



# The Leadership Letter

## Do You Need a Technology Plan?

In today's wired world, technology is as vital to an organization's productivity and success as its Board members and employees are. So, if you have a staffing plan, as most organizations do, why shouldn't you have a technology plan?

Taking advantage of available technologies can help your organization advance its mission in an efficient, cost-effective manner. With the right tools, you can reach more people and get more done, all in less time and with less money. But what are the right tools? How much do they cost? Where do you get them? When should you explore new tools? These are all questions that should be addressed in your technology plan. A sound technology plan can

- **Help you obtain funding.** Donors and Board members want to see a plan before dedicating funds to a project.
- **Create new opportunities and methods** for advancing your organization's mission and goals.
- **Save money.** Outlining your needs, both short- and long-term, will help you make better buying decisions. Your members will appreciate your wise use of their dues.
- **Prevent disaster.** A poorly thought out system can create

stress, lead to data loss, and cause headaches for years.

- **Save staff time.** How much time do you waste working around and repairing technology glitches and shortfalls?
- **Protect your organization from staff turnover.** Good documentation and cross-training will keep you moving forward if an employee leaves.

Now that you know why you need a technology plan, how do you go about creating one? First, know that this will not be an easy process, **but it will be a rewarding one.** Then, follow these seven basic steps:

1. **Establish leadership and support.** You need a technology team with a leader, and management and staff that will support that team and its efforts.
2. **Evaluate your resources.** What do you have and how is it—or is it—meeting your needs?
3. **Define your needs.** What do you need to do that technology can help you accomplish?
4. **Explore your options.** What solutions are available and which ones best fit your needs?

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## Technology Plan (cont'd)

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5. **Write the plan.** Document your resources, needs and solutions, and budget.
6. **Obtain funding.** Your written plan will help you do that!
7. **Implement your plan** by creating a timeline, assigning duties and responsibilities, and evaluating progress.

For more information and guidance on technology planning, explore these resources:

- [TechSoup.org Learning Center](#)—This online article

archive created with nonprofits in mind is jam-packed with technology planning information, including a more detailed description of the seven steps listed above and a sample technology plan.

- ***Wired for Good*** by Joni Podolsky (Jossey-Bass, 2003) is a strategic technology planning guide for nonprofits of all sizes.
- ***The Accidental Techie*** by Sue Bennett (Fieldstone Alliance, 2005) provides

guidance for creating a support system that will help your organization use technology more effectively.

Sources:

Anna Mills, "Why a Technology Plan?" May 4, 2000, <<http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/techplan/archives/page9834.cfm>>, accessed on Dec 13, 2011.

"What's Involved in Technology Planning? Seven Steps to a Better Technology Plan," Dec 5, 2002, <<http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/techplan/archives/page9832.cfm>>, accessed on Dec 13, 2011.

## TechSoup: Providing Technology for Nonprofits

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Is your organization struggling to keep up with ever-evolving technology due to budget restrictions? TechSoup can help. TechSoup is a nonprofit that provides other nonprofits and libraries with technology that empowers them to fulfill their missions and serve their communities. According to their website, "[TechSoup Global is working toward a time when every nonprofit and NGO on the planet has the technology resources and knowledge they need to operate at their full potential.](#)" To that end, TechSoup partners with various tech companies to provide product donations to qualifying organizations.

For example, if you have been wishing you could provide online training to your members but you're worried that the cost of doing so would be prohibitive, think again! Qualifying

organizations can get an annual subscription to an online training platform by paying an administrative fee that amounts to less than 10% of the cost of the service.

Don't know what you need? In addition to product donations, TechSoup also provides free learning resources—including articles, blogs, webinars, and forums led by expert hosts—that can help your organization figure out what technology is available and how it can help you achieve your goals and advance your mission.

Joining TechSoup is free. Here's how to get started:

1. **Go to [www.techsoup.org](http://www.techsoup.org).**
2. **Click "Join TechSoup"** and fill out the form. This is done by an individual representing the organization.

3. **Click "Register Your Organization"** and enter the required information.
4. **Qualify your organization** by providing the required documentation (e.g. your tax-exempt status letter from the IRS).
5. **Request a product donation.** Not all organizations will qualify for donations from all of TechSoup's donor partners. You will be notified if you do not meet the eligibility criteria for a particular product donation.

# Could a Service-Learning Project Be the Answer?

Associations sometimes find themselves stuck in a vicious cycle where a lack of technology keeps everyone so tied up doing everything manually that nobody has time to explore the technology tools that could free staff and volunteers up to focus on more meaningful projects. Or, perhaps budget concerns are the issue. Does this sound familiar? Whatever the reason for your IT rut, a service-learning project may be the solution.

According to Robin A. Alexander, a service-learning project is one "in which students, under faculty supervision, undertake information-technology projects for nonprofits." In the A.S.S.I.S.T. program at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, where Alexander is an Associate professor, instructors seek out local

nonprofits who would benefit from an IT project that

- Is appropriate for the class.
- Provides a challenge but is achievable within the semester timeframe.
- Has a high probability of success.
- Would provide significant value to the recipient organization.

Service-learning projects benefit both the nonprofit and the students and faculty involved. Benefits include

- A new system that meets your organization's needs.
- Increased technical knowledge and awareness for staff.

- A source of potential staff for your organization and a source for potential employment for the students.
- Interaction with a college or university that could build a relationship and lead to further partnerships down the road.

To participate in a service-learning project, contact local institutions to see what programs are available. Although not often publicized, these projects are becoming more common.

Source:

Robin A. Alexander, "Need to Update Your Information Technology? Try Service Learning," *Nonprofit World*, Sept/Oct 2011, pp. 27-29.

# Limiting Liability When Working With Volunteers

Many organizations rely on volunteer "techies" to setup, maintain, and repair their IT systems. Here are some legal issues to consider:

- **The volunteers' safety**—Provide a safe, secure place for them to work.
- **Staff and client safety**—Careful screening and even reference checks are a good idea before bringing someone new on board.
- **Child safety**—Your volunteer may not have much experience with children and, therefore, may not know what is and is not appropriate behavior around children. Make sure the volunteer

knows your policies for unsupervised, one-to-one contact with children.

- **Confidentiality**—A volunteer may need passwords and access to confidential data to troubleshoot a problem. Find out what information he or she will need access to before beginning a project. Also, consider changing any passwords after the work is completed.
- **Solicitation**—A volunteer may offer to sell you his technical services or equipment. Set clear expectations for the volunteer project, and once it is completed, you can negotiate

an additional paid arrangement if you wish to.

- **Dismissing Volunteers**—Despite the best intentions, some volunteers may end up disappointing you for one reason or another. To avoid misunderstandings, set clear guidelines for the volunteer, and if the relationship must be terminated, make that fact clear to everyone involved.

Source:

Joan Heberger and Karen Thomas, "Volunteers and Legal Issues: Limiting Your Liability," Aug 24, 2000, <<http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/volunteers/archives/page10256.cfm>>, accessed on Dec 14, 2011.



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*Promoting Quality Care and Education for  
Young Children and Their Families*

[www.southernearlychildhood.org](http://www.southernearlychildhood.org)

*The Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA) is a regional organization committed to promoting quality care and education for young children and their families. SECA is committed to providing leadership and support to individuals and groups by:*

- *Enhancing the quality of young children's lives through early childhood care and education.*
- *Supporting families in their roles of caring for their children.*

*Fostering the professional growth and status of individuals working with young children and their families*

## LAECA's Collaborations Helps You "Get A Grip On Technology"

The Summer/Fall issue of *Collaborations*, the official journal of the Louisiana Early Childhood Association focused on how to integrate technology in classrooms and child care centers. Articles in the issue include:

- "Ten 'Best' iPad Apps for Children"
- "A Cheap and Easy Lightbox"
- "Computers and Toddlers: How to Make It Work"
- "Learning & Technology"
- "Innovative Uses for Technology"

- "5 Effective Ways for Young Children to Use Technology"
- "Key Opportunities and Challenges in Mobile Learning"
- "Technology in the Early Childhood Classroom"
- "Appropriate Technology Uses for Young Children"
- "Groups, Blogs and Linky Parties! Oh My!"
- "A Review of Technology in Early Childhood Classrooms"

If you're a leader in your SECA state or local affiliate organization,

you can access the issue by going to the Board Resources page of the SECA website: [http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/seca\\_board\\_login.php](http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/seca_board_login.php).

If you do not have access to this page, contact Martha Garner, *Collaborations* Editor, about obtaining a copy of the journal by emailing her at [mgarner352@cox.net](mailto:mgarner352@cox.net).

Kudos to LAECA for dedicating an entire issue of *Collaborations* to a topic that is becoming ever more important in early childhood education!