

Nonprofit Boards & the Future of Technology: A Modest Proposal

Boards often have to make decisions involving technology. But do they have the expertise needed? Here's how to address the issue.

By Eugene Fram

Nonprofit boards often encounter technology issues while they're developing strategies. Thus, they're always seeking ways to become better informed about technology issues.

Some organizations have tried to add technological experts to their boards. However, the type of people with this expertise who also can contribute to broader discussions on finance, marketing, and human relations are in short supply.

Another approach has been to consider younger directors who understand the world of technology better. But this leaves only one board member, or at most two, qualified to review the issues involved.

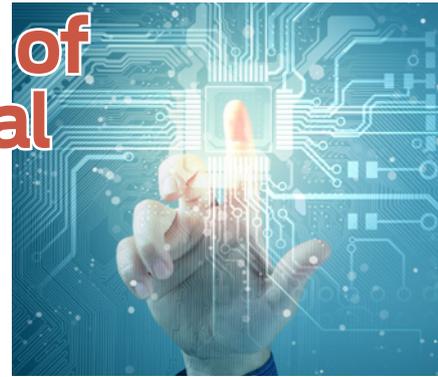
Nonprofit directors need to prepare themselves to become more technologically literate. Some developing technologies, such as 3-D printing, will completely change the future of organizations. To spread costs, nonprofits will certainly see the opportunities in developing big-data analytics with allied nonprofits or consortia. A director naive about technology opportunities will be equivalent to one currently naive about basic financial statements.

About 60% of potential nonprofit stakeholders under the age of 40 accept social media as a credible source. Boards without directors having a modicum of technological competence will be at a distinct disadvantage in establishing viable policies and strategic directions.

My Proposal

I suggest you consider forming a small advisory technology committee. This group can meet with directors and senior managers to focus on how new technologies might be applied to your organization. The committee shouldn't focus on technology nuts and bolts but, rather, on applications, new developments, allied apps, and the pros and cons of technological change. If your board encounters a major decision involving technology, there will be a relationship between your board members and the advisory committee. That relationship will help them develop a critical-thinking decision process.

Since most nonprofits are volunteer organizations, I anticipate that there will be technical personnel who will be willing to serve on the committee pro bono. I think the



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advisory committee should be able to function with three or four volunteers.

Nonprofit directors are now expected to have broad understandings about a variety of fields. It's time to add technology to that repertory. 

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Understanding Technology

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