think this through?
- 2. Understand grantee needs.** Send out a survey or talk to organizations to find out how you can maximize the help you give to grantees.
- 3. Think through your options.** Read through this guide and talk to other foundations to think about the tactics that might work for your community.
- 4. Pick an easy place to start.** What would fit in best with your foundation's goals? What will be an easy sell internally?
- 5. Define success.** How will you know if it works?
- 6. Line up someone to help.** Define who you'll turn to when you're looking for technology resources or advice.
- 7. Get started.** Kick off a small initiative. If you can achieve success with something, it will be easier to try a bigger program in the future.
- 8. Evaluate.** Measure and monitor progress toward success.
- 9. Iterate.** How did it work? Should you continue down that path, or try something else?
- 10. Don't give up.** If your first attempt wasn't successful, what can you do differently?

BUILDING ON YOUR SUCCESS

If you've already started down the path, how do you continue building the technology capacity of the sector? Here are 10 steps to help keep supporting your grantees needs and growing capacity for the entire sector.

- 1. Assess what's working for you.** There's no sense changing something that's already had a positive effect.
- 2. Improve what isn't working.** Talk to your grantees for ways to improve. Or, think about different areas to focus on.
- 3. Deepen your initiatives.** If you've taken some small steps to share technology knowledge, are there other tactics that would have even more impact?
- 4. Get other programs on board.** Are there other programs within your foundation that would benefit from the same tactics that have worked for you?
- 5. Collaborate.** Work with other funders on a program to reach a bigger audience and make a bigger impact.
- 6. Share your successes with the sector.** Your knowledge and experience can help other funders—consider sharing it through articles, blogs, or conferences.
- 7. Be a mentor.** Offer your knowledge and experience to other foundations just starting to support technology.
- 8. Convene foundations to discuss technology.** Form or join a network of foundations interested in this area.
- 9. Support the sector.** Fund or engage with capacity-building organizations to support technology capacity sector-wide.
- 10. Keep up the good work!**

“Helping our grantees’ use technology effectively is the most cost-effective investment we could ever make.”

—David Krumlauf, *The Pierce Family Foundation*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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WANT HELP? LET'S TALK

Here at Tech Impact Idealware, it's part of our mission to help foundations think through how to help support their grantees' technology capacity. We're a 501(c)(3) nonprofit ourselves, and we know that every foundation that devotes even a small amount of staff time or resources toward helping its grantees with technology can have a big impact on our own mission: ensuring that nonprofits make smart software choices.

If you want to talk through the options or challenges for your foundation, we're here to help without charge.

If you want to talk through the options or challenges for your foundation, we're here to help, without charge. We've worked with a number of foundations and networks to define an action plan that will work for them, and are eager to help you as well.

Call 207-613-7368 or email karen@idealware.org

ABOUT TECH IMPACT IDEALWARE

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.