

# The View from Here:

## A Snapshot of Technology Assistance Needs of Nonprofit Organizations in the Tampa Bay Area



### ***THE WHY FOR THIS PROJECT***

- Interest in improving performance in nonprofits and government
- Experience with technology issues in nonprofits and state government
- Change agent background
- Opportunity to develop knowledge and network
- Shift in *Groups-That-Work* business to distance collaboration via computer technology

The purpose of the project was to explore:

- 1) the needs of nonprofits in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties for technology assistance and how their needs are served by existing nonprofit and for-profit technology providers;
- 2) whether technology service gaps exist and how these gaps may be filled through a nonprofit technology assistance center;
- 3) how to expand technology support capacity in the nonprofit community through internships and other learning opportunities for college students and entry-level professionals; and
- 4) the readiness of local foundations, nonprofits, governments, and other stakeholders to support the creation of a technology assistance nonprofit.

### ***THE HOW OF THIS PROJECT***

- **DATA COLLECTION**
  - Research protocols provided by Project Alchemy and NPower National
  - The merits of focus groups/interviews/surveys; decision to use interviews
  - Selection of population to be sampled—Guidestar categories, all nonprofit sectors represented including all volunteer organizations (AVO), no hospitals
- **METHODS**
  - Interview protocol—questions drawn from NPower National needs assessment protocol for nonprofits and for-profits
  - Interviewee calendar—July through November 2003
  - Interviewee population—see next page
  - Promises of confidentiality and aggregation of data given to interviewees
  - Setting up interviews—average of 4-5 phone calls to set up each interview
  - Assistance from Jim Mills, Director of the Juvenile Welfare Board, Pinellas County
- **ANALYSIS**
  - Access, Excel

**THE WHAT WE LEARNED IN THIS PROJECT**

**THE NEEDS OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN THE TAMPA BAY AREA**

**TABLE 1: POPULATION SURVEYED**

TYPE OF GROUP	BUDGET SIZE <sup>1</sup>				# OF EMPLOYEES			
	Large	Mid-size	Small	Micro	Large	Mid-size	Small	Micro
ARTS AND CULTURE (4)			3	1				4
ENVIRONMENT AND/OR ANIMALS ((4)		2	1	1		2	1	1 <sup>2</sup>
HEALTH (2)	1	1			1		1	
HUMAN SERVICES (8)	5	2		1	4	3		1
INTERNATIONAL (1)	1				1			
PUBLIC/SOCIETAL BENEFIT (2)				2				2
FOR-PROFIT TECH SERVICE PROVIDERS(7) <sup>3</sup>	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
FUNDERS (5)	5				3			2
GOVERNMENT OFFICES	1	1			1			1
TOTAL	13	6	4	5	10	5	2	11

- The annual budget and number of employees do not always fall into the same category of large, midsize, small, or micro. For instance, an organization may have a larger budget, especially in funding organizations that make grant awards, but relatively few employees to administer the programs.

**TABLE 2: TECHNOLOGY STAFFING FOR NONPROFITS SURVEYED**

Type of Nonprofit	Designated IT Staff	Other Designated Staff—"Accidental Techies"	Combo of staff, volunteers, and contractors
Large (7)	Four have 1 or more	Three—office manager, business operations manager, program person	
Midsize(5)		Two—office manager	Three
Small(4)		Two—finance director; one—ED	One—pro bono & contractor supp
Micro (5)		One—computer tech teaching organization	1—vendors/pro bono 2—volunteer support from board 1—AVO
Funders(5)	Three—2+	One—related org. support	One—staff and contractors

<sup>1</sup> Budget: Large>\$2m; Midsize<\$2m and >\$1m; Small<\$1m and >\$250,000; Micro<\$250,000. Number of employees: Large>50 employees; Midsize<50 and >25 employees; Small<25 and >10 employees; Micro<10 employees

<sup>2</sup> This organization is an AVO—all volunteer organization—and has no employees.

<sup>3</sup> Data were not routinely collected on the annual budgets or numbers of employees of for-profit tech service providers.

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**TABLE 3: TECHNOLOGY NEEDS OF TAMPA BAY NONPROFITS<sup>4</sup>**

TECHNOLOGY NEEDS	TYPES OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS					
	ARTS AND CULTURE (4)	ENVIRONMENT AND ANIMALS (4)	HEALTH (2)	HUMAN SERVICES (8)	INTERNATIONAL (1)	PUBLIC/ SOCIETAL BENEFIT (2)
<b>MONEY</b>	4(100%)	4(100%)	--	4(50%)	--	1(50%)
<b>HARDWARE</b>	4(100%)	4(100%)	2(100%)	2	--	--
<b>SOFTWARE</b>	4(100%)	4(100%)	2(100%)	2	--	--
<b>NETWORK CONNECTIVITY</b>	2(50%)	2(50%)	1(50%)	2	1	--
<b>INTERNET CONNECTIVITY</b>	3(75%)	3(75%)	1(50%)	2	--	--
<b>WEBSITE</b>	3(75%)	3(75%)	--	3	--	1(50%)
<b>OPERATING/ ACCOUNTING SYSTEMS</b>	3 (75%)	2(50%)	--	--	--	--
<b>DATABASE</b>	3(75%)	3(75%)	1	2	--	1(50%)
<b>TRAINING</b>	3(75%)	2(50%)	2(100%)	5(63%)	1(100%)	2(100%)
<b>IT STAFFING ISSUES<sup>5</sup></b>	1	--	--	2	--	--
<b>PC &amp; NETWORK SUPPORT</b>	4(100%)	1	2(100%)	5(63%)	--	--
<b>TECHNOLOGY PLANNING</b>	3(75%)	1	--	2	--	1(50%)
<b>LACK OF SYSTEM DOCUMENTATION<sup>6</sup></b>	2(50%)	--	--	--	--	--
<b>PROCUREMENT AND VENDOR RELATIONSHIPS<sup>7</sup></b>	2(50%)	1	--	1	--	1(50%)

**NET IMPACT**

Many nonprofit organizations are working harder, rather than smarter, because they don't have the basic technology infrastructure. Smaller organizations often lack current and compatible hardware and software; local connectivity; and the ability to use the Internet for easy communication, collaboration, and research. Small and midsize organizations struggle with inadequate information technology staffing, relying on combinations of "accidental techies" (program staff charged with IT responsibilities), pro bono assistance, and contractors, to provide basic computer and network support. Many midsize and large nonprofits do not have comprehensive information databases. Therefore, they are unable to easily analyze the impact of their programs or track the activities of clients, members, and other constituents or produce reports documenting

<sup>4</sup> These numbers are conservative and may not reflect the full extent of need.

<sup>5</sup> In this context, IT staffing issues refers to the personal capacity of IT or program staff designated to assist with IT not growing commensurate with the organization's technology needs.

<sup>6</sup> Because some organizations have relied heavily on volunteers to design databases and networks, and redesigns have occurred over time, schema do not exist to document the current setup.

<sup>7</sup> Several interviewees talked about the challenges involved in finding the right vendors and managing those relationships. As one interviewee said, "I don't have the knowledge to do it."

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outcomes for funders. Some must also cope with different reporting requirements imposed by funders.

**OTHER DISCOVERIES**

- Need for Technology Assistance Nonprofit in Tampa Bay Area
  - Yes! At least half the interviewees wish for a tech assistance nonprofit.
  - Specific desired services include training, stand-by resource for help with technology acquisition and identification of resources for purchasing same, Help-Desk and/or online performance support; communication and collaboration networks
- Relationships with vendors—developed through trial and error; once trust and good performance have been established, nonprofits deeply value and protect relationship
- Technology innovation in nonprofits—a lot of innovation is going on, particularly among large human service agencies with application/database development; this is leading to social entrepreneurialism as they market their innovations to other organizations
- Importance of board/executive leader support for technology—generally, the nonprofits doing the best job with technology have identifiable technology leadership on the board and executives who are eager to harness the power of technology to carry out their missions more effectively

***THE SO WHAT OF THIS PROJECT***

- Community Session in November 2003 to release and discuss research findings, and plan next steps
- Launch of planning group in November 2003 to develop a business plan for a technology assistance nonprofit presence
- Calendar for action—December 2003 to April 2004 for building and presenting plan to key stakeholders in Tampa Bay area
- Relationships are being built between Tampa Bay nonprofit and for-profit executives and national technology assistance nonprofits leaders, and with researchers; these relationships will help leaders in the Tampa Bay area to improve the array of technology assistance services for nonprofit organizations

***CONTACT INFORMATION***

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