Getting the Most from Your Decision:

Four Steps to Selecting Donor Management Software

NPower Seattle

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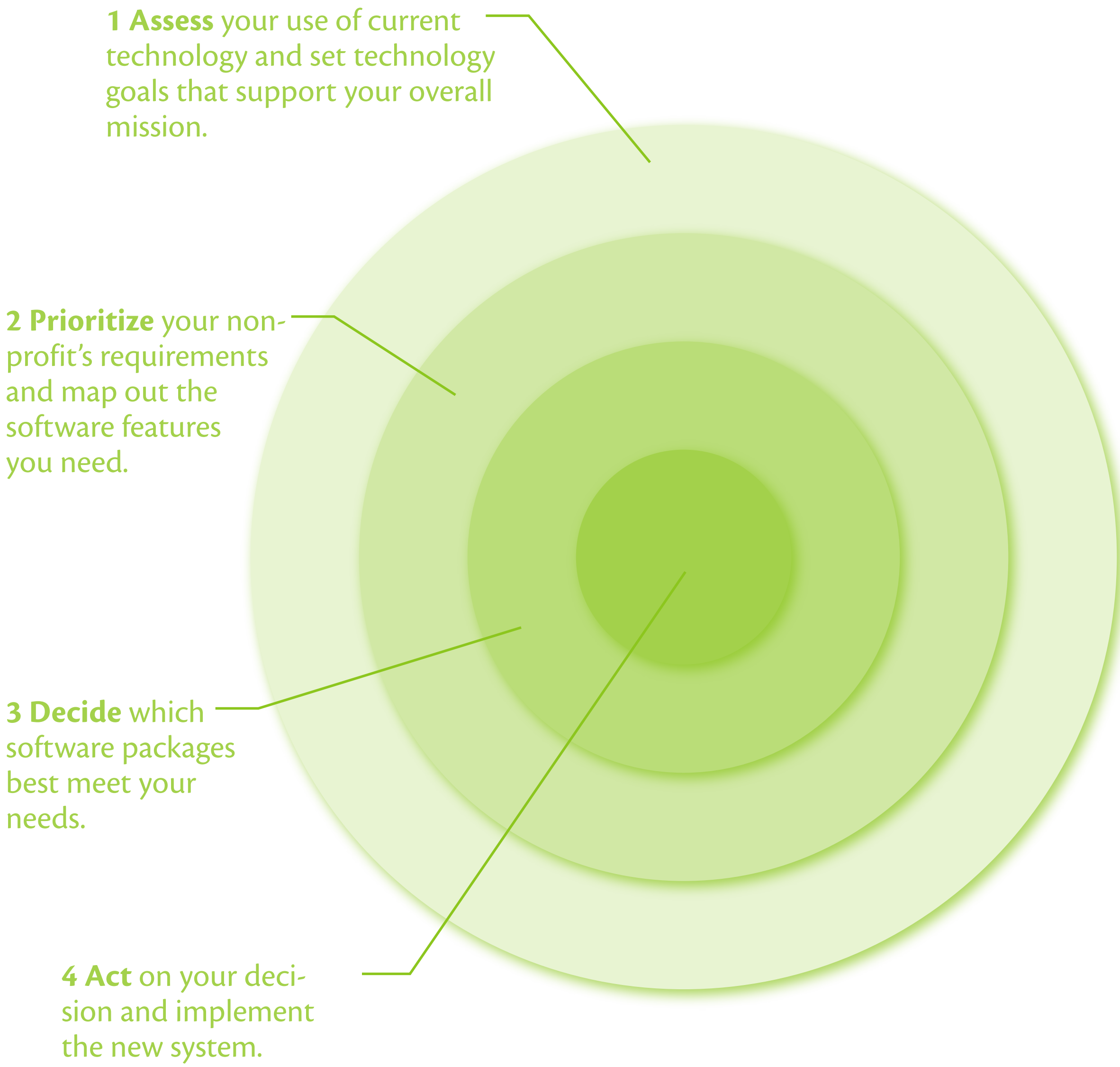

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is for any nonprofit employee or manager given the task of selecting software for managing donors.

If you use donor management software today, you probably have a long list of things you like and dislike about your current system. The toolkit will help you document and prioritize your needs moving forward. On the other hand, if your organization has no donor management software today, this a great place to start.

Whatever your software needs or budget, we believe that the process we suggest for selecting a donor management solution will help you move forward. In some cases, your organization may need additional help from technology professionals in planning for and selecting software; we'll point out some of the reasons to seek additional help and recommend places to look.

Why use donor management software?

Nonprofits are charged with more than "doing good works" for the communities in which they reside. You are also asked to run fiscally sound businesses and make savvy funding and smart finance decisions in an ever changing landscape. Nonprofit organizations regularly face:

- the challenge of accomplishing a mission with limited resources and high accountability for expenditures regularly considered "overhead".
- donation and grant dependent funding where success is defined by an ability to tap into and grow these donor bases as efficiently and effectively as possible.
- limited in-house technology expertise tasked with maintaining and managing unusual and detailed data to support your services.
- multiple systems that can inadvertently complicate tasks because data is stored in multiple locations that don't talk with one another.

The good news is that there is technology available, at a range of costs, to help you navigate the funding landscape. Donor management software packages help you manage vital relationships with active and prospective donors by tracking contact information, keeping records of correspondence and donations, managing grant deadlines, and producing detailed reports. Some of these software packages also allow you to keep data in sync with other information management systems that you already have in use. In fact, vendors interested in capitalizing on the $700 billion nonprofit software market industry are offering a wide array of off-the-shelf fundraising solutions aimed at navigating the landscape for you.

The great news is that, no matter how daunting or confusing all those choices can be, you have already honed many of the skills you'll need to select donor management software. It is a matter of applying your skills to the process of selecting the software tool that is right for you. That's where this toolkit comes in.

Buying vs. Building Your Own

Are you considering building your own donor system in a database system, programming language, or website? Our toolkit focuses on selecting **off-the-shelf donor management software** rather than creating a system of your own. Because so many good donor systems are available today at a variety of prices, we believe that organizations are best served by taking advantage of existing software.

Although developing your own software may be tempting, the advantages are outweighed by the risks of custom development. You are a nonprofit, not a software development company—unless there is a compelling reason to create your own software, leave it to someone else!

Most nonprofits find that their donor management needs align well with available software. Still, some nonprofits have unique needs that aren't met by any system "out of the box." Fortunately, some of the systems we discuss in the toolkit can be customized extensively. Be aware, however, that customizing may come at additional cost, especially if it requires the help of a software consultant.

INTRODUCTION

How this toolkit will help

When planning for new technology, we have seen nonprofits achieve the best outcome when they think in terms of a process – a series of conversations that brings the technical solutions into ever-greater focus – rather than in terms of a single decision. After all, any software selection is as much about the requirements of the buyer as the technology available. What tools do you need to get your work done and meet the organization's mission? Examining your organization's plans, people, and processes will help you best understand the hierarchy of technical needs that any new technology must meet.

This toolkit has been designed to walk you through that process of discovery. At the end of it, we think that you'll be ready to choose software that allows you to work the way you want to, rather than adjusting your needs to do what the software allows. Ultimately, we hope you'll have made a technology decision that helps you better serve your community.

Seeking Help from a Technology Consultant

Selecting a donor management system is a big decision – moving to a new system involves an investment of time and money, and the system you choose will impact your organization for some time. We believe that most nonprofits can navigate the process we outline in this toolkit without any outside assistance. However, if you are unsure of your footing along the way, it is nice to know that consultants are available to help.

If you decide to look to a consultant, do your homework beforehand. To save time and money in consulting fees, try to limit the types of assistance you need and define your consulting engagement carefully. Here are some of the ways you might ask a consultant to help:

- Work with you to define and document your organization's high-level strategic plan, technology plan, or fundraising plan
- Assess your existing technology infrastructure and identify gaps to address
- Interview your staff, then organize and document your specific donor software requirements
- Use your list of requirements to help you narrow the field of possible software solutions
- Work as a liaison with software vendors to determine how each software package will meet your needs

Look for consultants with broad experience in technology planning and donor management software. Ask to see sample documents that resulted from previous engagements like yours. And don't forget that a consultant won't be successful without a commitment from you and your staff to provide information and feedback along the way.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

If you consider successful donor management software selection a destination, this toolkit is a roadmap which includes four steps involved in reaching that destination:

1. Assess your current use of software. Set technology goals that support your overall mission. Consider how the new software will help your organization meet its goals, now and in the future.
2. Prioritize software features based on your organization's required functions and make any needed trade-offs when considering cost.
3. Decide which software packages best meet your needs and seek advice to narrow your list down to one.
4. Act on your decision and begin the implementation process.

Where appropriate, we've included samples of forms and tables to assist with a particular step in the process. Because each nonprofit is different, each will have different concerns and risks for each step.

The CD provided includes:

- an electronic copy of this toolkit for you to forward to your coworkers or colleagues at other nonprofits
- blank copies of the worksheets and tools described here for you to use in your software selection decision process.
- links to articles on the Web that provide greater detail

Thanks and Acknowledgements

This toolkit is the work of many at NPower Seattle and in the Seattle nonprofit community. Thank you to those Seattle nonprofits that found time to help with this project. Special acknowledgement goes out to The Operational Emergency Center, Casa Latina and Arts Corps who field tested our theories about software selection and allowed us to share their stories here. Additional thanks go out to the 40+ organizations who attended our "So Much to Consider …" workshops which provided much of the groundwork for this toolkit. Special thanks to the Greater Everett Community Foundation for their help with the Everett workshop and our primary supporters for the Donor Management Project (Verizon and The Kellogg Foundation).

— NPower Seattle

November, 2006

STEP 1: ASSESS

In this step, we recommend that you assess your nonprofit organization to better understand what your software needs might be. After all, if you don't know the needs you are trying to meet, there is no way to ensure that the software you select will meet your organization's goals.

This step requires you to assess four areas:

Strategic Plans **Current Technology** **Processes** **People**

Strategic Plans: The Big Picture

The effectiveness of any new technology depends on how well it supports the overall vision and goals of the organization. We strongly recommend that you step back and review those larger objectives at the very beginning of the technology decision-making process. Organizations make decisions based on a number of factors. Check out the sidebar, The Decision-Making Process for a quick discussion of the three questions which can distract nonprofits the most. While those questions are important, the decision regarding which donor management software or package to purchase needs to make sense within the context of a set of plans for your organization.

Look to what has already been set in terms of your organization's strategy for direction, fundraising and technology. Frequently, planning has already been done by others at your organization. In any case, you may need to do some research. How will this new, proposed technology serve the organizational vision? How will it enhance the community you serve? Will it help address the technology concerns of your board or major funders?

Starting with the big picture helps. Keep the focus on the organization, rather than on the technology. When it is time to approach your board and donor base with requests for support and funding, you'll be able to speak in terms of how the technology will help the organization better achieve its mission.

The Decision-Making Process

If you are like many nonprofits, you've based past technology decisions on these common considerations:

- Available Money
- Your Staff Size
- Recommendations from similar nonprofit organizations

These considerations are important, but they don't always lead to the right decision. Here are some reasons that nonprofits may benefit from looking beyond these factors:

Why not decide based on money?
"Cost savings upfront can mean lost fundraising ability in the end."

Your budget will in part dictate your options for purchasing software. However, many nonprofits find that using the right donor management tool frees up time and provides the right information so that the software basically pays for itself and helps generate more money, in donations and time or cost savings, than they would have expected. It is sometimes helpful to look at how much money an organization might make with the investment in a particular software.

Why not decide based on staff size?
"This number can be deceiving. Staff size doesn't always tell you how many people will access the software."

Staff size fluctuates with time, and you may find that you want more people to use the software than anticipated. This is especially true if volunteers help with data entry, if board members are involved in fundraising, or if your donors are also volunteers or otherwise involved with your programs. If you are planning to choose software that will last for a few seasons, you'll want to consider whether it will support your growth.

In addition, donor systems often evolve into the core systems of an organization. The Network Effect of Information—the idea that when many people on varying levels use and add data to a common, integrated system, it increases the value of the information—is something you will want to encourage. The original number of users often balloons when nonprofits who value the Network Effect begin to use the application, increasing licensing costs and system investment.

Why not depend on recommendations?
"What appears similar on the outside may not always prove true internally."

This is tricky. Some of your best information on real usable technology can come from other similar nonprofits. And while other nonprofits can be a wonderful resource for information on "real-life" uses of software, you need to also be aware of how your nonprofit is different--the particulars of your organization and its constituency. The difference in office or regional culture could equal a big difference in appropriate software as well.

The best advice from other nonprofits? Try to delve deeper into factors that might influence your organization's technology decision making. Ask questions based on your current office systems and what might be better rather than questions based on how limited your current resources might be or might not be.

Organizational Strategic Plan

Your best starting place is your organization's Strategic Plan. If you don't have the benefit of formal planning documents, try to gather as much information as possible about the organization's overall goals and direction. The strategic plan of your organization can often detail:

- plans to grow or change your client or your donor base
- any foreseeable organizational focus shifts
- the next one-year, three-year, or five year plan to measure success
- needs for a capital campaign
- future changing or expanding facilities, and
- any other circumstances that will affect technology purchases

We encourage you to insist that any software purchase must, ultimately, support your organization's mission and plans for growth. At the very least, this focus will help you to justify your technology spending in the larger context of your overall budget.

Fundraising Plan

In order to purchase donor management software that is a good fit for your current and future donor needs, you'll need a firm grasp of your organization's current fundraising activities and its plans for future fund development.

Do your current and future fundraising activities include:

- direct mail
- online appeals
- grants
- major gifts
- memorials
- matching gifts
- corporate relations
- planned giving ?

Use your fundraising plan to figure out how important certain features may be from the very beginning. Remember, however, that today's "not so important" may later become "vital" as your fundraising needs grow. Check in with your board and major funders to find out what they want to know about the current trends in giving among your donor base.

Consider the information you'd like to collect that you aren't capturing right now. For example: Is the number of donors or the amount of the average gift increasing? What percentage of your nonprofits' funding comes from individuals, corporations or foundations? Knowing the high-level questions you want to answer can help you determine what the software needs to do.

Finally, consider the ways you want to reach out to donors in the future. If you intend to mail fundraising appeals, you'll need to easily export information to a mail merge document. If you intend to email appeals, you may want to make the whole transaction digital, receiving donations via your website and tracking them automatically. If your nonprofit is moving towards a focus on major donors, you may need software that includes moves management—software features that help you shepherd your individual donors along the path to giving. With your fundraising plan, you can begin to assess which features will help you most in your long term fund development strategy.

Strategic Technology Plan

Having reviewed your mission and fundraising plan, you'll want to round out your organizational assessment by outlining or revisiting your nonprofit's strategic technology plan.

A technology plan might be a basic list of the technology needs for the immediate future, or it might set out a course for the next several years. Both will be helpful in assessing how your potential software selection might fit into the current stated goals for acquiring and sustaining technology at your organization. Having a plan helps ensure that you are not dreaming too big (looking for software you can't manage effectively) or too small (considering software that won't support your comprehensive needs). This plan should help to either ground you in what is possible on your organization's technology landscape or encourage you to support your organization's investment in improving that landscape. The idea is to develop a vision for how technology, working perfectly, could help your organization be highly effective and meet its goals.

As before, you may find that others have done this type of planning at your nonprofit. If not, you may want to encourage your coworkers to help you work on a strategic technology plan. In order to create a plan that considers the needs of the whole organization, you may need help from a planning committee or outside organization. Even if you can't commit to a large scale planning effort, gather the best possible information about your organization's technology plans before moving forward.

Avoid this Pitfall:

Selecting new software is an important step, but this step in itself is not a *Technology Plan*. Like all strategic planning, technology planning is a long-term process—the software selection process is much shorter. Don't let software selection drive your technology plan; use your strategic plans to help steer software selection.

Nonprofit Perspective:

Be Your Own Lead Technology Funder

In Sue Bennett's *Accidental Techie*, Eugene Chan offers advice on how you can use your fundraising experience to frame your software purchasing decision:

"Regardless of the software you choose, ultimately, your organization will need to look at itself as the primary technology funder. Since that is the case, use some of your own expertise to approach this area. Treat this as a funding proposal process."

As with any funding proposal, you'll want to outline the problem and proposed solution clearly, providing a realistic budget and timeline. (In NPower's Technology Planning services, we refer to this as a Project Brief.) Challenge your own proposal, just as a funder would, and set measurable objectives for evaluating your success.

As Chan says:

"This is a great way to get prepared for that conversation with your executive director or the board about your donor management software needs. You can also get further mileage out of this exercise down the line. You are now prepared for future new technology funding proposals and are more technologically self aware. You've anticipated some of the problems, their concerns and addressed them in advance. This self-awareness is very sexy to foundations and other funders. Everybody wins!"

For More information on navigating the effects of your software selection on your organization's "budget for growth" please see the article Budgeting for Growth in Youth-Serving Organizations from TechSoup on the accompanying CD.

For More information on creating a strategic technology plan please see the technology planning resources on the accompanying CD.

Current Technology

Having looked at the big picture, the next step is to assess the current state of your nonprofit's technology. Narrowing your list of possible donor management software packages to those that work within your current technology can definitely save you time and money.

In most cases, it is always best to start with a current inventory of the hardware and software you currently use. If this information isn't available, we encourage you to use one of the following tools to prepare a quick inventory. We have included these links or tools in this toolkit to help get you started:

1) NPower's TechAtlas tool: http://www.techatlas.org
2) Belarc Advisor. Belarc offers free licenses to some charitable organizations via it's website: http://www.belarc.com/free_download.html
3) FreshDiagnose by Fresh Devices. Free for 10 days: http://www.freshdevices.com/freshdiag.html

Collect information on each computer system impacted by the proposed donor management package. Once the inventory is done, referring back to the assessment of the strategic technology plan can help you answer questions about plans to purchase new hardware and the need to integrate this potential donor management software with other systems.

In addition to your workstations and software, be sure to include your server infrastructure and network connectivity in your assessment. The state of your servers and network may be an important factor in your decision for two reasons.

a. If your current infrastructure is inadequate to support the systems you are considering, it may be time to consider upgrading hardware or other systems before rolling out new donor management software.
b. If the current state is bad, don't specifying a new system that works on the bad hardware! There's no need to gather the data if you know that the hardware and infrastructure stand in the way of users doing the rest of the work they need to do.

This software selection is about planning accordingly. At this step, you may find that you need to invest a lot in hardware and infrastructure, which is ok. When it comes time to consider cost, you will already know that you may need to adjust your donor system budget (or fundraising plans) accordingly.

Processes

You've looked at your strategic direction and assessed the current state of your technology. Now it's time to examine processes—the terrain the new software will need to navigate within that framework and amidst those boundaries. Our goal with this toolkit is not to make your nonprofit contort to work within the latest technology. Instead, our focus is on selecting technology that will help you do your work. So, the best technical solutions for your organization are those that maximize your process.

This is an excellent opportunity create a quick organization process map where you sketch the task workflow in your nonprofit. Your policies and procedures manual may walk you through some of the formal processes, but these types of manuals often lack the detail needed to account for everyday tasks or those that involve less formal "unspoken" procedures. Instead of relying on that document, take time to brainstorm who does what within your organization and which systems they use to do each step. We often suggest that people begin by noting what happens when a check arrives in the mail.

ASSESS

Here are some of the questions to get you started:

- How many people are involved in processes such as accounting, client management and donor tracking performed daily?
- What/who are the information sources?
- Where is the information stored and how does it get there?
- How many times per day are these steps repeated?
- If any of these steps are integrated, how does that happen?
- Who is responsible for maintaining which applications?
- What technology knowledge and training is needed for people to perform their responsibilities?

Assessing these processes helps to ensure a clear picture of how much work goes into one process and where gaps or inefficiencies might exist. It can also provide opportunities to promote a more productive and effective service delivery, indicating the importance of a software feature that alleviates some of that workload. One example that we see is nonprofit staff entering the same information in more than one system, creating additional potential for data entry error and costing additional staff time.

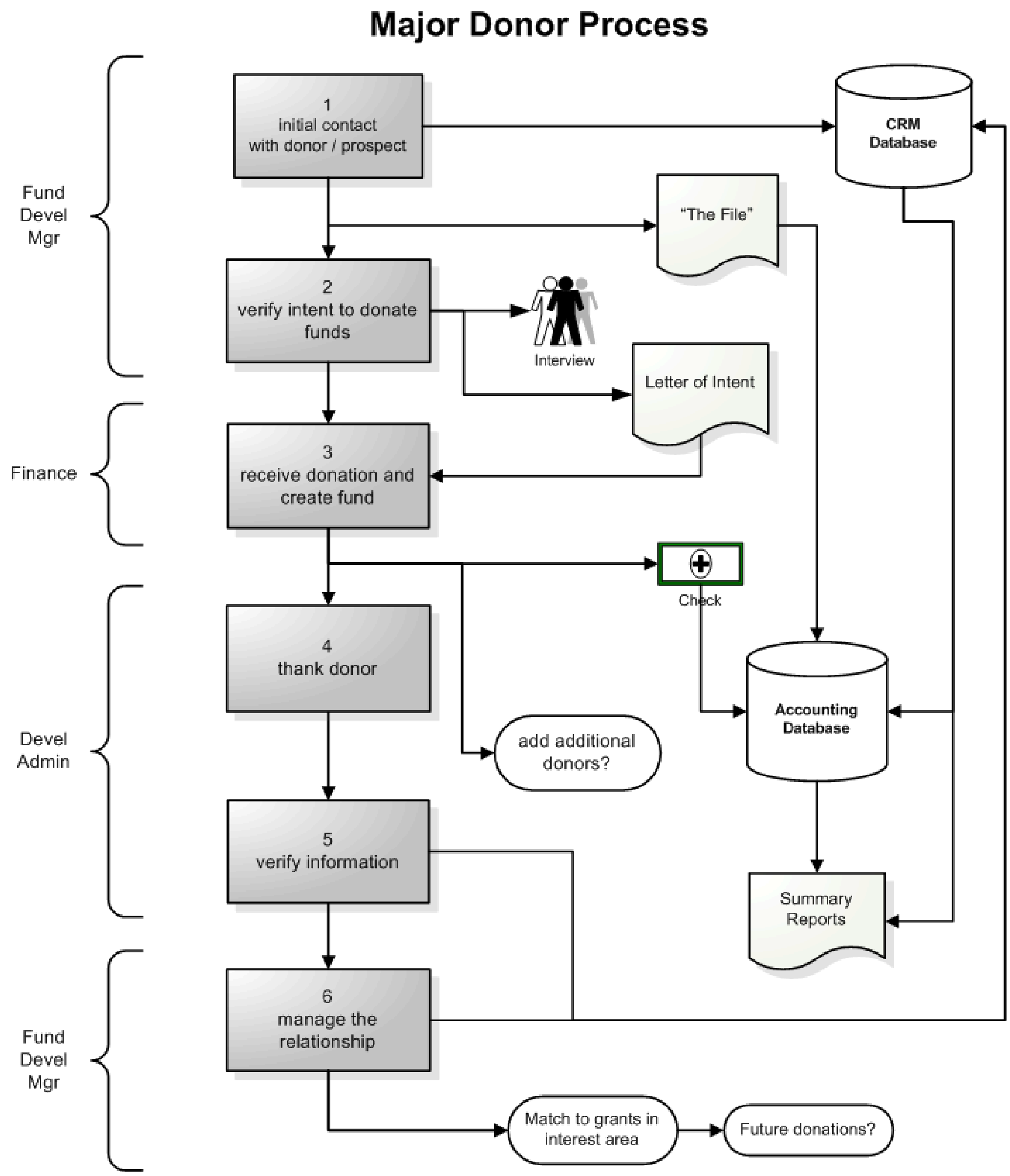
With the organization process map in hand, you'll have a clearer understanding of what you hope to improve through technology purchase, and this may effect which features you require in your donor software.

The form of your process map will depend on your organization's complexity and your own preferences. It can be a simple table outlining the type and location of stored information or it can be more of a diagram indicating flow of work. We've included an example of this type of table and workflow diagram here. You can find a blank copy of this tool on the CD included with this toolkit.

Sample organization process map table:

Type of information	Where it is stored today	Working well?
Contacts/CRM	Access database, Outlook	Needs improvement
Individual Donors	Access database	OK
Foundations, Partner Organizations	Access database, Excel	OK
Donations and Grants	Access database, QuickBooks	Difficult to track
Donor Development Detail/ History/Actions	Excel / Word, Access database	No—need integrated calendar
Volunteers	Excel	Duplicates the people in donor database
Volunteer Applications	Word / hardcopy	Not linked to database
Volunteer Hours	Excel	OK
Facilities	Website database, Access database, Excel	OK
Events	Website database, Excel / Word	Need shared calendar
Public Comments	Access database, Word / email / hardcopy	OK
Evaluation Data	Excel / Word	OK
Sample Artwork, Photos, Video	Media files / hardcopy	OK

It may also be helpful to map out the processes graphically, using workflow diagrams such as the example we've included here. When mapping a process, try to make note of who does each step or part of the process. Seeing the way information flows between people in your organization is often the key to improving your process—and is an important consideration in understanding how you can get the most from your donor management system.



On the toolkit CD, we've included more samples of process flowcharts, together with instructions for creating them.

ASSESS

People

Nonprofit organizations succeed because of the thousands of people, paid and unpaid, who are drawn to work in service of the greater community. The effect of their good works can be maximized through effective use of technology. Technology is implemented for people, so it's important to assess those people's needs before deciding on a technology solution to benefit them. This is a time to assess the internal culture of your organization.

We know that in large nonprofit organizations or those with high turnover, software training will be a key element of any new software purchase. Some vendors provide ongoing training that is not too expensive or disruptive to staff schedules. Other software requires more extensive or costly training.

Some nonprofits lack computer-savvy staff, while others have workers with volunteers who are comfortable with technology. Assessing the general office comfort with technology can help you determine whether those exciting new features will quickly become neglected.

Assess the role of your volunteers who will use the new software. If you intend to have volunteers enter or verify your donor data, it is worthwhile to consider this added complexity when deciding what software to purchase. Your volunteers will need flexible training and clear guidelines for using the system.

In addition, no matter how user-friendly software may be, a staff that has not been a part of the purchase decision may not be as excited about the technology. Worse, such a staff may not be as convinced that the old systems were not working as well as they could. Simply put, make sure to include staff members who will be actually using the software in the decision-making process. A sense of ownership in the process will set appropriate expectations and encourage buy-in.

For More information on how to complete a needs assessment see the article, In-Depth Database Needs Assessment (Techsoup) included in the accompanying CD.

The Case of the "Accidental Techie"

Do you have "accidental techies" in your organization? People who have informally taken on and become pretty good at handling technical responsibilities -- often because there was no one else to do them?

Rather than adding the cost of consultants, some nonprofits choose to invest in extra training for these staff members or volunteers. As an added benefit, this strategy may allow you to tap into funds with an educational rather than strictly a technology focus. A problem is that, as with all staff, people sometimes move on to other work. If your accidental techie is a volunteer, this could mean that your new system has been set up according to their unique understanding of the particular technology.

In the case of the accidental techie, we recommend proceeding as cautiously as you would with a consultant. The wrong accidental techie can be as costly and demoralizing as the wrong consultant.

An Ounce of Prevention

During our June 2006 workshops, So Much to Consider…, we gathered the following advice from participating nonprofits on the hunt for donor management software that's a good fit:

- 'This is a purchase that you will want to last longer than just a year. Assessing your nonprofit's guiding plans (for direction, fundraising and technology) will help you search out software that allows you to scale your efforts in the upcoming years.'

- 'Be realistic and pace yourself! While the possibility of new technology brings potential for vast improvements in your internal processes, it is worthwhile to be realistic. Set realistic expectations for yourself and others about which processes will be affected, how they will change and the timeline for both.'

- 'In an office where multiple people or departments may have differing priorities, it is important to include them in the research and planning around purchasing new software—at all levels and in all directions. If not, you end up risking less personal investment in the software and you will not succeed with the software implementation.'

STEP 2: PRIORITIZE

In Step 1, you assessed the scope of the organizational needs you want donor management software to address. Congratulations, you are well on your way to a purposeful selection! In the next step, we suggest that you document all your specific needs and then prioritize—make some order of your list. Doing so will help you narrow the list of potential vendors and save you a lot of time. Nonprofits that skip this step spend time contacting vendors who don't have a suitable product, rather than focusing their efforts on vendors who meet their needs for function and price. This step requires you to make a decision on the top donor management software options by following this 3 part process:

1. Create your functional requirements outline
2. List and prioritize potential software features to meet your requirements
3. Review costs & make trade-offs

By the end, you should have a very short list of software products that make the most sense for you. We recommend that you narrow the options down to three or four so that the next step feels more manageable.

Defining Your Functional Requirements

You're now ready for your first bit of software selection "homework"—setting up some functional requirements for your selection.

Before making a decision to buy any complex software system, it is crucial to identify your specific requirements for the system. Not only does this help you choose the right software, it also saves you from investigating packages that you know will not be compatible. For example, if your organization has members and receives annual donations as membership dues, your choice of software should only include those that help track membership. Further, your specific requirements will also provide a basis for comparing the value (to your nonprofit) of software solutions at different costs. Although the system you select will undoubtedly come up short in some areas, you will at least know what to expect ahead of time.

Functional & Information Requirements:

What's the Difference?

Functional requirements outline what a technology tool should ***do*** to support a process.

Information requirements list what information or data a technology tool should **gather, track and report on**.

General Requirements

You'll start by listing the general requirements you are seeking in a software package. These are features that aren't specific to a donor management system, but are important if the software is to work well for your nonprofit organization.

Your Assignment:

Considering what you know from your organization process map about who uses what system to complete which task, identify the general requirements you are seeking in a software package. Don't forget to ask everyone in your organization who will use the software—each staff member may come up with another important requirement that another forgets to mention.

PRIORITIZE

Use the following shortened example to list your requirements in a table. A full sized, blank version of this tool is included on the accompanying CD.

Functional Requirement	Description
General Requirements	
Mac Friendly	The software shall run on Apple Macintosh client computers (or, in the case of web-based systems, in a Macintosh web browser).
Remote Access	The software shall provide basic database access to staff when out of the office.
Minimum of Redundant Data Entry	Where data is stored in different databases (contact and accounting data, for example), the system shall not require data to be re-entered between modules.
Data Validation	The system shall ensure that records have valid relationships, data is the appropriate type (such as date, number, or email address) and required fields are not left blank.
Consistent Data Entry	The system shall require consistent data entry, providing drop-down lists and default values where appropriate. However, many fields (e.g. gender) should default to blank or "Unknown" to avoid assuming a default value (e.g. male).
Backup / Data Redundancy	The system shall provide good options for automatic backup.
Organized data entry screens	Data entry screens shall be easy to use, organized into sections so fields are easy to find.
Saved queries and reports	The system shall allow ad-hoc filtering, queries, or reports. Users should be able to save queries and reports for later use.
Secure User Login	The system shall require users to log in with a user name and password; ideally, it would allow administrators to limit access to appropriate areas based on the user's role at Arts Corps.
Quick Response in Frequent Operations	The software shall perform well (not cause any noticeable delays) in day-to-day operations, such as finding, opening, and saving records. Common queries and reports shall run in several seconds, not several minutes.
Documentation / Training	The system shall include documentation and/or training to help both users and administrators perform all basic tasks (data entry, reporting, and maintenance).

Donor Management Requirements

Next, you'll add donor-management-specific requirements to your list. These are features such as grant tracking, task reminders, thank you notes, and annual reporting that will directly support your organization's donor management process.

Your Assignment:

Use the technology, process, and people information you gathered in Step 1 to define the possible donor management specific features needed for your organization.

The following table provides an example. Again, this is a shortened list, but it will give you a good start in preparing your own list. There are many other requirements that you might consider. A full sized, blank version of this full tool (Pts. 1 & 2) is included on the accompanying CD.

Sample Feature Table:

Functional Requirement	Description
Donor / Grant Tracking	
Scheduling and Reminders	The system shall offer reminders for scheduled tasks, workflow due dates, and appointments. Reminders should be flexible so that they are easily seen but not annoying to users.
Prospect Leads and Source	The system shall track prospective donors and how they heard about or were referred to AC.
Workflow Steps / Task Assignments	The system shall allow a customizable set of steps or milestones for grant or donation opportunities and permit users to assign tasks and due dates to others.
Thank You Notes	The system shall provide an easy way to produce a thank you letter or email.
Anonymous Donors	The system shall track donations that are entirely anonymous as well as those from donors who do not wish to be recognized publicly.
Grant Calendar	The system shall display and print a calendar with all grant-related due dates.
Donor Campaigns	The system shall track campaigns and which donations resulted from them.
Special Events	The system shall track fundraising events, attendees, and resulting donations. Mailings or email announcements for the event should be easy to produce, as should attendance sheet reports.
Pledges	The system shall record pledges or recurring donations.
Employer Matching	The system shall track employer eligibility for employer-matched contributions and when they are received.
Outgoing Email Campaigns	The system shall send batch email to contacts.
Income Forecasting	The system shall provide a report that shows the donation pipeline and helps forecast probable future income.
Online donation entry	The system shall import online donor and donations records from PayPal or other services.
Export to QuickBooks	The system shall export donor and donation records to a format that QuickBooks can easily import.

Comparing Potential Software Features

At this point, you have a general group of requirements with which to make the field of possible donor management software options narrower and, hopefully, more manageable. Now it is time to delve deeper into that group of requirements and map your needs to the myriad features commonly available in donor management software.

PRIORITIZE

We suggest that you expand that general requirements list into a more detailed and comprehensive list of features. Take a minute to think about all those little technology daydreams that would make life in fund development easier. Would you like to access donor reports via your Blackberry on your way to a meeting? Does easy import and export of data make you feel more secure? To some, a system that assists with membership and tracks volunteer interests sounds like heaven. Write down your own list and refer to it often for the rest of the selection process. (As before, ask other staff members for their personal wish lists as well, and combine them with your own.)

To keep the feature list under control, you will have to make some trade-offs according to your organization's priorities. Even with trade-offs, it is helpful to know about the software features that are less important to you because they help you envision what might be possible in the future.

Avoid this Pitfall:

Knowing what is possible is different than knowing what you need.

It is important to know both.

Your Assignment:
Sit down with that list next to your functional requirements and build a feature table. Loosely prioritize requirements in each group, with the "Must Have" items listed first.

As with the other tools provided in this toolkit, the following table is meant to be a brief sample of what you might create to help get you started rather than a complete list. We have come up with about 60 potential features a nonprofit might consider. A full tool is provided on the CD that accompanies this toolkit.

Feature	Must have	Would be nice	Ideal	Not Req'd	Comments
Records Administration					
Multi-level password protection					
Join and separate records for couples					
Funding Tasks, Actions and Communication					
A calendar for grants and other deadlines					
A reminder feature reminds users of important deadlines					
Gift Tracking					
Allows for splitting gifts between two funds					
Tracks different appeals					
Pledge Tracking					
Tracks pledges					
Tracks scheduling of pledge payments					
Mailings					
Links to National Change of Address Registry					
Prints bulk mail zip count					
Queries and Reports					
Allows custom queries based on the fields user selects					
A built-in report writer/custom report generator					
Data Import and Export					
Credit card processing can be imported to corresponding donor records					
Supports using email tool links for tracking					
Codes					
Can maintain/edit standard code tables (gender and address lookup tables)					
Can create/define fields for information					
Volunteer Management Functions					
Tracks a volunteer's availability					
Can schedule volunteers					
Events Management Functions					
Manages events					
Does online calendar for events					
Membership Management Functions					
Multiple or tiered membership types					
Online membership signup and renewal					

PRIORITIZE

With this General Functional Requirements toll and your prioritized Potential Features tool, you have two key tools needed to compare costs and make any needed trade-offs in our selection process. Before moving on to the next part of this step, go ahead and review your tools for overall trends.

Narrowing the Software Field

With the functional requirements for your donor management software defined, you're ready to start focusing on the software itself. Dozens of donor management systems are available today, and the landscape changes. They range from a basic database to track contributions to a sophisticated, expensive system that integrates a website, online advocacy, and financial management.

Review Costs & Make Trade-offs

Take some time to do a little preliminary research. Search online, talk to other development professionals in similar nonprofit organizations and ask as many questions as you can think of about which vendors you might contact for more information. The following online resources are nonprofit sources of information

- www.TechSoup.org
  Powered by CompuMentor, this online community is a great resource for information on nonprofit technology, offering numerous articles, discussion groups, how-tos and software donations amidst some tasty soup recipes.
- www.Idealware.org
  This site offers reports and articles aimed at helping nonprofits locate the best technology resources for them. Sometimes described as the "Consumer Reports" of nonprofit technology, Idealware completed a comparison of online donation tools that toolkit readers may find particularly helpful.
- www.NPowerSeattle.org / www.NPower.org
  As you move though the donor management software selection process, you may want to consider workshops and classes offered periodically by NPower Seattle and other NPower affiliates. In 2007, NPower Seattle plans to continue offering its free donor management workshops on which this toolkit is based.

We post current technology resources on our website, and provide any available vendor samples and opportunities to talk to vendor representatives whenever possible. Should you decide to seek outside help, NPower also offers a range of consulting services such as technology planning and database implementation.

An obvious factor in choosing one software product over another is the cost of the software. Still remember that cost isn't everything—this purchase is part of a larger technology plan and overall strategic plan. The value the system will provide your organization isn't always measured in terms of the purchase price.

Total Cost of Ownership

Before making a purchase, you'll need to consider the total cost of ownership, which includes the equipment, software, ongoing maintenance, training, implementation, customization, staff downtime during conversion and technical failures. These costs can sometimes reach more than half of a project's technology budget. Choosing something cheap to buy but expensive to maintain may be costly over the long haul. When describing the total cost of implementing a technology project, we often use a 20/10/70 rule to think about the costs—the price of software might end up being only 10% of your total cost on a project, while hardware may be 20% and other costs up to 70%. In other words, you may end up spending up to 10 times the software price to make your project a success.

One method that nonprofit organizations have used to estimate total cost of technology ownership is to look at the cost of new technology over the course of three to five years. This ensures that items such as training, maintenance and other frequently forgotten costs are accounted for in their financial decision.

20/10/70 Rule for Total Cost of Technology:

20% Hardware purchases

10% Software purchases

70% "Humanware"

100% Project Technology Budget

Humanware=Planning, implementation, maintenance, training, on-going support

Examples of forgotten costs include:

- Staff Training
- New Hardware Needs
- Hardware Replacements
- Maintenance and Support Fees
- Data Migration
- Downtime
- Connectivity
- Lost Revenue (from failing to manage donors effectively)

But don't just take our word for it. We encourage you to spend some time thinking about other potential hidden costs and adding them to your list. Go ahead and use some of the information gathered in your preliminary research to project out cost. Just note that these estimates may change as you have more conversations with potential software vendors. If nothing else, this exercise will help you determine a preliminary and, hopefully, realistic budget with which to begin vendor conversations.

For more information on total cost of ownership and a tool created to help nonprofits avoid these unexpected pitfalls as well as the Inexpensive Donor Databases article included on the accompanying CD.

Software Selection Matrixes

After researching possible donor management software packages and creating a realistic picture of how much your nonprofit is willing to spend, it's time to make contact. But who are you contacting?

In Step 1, you assessed your organization's Technology, Processes, and People. Following these broad areas, we have created three Software Selection Matrixes to help you narrow the number of software companies you need to contact for product information. Rather than evaluating hundreds of products, this tool can narrow the search to three or four or so by first determining the type of software package that you should consider.

As you can imagine, it's difficult to capture the variety of features, environments and costs in this type of matrix, and what you see here is meant only as a guideline. Moreover, we've included only a handful of popular vendors; the matrix doesn't provide a comprehensive list nor does it represent a recommendation of the products listed.

Don't forget our previous work in this toolkit! Let your earlier assessment of your Technology, Processes, and People guide your thoughts. And when weighing cost in the first matrix, keep in mind the total cost of ownership estimate that will work for you.

For online versions of the Donor Software Selection Matrixes or get more information on determining your software cluster area, including a list of vendor websites, articles on integrating client management, membership databases and other systems with your potential donor management software selection, check out the accompanying CD.

You say "matrices"
I say "matrixes"
Let's call the whole thing off.

— Song heard among gatherings of NPower Seattle Consultants

TECHNOLOGY: Which software fits with your technology constraints?

Pick the quotes that best describe your organization:	← IT Infrastructure Requirements → **Low Tech** "We have a few hundred donors, and one fund development person. We try to keep the computer systems simple."	**Ready to Outsource**[1] "Our data management needs are growing, but we would benefit from letting a service provider manage the server infrastructure."	**Powerhouse** "We have 6,000 donor records and a large staff, and we are growing fast. We have fast new servers managed by our IT staff."
← Software Budget → **Cash Poor** "Our budget for donor management is small."	• DonorAccess • Donor Express • GiftWorks • Metrix • Organizer's DB	• Ebase[2] • Salesforce.com[2] • CiviCRM[2]	
Ready to Invest "We have budgeted a few thousand dollars for a mid-level system."	• BasicFunder • DonorPerfect • Donor Records • Exceed • Mission Assist • NonprofitBooks	• DonorPerfect Online • ETapestry	• Donor[2] • Paradigm / MIP Sage Fundraising 50
Bucks Deluxe "We believe that a high-end system will help us raise more money, so we've budgeted for software licensing, ongoing fees, and additional technical staff."		• Kintera • Convio	• Raiser's Edge • Custom development (Access, FileMaker, .NET, LAMP)[3]

1 *The solutions in this column are web-based and (with the exception of Ebase and CiviCRM) are hosted services. They are ideal for nonprofits with low-tech workstations, Mac workstations, or employees who travel or telecommute. They don't require internal server infrastructure or support.*

2 *These systems are free to license, but implementation and customization generally requires a consultant or database expert.*

3 *This toolkit is about software selection, not custom development; we've included this entry in the matrixes only for comparison.*

4 *These systems integrate well with an accounting system (at additional cost).*

5 *With custom development, you could achieve "Deluxe" or "Full Meal Deal," but the cost tends to be high.*

6 *These systems are not difficult to use, but we've placed them in the High Tech column because they require expert consultants to install, configure, and administer them.*

PROCESS: Which software tracks donors in the ways you require?

	← Customization & Integration Needs →		
Pick the quotes that best describe your organization:	**Standard Procedure** "We track donors and grants in a standard way, and donor tracking is fairly independent from other functions."	**Do It Your Way** "We appreciate the ability to customize our software, and we might want to track other types of data along with donor data."	**Unique Needs** "Our donor management needs are very different from any other nonprofit. The software has to integrate well with our website or other systems."
↑ Advanced Features & Reporting ↓			
Basic "We need simple contact management, mailing lists, and donation reports."	• BasicFunder • DonorAccess • GiftWorks • Metrix • Organizer's DB	• Donor Records[4]	• Custom development (Access, .NET, FileMaker, LAMP)[5]
Deluxe "We need some advanced features, such as activity and volunteer tracking or custom reporting."	• Donor Express • DonorPerfect • ETapestry	• CiviCRM • Ebase • Exceed[4] • Mission Assist • NonprofitBooks[4]	• Salesforce.com[4]
Full Meal Deal "Our donor development process is complex; it absolutely must do everything. We depend on highly flexible reports for decision making."		• Convio • Kintera[3]	• Donor2[4] • Paradigm / Sage Fundraising 50[4] • Raiser's Edge[4]

3 *This toolkit is about software selection, not custom development; we've included this entry in the matrixes only for comparison.*

4 *These systems integrate well with an accounting system (at additional cost).*

5 *With custom development, you could achieve "Deluxe" or "Full Meal Deal," but the cost tends to be high.*

PEOPLE: Which software will best support your staff?

Pick the quotes that best describe your organization:	← Technical Skills & Consulting Budget → **Low Tech** "We don't like computers. We focus time and money on our mission, not on technology."	**Average Tech** "We are competent computer users, and are willing to spend money on help as needed."	**High Tech** "Our staff is very tech-savvy, and we have a generous budget for hiring consultants to help us succeed."
↑ Willingness for User Training ↓ **No Time** "Our staff doesn't have a lot of time to learn new software."	• GiftWorks		
Will Train "We know we need software training, but don't always make the time."	• Metrix • Donor Express • ETapestry • Exceed • NonprofitBooks • BasicFunder	• Convio • DonorAccess • Organizer's DB • Donor Records • DonorPerfect • Mission Assist	• CiviCRM[6] • Ebase[6] • Salesforce.com[6] • Custom development (Access, .NET, FileMaker, LAMP)
Love Training "We are ready to invest significant time and money in training for the new system."		• Kintera • Donor2 • Paradigm / Sage Fundraising 50	• Raiser's Edge

6 *These systems are not difficult to use, but we've placed them in the High Tech column because they require expert consultants to install, configure, and administer them.*

Donor Management Feature Checklist

Once you identify a short list of appropriate vendors, you're ready to make contact with them for more information on donor software management packages.

Your Assignment:

Review the available online information for donor management software packages that seem appropriate for your nonprofit. Use the Donor Management Feature Checklist provided in the CD which accompanies this toolkit to indicate which needs each software system meets. Rate each vendor's product. Put a check mark in the box for the potential vendor that has needed features or meets your requirements. Your table should look something like this:

Your ranking of importance of this item	Feature/Requirement	Enter Software Vendor Names Here	Vendor A	Vendor B	Vendor C
I.	Donor Management Features				
	Records Administration				
Must have	System has ability to archive old records		✓	✓	
Would be nice	System has a global change feature to allow mass update of a certain field based on records returned from criteria.				✓
Ideal	System tracks updates to records		✓	✓	✓
Would be nice	Addressee/mailing name and salutations are auto-created based on a prefix and a last name.		✓		✓
Must have	User can set up data defaults (zip plus 4)		✓		✓

Using this tool, you begin to see which systems seem to be clear choices, proving features to address your "must haves" and hopefully most of your "ideals" as well as some of your "would be nice" options. In this case, vendor A is a strong possibility since they have features meeting two of our "must have" criteria.

An Ounce of Prevention

More words of wisdom from Puget Sound Nonprofits who participated in our workshops:

- 'When determining what software your organization can afford, be sure to consider all your options for covering the costs. Present the technology budget as shared common costs across the programs of your organization, rather than as an overhead expense. Use the technology plan at the beginning of this process to approach outside sources for financing your expenditures.'
- 'You might find that there is no perfect donor system for your needs—any choice you make will require some trade-off on price, features, complexity, and so on. On the other hand, donor management is not rocket science; if you have done your homework in selecting the type of software you need, the chances are good that you'll be able to accomplish your goals regardless of the specific package you select.'

STEP 3: DECIDE

You've narrowed down the universe of donor management software to a few solid possibilities. In theory, each of these products will meet your general requirements at a price that seems reasonable for a nonprofit budget.

Now it is time to follow up with the vendors and make a decision. This may feel like the most difficult step, but we can assure you that the bulk of your work is done. In this step, we suggest that you get product demonstrations from both vendor representatives and other nonprofit customers.

Evaluating Low-Cost Donor Software

If you've selected from the low or no-cost area of the matrix, you'll probably have trouble finding vendors to respond to your requests or provide a personalized software demonstration.

In this case, do your own research. You can start online—on the vendors' websites and by reading online reviews. Fill out your own "request for information" as best you can for each product. Note the pricing for each product in your own spreadsheet. If possible, interview at least one other person who uses each product.

Remember that at a lower price level, you'll have more trade-offs to make. This is where a focus on your nonprofit's most critical requirements can help you meet 80-90% of your needs while limiting the cost.

Requests for Information

One good way to compare software packages is to send a questionnaire or a list of requirements to each vendor you are evaluating. We have found that we get the most consistent and objective results by preparing a formal request for information, which is an organized way to get multiple bids written to your specifications.

Don't compare apples and oranges—if each vendor gets the same information, comparison is much easier. Ask for detailed pricing in writing, especially if the features or services you require cost extra. Be wary of vendors that don't make the total costs clear.

Although your request should be brief, make sure to describe your most important functional requirements to ensure that the software vendor can provide mandatory functionality needed. For best responses, avoid sending a simple checklist; instead, provide open-ended questions about the software. For example, if you send the list of requirements you created earlier in this toolkit, include a column for Comments and ask the vendor to "use the Comments column to explain how your software would meet each requirement in the list."

Here are some general questions you might want to ask:

- How long has your company been in business? Ideally, choose a company that has been in business for several years and upgraded their product more than once.
- What portion of your customer base is nonprofit? Can you provide references from other nonprofits that have worked with you before?
- Describe your business stability and sustainability plans. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your company and your products?

You'll also want to ascertain whether the vendor has in-house expertise to assist with the implementation process—and how much it will cost. A vendor that can provide guidelines for preparing or cleaning up your existing data will help make the transfer that much easier. A vendor who can provide documentation and training will help make a nonprofit's system transition more smoothly.

Assess each vendor's interest in software development. A track record of updating their software can help you feel confident that they will continue to add features and improve on the system. Good product development rapport with their customers is always a great sign. Is there a roadmap for upcoming feature improvements?

Software Demonstrations from Vendors

Once you have compared the responses from the vendors and ruled out any products that don't make the grade, ask representatives for the remaining products to demonstrate them for you.

We strongly suggest piloting the software with a small user group of employees to get a range of opinions. Be sure to include people who will actually use the software.

In addition to demonstrations, many software vendors offer demo versions or trial accounts. This is a great opportunity to take your time and look at the details. Are the features you need most easy to find? Can you do the kind of queries and reporting that you want to?

Software Demonstrations from Other Nonprofits

The vendor representative is trained to show his or her product in the best possible light, and may not identify issues that would make the software less than ideal for your nonprofit. This is where your professional network is invaluable. Talk to others about their experiences with the same vendor. Be sure to ask them about the software's strengths and weaknesses, and about their vendor experience both during the implementation phase and when they've needed ongoing support. If possible, ask them to walk you through the software.

If you are unsure of whom in your network to contact, ask the vendor representative to provide a list of their clients. Most representatives recognize that nonprofit organizations rely on each other for advice based in common day to day realities and are happy to help you make those connections. Remember, however, that organizations may have internal issues that affect the success of software, or their specific needs may differ greatly from yours.

STEP 4: ACT

At this point, you have all the information you need, and we feel confident that you should be able to choose the software that best suits the needs of the organization. Call the vendor of your choice, and start thinking about implementing your new donor management system!

Start Training Early

As soon as you've selected the software you'll move to, encourage all development staff to start becoming familiar with the new system. If printed documentation or online training is available from the vendor, distribute it before you switch to the new product. If you plan to attend in-person training, schedule it as soon as possible—once you start using the new system, you'll be busy.

Implementation

The conversion and implementation of new software takes place in four general stages:

Stage 1: Clean the data.

Existing data must be prepared to move into the new software. This often involves mapping old fields to new, deleting redundant and unnecessary data, and then testing the data in the new system. Don't postpone or shortchange this step, or you may end up importing many of your old problems into the new system.

Often, someone needs to oversee the conversion, either a vendor specialist or a consultant. (However, you'll save a lot of money if you can clean up the data ahead of time.) While you should be able to continue using the old system during this phase, you may need to stop entering new data in the old system just before you switch to the new.

Stage 2: Make the switch.

One day, you'll have to stop entering data in the old system and begin using the new. Be sure to build some flexibility into this phase to allow for unforeseen circumstances. If possible, avoid scheduling the switch at a critical time in your funding cycle.

Stage 3: Implementation.

One person needs to be responsible for data quality, for creating new reports and defining security. Appoint a database administrator, who can add new users, perform backups, and add new categories. Create a checklist of roles and responsibilities.

Stage 4: Training and sustaining.

It is essential to integrate training into your implementation plan. If staff are inadequately prepared, uncomfortable, or lack confidence in the end product, you risk having inappropriate data entered into the database or facing a lack of understanding about how to extract data. Make sure everyone has the documentation, and create your own documentation that explains your nonprofits procedures for working with donor data. Documentation should be written clearly for new staff who may join your team in the future.

Operational Emergency Center (OEC)

Operational Emergency Center was founded in 1971 as a nonprofit social service organization dedicated to providing emergency assistance and employment opportunities to the community of South Seattle. OEC operates a food and clothing bank and a program for babies and mothers, as well as other programs, for an ethnically diverse population with large incidents of poverty. They take in food valued at $5 million each year, clothing valued at .5 million dollars, and .5 million dollars in cash donations. The organization employs 11 staff members and a large number of volunteers.

Over the years, no one has taken the time to thoughtfully look at what the organization needed for records management. Each manager created, in Excel or Access, their own records to track the information they needed, and records were eventually lost.

OEC is in the process of developing a new strategic plan, including the following objectives:

- Grow the organization to balance their cash donations with their in-kind donations.
- Track major donors.
- Find new cash donors, possibly tapping into the pool of clothing donors.
- Hire a professional fundraiser on staff and sponsor more fund-raising events.
- Track highly-valued donations to their destinations.

At the same time, OEC is developing a technology plan that will facilitate their strategic plan. They've started by cleaning their current data, paring down their donor records from 6,000 to 2,500. Because they'll be replacing a system they've only used for a year, they want to make sure their new solution will be able to grow with the organization over the next four to five years.

It's important for them to purchase user-friendly software that they can learn with a little coaching. They know from experience that users won't learn complicated software if they don't have the temperament for it. They plan to increase the number of people entering donor data to six or seven, including volunteers, so ease-of-use is an important factor in their decision.

The organization uses Quickbooks as their accounting software. They would like to purchase a donor management system that interfaces with Quickbooks, so that they can avoid double entry of donations. They used Auction Tracker to manage an auction they sponsored last year, and they intend to use it again. They would like the donor management system they purchase to also interface with that software.

In preparation for selecting a new donor system, OEC worked with NPower to define the goals and requirements for the upgrade. NPower consultants conducted several information gathering meetings with key staff at OEC. We reviewed existing databases, created a scorecard of software features, and assigned priorities to specific donor management tasks.

After reviewing OEC's requirements against a variety of off-the-shelf systems, NPower recommended focusing on four systems:

- Exceed! Premier
- Sage Fundraising 50
- Easy Ware Total Info
- Donor Perfect Online

The next step is for OEC staff to contact these vendors for more information and software demos. At this point, they are uncertain as to how they will fund the costs associated with the software purchase. They are in the midst of a capital campaign to fund a remodel of their building and may roll the technology costs into that effort.

NPower provides assistance to nonprofit organizations that are in the process of making technology decisions. We've included here three case studies of organizations that NPower has recently assisted with donor management software selection. They have agreed to share their stories to help illustrate the process outlined in this toolkit, as it may be helpful to you in your own decision-making process.

Casa Latina

CASA Latina is a community-based organization founded in 1994 to empower Seattle's Latino immigrants by providing them educational and economic opportunities. Each year over 1,000 immigrants enroll in their programs, which include a day laborer program as well as programs for immigrant women and families with children. In 2005 CASA Latina placed workers in 7,600 temporary jobs and found permanent employment for over 100 immigrants.

As is typical for a nonprofit, CASA Latina is trying to increase donations using limited resources. In 2005, they switched from an Access database to Fundraiser Jr. After a year in this system, they are finding it severely lacking in the functionality they need to manage their fund development efforts.

CASA Latina has 1800 – 2000 records in their donor database, and they use a separate database for their day work center. Fundraising activities include regular solicitations by letter, in addition to an annual auction attended by roughly 500 people. They use Quickbooks as their accounting software and enter donor contributions twice, into both their accounting records and the donor database.

CASA Latina contacted NPower to request help selecting a donor database tool that would substantially meet their needs. Together, they followed the steps outlined in this toolkit.

First, an NPower consultant met with key staff at CASA Latina (CL). In the first meeting, fundraising associates talked through their processes relating to each type of constituent (prospects, donors, foundations, volunteers, etc.) and reviewed their existing database systems. In the second meeting Executive Director Hilary Stern discussed her needs, and the group talked through a checklist of donor management functions and ranked their priority to the organization.

Casa Latina's goals for donor software were the following:

1. Increase efficiency by integrating the donor management data with auction information
2. Broaden access to data by implementing a multi-user system
3. Expand analysis capabilities through more sophisticated querying and reporting functionality
4. Increase effectiveness by utilizing an automated reminder system for donor communications and grants management as well as board contacts

With these goals in mind, NPower helped Casa Latina develop a detailed list of functional requirements for the new donor management software. After a review of available off-the-shelf software, Casa Latina has decided to consider the following systems to meet their specific needs:

- Exceed! Premier
- ResultsPlus!
- Sage Fundraising 50
- GiftWorks

NPower and Casa Latina were also able to rule out three proposed systems that did not meet the critical requirements.

Casa Latina will solicit funding for the software once they have made a decision on which package to buy. Although cost is definitely an important factor, they hope to be able to purchase donor management software that will see them into the foreseeable future and allow them to grow their donor base and manage information more effectively.

MEET THE ORGANIZATIONS

Arts Corps

Arts Corps is a nonprofit youth development program that partners with schools and community organizations to bring free arts classes to low-income youth. The vision of Arts Corps is to promote a just and compassionate society that celebrates human possibility and the transformative power of the arts, and the Arts Corps mission is to provide access to diverse learning opportunities that use art as the tool to nurture critical thinking, individual power and creativity.

Arts Corps executive director Lisa Fitzhugh met with NPower in 2005 to discuss the future data tracking needs of Arts Corps. Arts Corps asked NPower to examine their existing data structures and to create a functional requirement document that detailed their needs.

Previously, information about Arts Corps constituents—donors, students, teachers, and partner organizations—was stored in a MySQL database and accessed via a custom website. The database had some functionality for tracking constituents and donations, but lacked many needed features for reporting and managing donors and grants and caused major inefficiency in routine tasks such as mailing lists.

NPower and Arts Corps started by identifying the following high-level goals:

1. Make systems more efficient so staff can concentrate on the mission
2. Stop losing information about donors and other contacts
3. Enable staff to produce reports and mailings more easily
4. Facilitate better evaluation of Arts Corps classes, enrollment, and attendance
5. Connect with donors and clients via a new and improved website
6. Select software solutions that are a good value and fit with the Arts Corps style

An additional factor helped to narrow the field of possible solutions for Arts Corps: because Arts Corps has invested in all Apple Mac workstations, it was important to find a Mac-friendly solution. This consideration, along with the fact that they wanted a single, highly customizable solution for managing all their data, led Arts Corps to look at three possible solutions: Ebase, CiviCRM, and Salesforce.com.

After weighing the pros and cons, Arts Corps signed up for an account with Salesforce and contracted with NPower consultants to help customize and implement the system. The Salesforce Foundation donates up to 10 licenses to non-profit organizations, its interface is highly customizable and works in most web browsers, and data stored there can be integrated with a website without too much difficulty.

In Fall 2006, just in time to enroll students for the new school year, Arts Corps switched from their previous web-based system to Salesforce. NPower consultants have created web pages that display the up-to-date Arts Corps class catalog and allow web visitors and potential volunteers to express interest and join the Arts Corps mailing list in Salesforce. Moreover, the new database offers all the fields and reports that Arts Corps will need to evaluate their classes as they had hoped.

With its combination of donors, grant tracking, volunteers, and after-school programs, the Arts Corps database was an ambitious undertaking. Difficult issues have surfaced during the transition, and there is still a lot of training and customization to be done. Even so, the staff believes that this solution will help them to meet their fundraising goals and better manage relationships with their constituents, enabling them to improve the exciting services they provide to the community.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR DECISION: THE CD

We have provided a CD to accompany this toolkit in hopes that you will use the tools on it to aid in your own donor management selection. On it you will find blank copies of the tools and matrixes sampled in the toolkit. We have also included links to additional resources and helpful articles, indicated here.

Additional Resources

- Techsoup. www.techsoup.org
- Idealware: www.idealware.org
- NPower: www.npowerseattle.org / www.npower.org

Online Links

1. NPower's TechAtlas tool:
   http://www.techatlas.org
2. Belarc Advisor. According to its website, Belarc offers free licenses to some charitable organizations:
   http://www.belarc.com/free_download.html
3. FreshDiagnose by Fresh Devices. Free for 10 days:
   http://www.freshdevices.com/freshdiag.html

Featured CD Resources

- PDF copy of this toolkit
- Software comparison charts
- Articles and other resources
- Feature Requirements Tool
- Donor Management Requirements Tool
- Agency Process Mapping Tools

Donor Management Feature Checklist

- General Functional Requirements Tool
- Potential Feature Requirements Tool
- Process Map Chart

CONGRATULATIONS

If you've read this far you have taken the first step to smoother sailing in donor management software selection. You have also demonstrated your commitment to improving your organization's donor management practices along the way.

Our goal in writing this toolkit and assembling the resources on the accompanying CD is to provide you with a useful guide to the why's and how-to's of software selection into your existing toolkit of donor management and technology planning resources. We hope you'll do the hands-on work of the tools and exercises to make this process your own.

To make the most of this toolkit,

Remember, what appears to be a timesaver at the beginning can actually cause grief and lost time down the road…

- walk through the whole four step process rather jumping ahead to call vendors.
- Do the hands-on assignments and exercises to define your organization's donor software needs
- Open the accompanying Resource CD for links, resources and the tools discussed throughout this toolkit to learn more.

In the words of a 'So Much to Consider' workshop participant—

"The time you spend to ensure that your choice works with the whole of your nonprofit, the more time you will spend reaping the benefits of a good donor management system."

We couldn't agree more.

Happy software hunting!

NPower Seattle

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