

IT for Non Profit

Vafa Adib, Greg Campbell - 2018

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In the current business climate there is an expectation that a dynamic IT component is a basic requirement which directly impacts performance, productivity and improvement. Successful enterprises work continuously to maintain this dynamism. Unfortunately this is seldom the case in the not for profit sector. Agencies rarely receive adequate or ongoing support dedicated to their IT systems. Typically, an organization tried to remain within two versions of current hardware and software. Much of this was accomplished through donations of hardware that was nearing shelf life expiration. Most of the hardware such as servers, network switches, laptops etc. have been always donated as second hand and in used condition and obviously out of warranty. Periodically, an organization would receive a “one time” grant that would allow it to upgrade and for a time, have a better system in place. This respite is unfortunately temporary.

In the past many data enquiries could be managed on simple excel files or even hard copies. Today, there is rapid growth and new development in hardware and software technology. There is an increased expectation, from funders and donors, around data collection and service outcomes. This is further linked to overall quality improvement. The days of tracking the client experience with pen and paper are long gone. Most of the hardware devices that used to be “nice to have” are now “must have” and functioning without them is almost impossible.

On the human resource side, the new generation of employees including Millennials is more comfortable with computers and mobile devices. They have learned to maximize the benefits of these tools which in turn can contribute to effectiveness and efficiency.

There is also the concern for personal security. This is increasing as agencies address access barriers through community outreach services.

The way potential and current clients interact with a service is evolving. Access through the web and online service is more common. New standards of best practice have been developed by accreditation bodies (e.g. COA, CARF, CCA). They deal with issues related to privacy and the protection of vulnerable clients. In short, the whole service sector is evolving more rapidly than the functional capacity to serve.

There are some positive signs of change on the horizon. Industry leaders like Microsoft, Cisco, and Adobe are very ahead of the game. They are collaborating with “TechSoup” in order to provide the sector with subsidized affordable IT products, including hardware and software. This benefits the sector immensely.

Innovative funders are taking the position that IT related expenses are more investments in client services rather than capital acquisitions. Clear outcomes will

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demonstrate impact and have a positive result in donor support. In addition it will promote the innovation and evolution of human service.

Finally, progressive agencies are implementing systems that demonstrate impact and effectiveness. This will guide them through a practice of continuous quality improvement

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A concerted effort from all parties will be required to make the necessary change.