

We are so excited to help you transition to a technical role in a social impact organization.

Overview: We created this guide because we want to set you up for success.

What's different? Some of these companies are familiar with interviewing technical talent, and for some, they are wading into new territory. We've provided them with some coaching and a similar guide to help them create the type of candidate experience you are used to. However, some aspects may still feel different. Please give them grace as they make adjustments to their processes and revel in the fresh perspectives you'll bring to their organizations.

Unsure if you're ready to make the switch? We totally understand. The authors of this guide, and the program managers at Tekalo, are all tech transitioners. In the second section of the guide, you will find some information about the differences you can expect - and why many folks are very glad to have made the transition.

Choose your own adventure by navigating through the links below to get started - but don't miss the **RECOMMENDED** sections! They contain tips to help you prepare for the process.

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How to prepare and what to expect from your interviews.

NEW TO THE SOCIAL IMPACT SPACE?

 [Social impact vs. tech industry: what's the difference?](#)

You may be surprised by some of the differences and similarities between tech and social impact.

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Many folks have made the transition - learn from and be inspired by their experiences.

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Some of our favorite resources about being a technologist in social impact organizations.



What to expect when working with Tekalo

You may have heard [that applying for social impact roles can be really hard](#) and that's often true, but Tekalo is here to make that easier for you. So, please don't let the historical difficulties scare you away. We need you here!

★ What's different with Tekalo ★

We know tech, and we know the social impact space. Many of us have successfully navigated these hiring processes ourselves and we are ready to help you do the same.

What the process looks like...

	Without Tekalo	With Tekalo
Finding social impact organizations that are hiring for technical roles	COMPLEX Endless google searches, spreadsheets on spreadsheets, scouring LinkedIn to find someone to refer you.	STRAIGHTFORWARD We do the search for you. We are in touch with many of the social impact organizations that are hiring for technical roles: they send the roles to us, we assess if you're a match, then we send it to you.
Writing cover letters and applications for all the different social impact organizations	BUSY WORK Creating multiple cover letters and sending in potentially hundreds of applications - though they all say pretty much the same thing.	ONE APPLICATION Just tell us once. We will use the application you submit to us to match you with organizations that fit your interests and skillsets.
Technical interviews with social impact organizations	UNCLEAR The hiring timelines and even the interviews themselves can be a bit opaque, which can be challenging from a candidate perspective.	PREPARED We work with our partner organizations to ensure their communication is timely and transparent. And we provide guidance to shape their interview process, so it will feel familiar to other interviews you've done previously.

★ The timelines ★

	Timeline	What's happening in this time
You apply to Tekalo	Immediately	Our Talent Connectors review your profile to assess if your interests and skillsets align with any of our current partners and roles.
Interview with a Talent Connector	Within 1-2 months	Our Talent Connectors will reach out to you to schedule an interview when we find a role that we think could be a fit.
Intro to an organization	Shortly after your interview with the Talent Connector	After our interview, we'll reach out once more to confirm that you're interested in the role and that you consent to us sharing your info with the partner organization. If you're still in, we'll connect you with the organization.
Interviewing with an organization	Within ~2 weeks	<p>After reviewing your resume, the organization will reach out to you to schedule your interview. We recommend that they do this within 2 weeks.</p> <p>Keep in mind, your Talent Connector interview with Tekalo will count as your first interview with the partner organization. So you'll be able to dive right in to meet the team.</p>
Selection process	Within 1 month	We encourage organizations to move quickly through the process - since we know that you are likely considering other roles as well. Feel free to communicate more about your specific timeline with your contact at the organization.

Interviewing with social impact organizations

★ Tekalo's interview ★

Your interview with Tekalo will feel pretty straightforward - similar to other phone screens you've had. We want to get a sense for the work that you're excited to do, your general qualifications to do it, and your requirements for the role.

Come to the interview prepared to...

- Share why you want to work at a social impact organization
- Describe some things that would make you excited to accept an offer
- Discuss your previous technical experience
- Answer a short technical interview question (or two!) relevant to the role(s) you are interested in
- Share more about the salary range and benefits you'd like to receive
- Let the Talent Connector know about any accommodations you may need in the interview process

Remember, the Talent Connector is your advocate - the more information you share with them, the more likely they are to identify a role that is the right fit for you.

After the interview...

Once the Talent Connector has your information, we'll be able to confirm the match we found for you (and we may find others!). We will always reach out to you before we share your resume with an organization, so you'll know when to expect to hear more. In the meantime, please keep your Talent Connector posted on your timelines.

★ Social impact interviews ★

Interviews with our partner organizations may feel a bit different than the interviews you're used to in tech. While tech companies ask some questions to ensure that you are aligned with their mission generally, technical skills are usually ranked as more important. In social impact organizations, your technical skills are definitely key, but your passion for and connection to their work is often an even higher priority. Fully understanding the impact of their work (potentially your **future** work) ensures you'll bring the right mindset to best serve their communities.

What to expect for your interview:

- **Process differences:** many social impact organizations are more accustomed to running behavioral interviews than technical interviews. So if your interviewers seem less familiar with the questions than you expected or the process runs a bit more slowly, keep that in mind!
- **Use your resources:** as you would for an interview in the tech industry, you can expect to be able to use google, stackoverflow, etc. as needed for your interviews.
- **Time for you to ask questions:** Your interviewers will leave time for you to ask questions throughout the process. Take some time to prepare your questions in advance by thinking through what is most important for you to learn about a future role.

! Social impact vs. tech: what's the difference?

These industries certainly aren't the same - but you may be surprised by the amount of overlap you'll find as you make your transition. We also want to be up-front about the differences in order to help you feel more prepared.

★ Common misconceptions ★

Myth:	Reality:
Nonprofits don't pay - they are looking for volunteers.	Actually, a significant portion of non-profits' budget goes towards staff compensation! Non-profits do rely on volunteers for some work (and we can connect you with volunteer organizations like U.S. Digital Response!), but many of the roles Tekalo shares are paid opportunities with good salaries and benefits.
You'd have to wear a suit every day.	There will be some teams who dress up - especially if they have important donor meetings or meetings with elected representatives. However, technical teams almost always dress more casually. And you won't be alone: organizing and operations teams will likely be dressed casually as well.
Your work would not be technically innovative.	Tech solutions alone will likely not solve social impact problems, but they are a key element. You will be using tech to contribute to significant problems affecting many people, that in itself will require innovation and creativity.

★ Similarities ★

- **Scrappy:** a popular startup term, and a common social impact feeling. Getting creative with limited resources is absolutely key in social impact organizations. Make sure to bring this important skillset with you as you transition.
- **Wear multiple hats:** rarely will your work be limited to just your title. Social impact organizations often have "All Hands On Deck" moments where you might find yourself setting up for an event or connecting with volunteers. You will definitely not get bored.
- **Mission driven:** at startups and social impact organizations, the mission you're working towards is foundational. It is the glue that connects everyone - across departments, timezones, and more. You are all there to work towards a shared goal, one that you believe in passionately!

★ Differences ★

- **Cautious:** “move fast and break things” is not going to be a common phrase at social impact organization. That’s because there can be a lot more at stake at these organizations - including human lives. You want to work quickly, you want to take some risks, but remember that these organizations proceed with caution because there is often a lot on the line.
- **Comfort with technology:** your colleagues at social impact organizations may be less comfortable and/or less familiar with some of the technologies that you work with. Nonetheless, most of the organizations can definitely benefit from some updates. Patience and emotional intelligence will be key skills to use as you start to effect these changes.
- **Less technical support:** the technical team will likely be smaller than it would at a tech company, and it may have less influence on the organization overall. Additionally, for folks earlier in the careers, there may be fewer technical mentors to guide you (but there will be more non-technical mentors!).
- **Career paths:** The technical career paths may be less obvious than at a tech company, but they can also be broader in scope! You may not have a clear cut engineering ladder but you will be exposed to cross functional areas that will influence your professional development.
- **Culture and community:** This difference certainly varies depending on the social impact organization. That said, oftentimes, social impact organizations are less homogenous than tech companies can be - you’re likely to find more folks with marginalized identities working in social impact organizations. Additionally, there will be more opportunities to connect with other organizations that work in a similar impact area.

★ Your mindset ★

You will definitely notice the similarities and differences when you join an organization - especially because we’ve pointed them out just now. But we highly recommend that you don’t focus on them.

Instead, spend time looking for the things that *are working* - and specifically why they are working so well. They will provide a roadmap for what works well at the organization that you can lean into. Then, when you want to make changes, you have a better idea of how those changes can fit more easily into what is already there.



Why make the switch?

There are many reasons to transition from the tech industry to the social impact space: maybe you're looking for an opportunity that aligns more closely with your values, maybe you're looking for a different kind of work-life balance, or maybe you're ready to flex your emotional intelligence when it comes to technology. Or perhaps it's none of those and you have your own motivations. There are also volunteering, part-time, and contract opportunities, if you're looking for additional flexibility.

Whatever is inspiring your transition, we want to tell you sincerely that we are so glad you are here. Social impact organizations are at the forefront of cultural shifts in the United States and enabling their work with technological advances will ensure their success.

But, don't just take it from us. Take it from the people who have successfully transitioned and shared their stories:

"It's really important that we have more technologists, whether it's product people, engineering, design, come into this space to be able to create impact at a worldwide scale."

- Christien Williams, Technologist at Schmidt Futures

"I'm proud to work in the social justice space, because it has allowed me so many opportunities to have a greater impact and work with communities that I care about."

- Amira Dhalla, Privacy and Security Expert

"There's a lot of discourse in the tech world about impact at startups vs. large companies, but the kind of work USDS was doing? No competition."

- [Amy Quispe \(she/ella\), Engineer @ USDS HO](#)

"I came out of the call with the realization that I want to dedicate my life to public service. I felt — and continue to feel — called to contribute my time, resources, and skills to serve those in need, wherever and however I am most helpful."

- [Izzie Zahorian on the moment that inspired her to commit her career to public service tech.](#)

"After years of struggling at startups, the excitement faded away. Most of my startups didn't move the needle — they had users, and sometimes even made money, but were not mission critical to anyone's lives. I wanted to feel like I was adding value, not just in a business sense but also at a personal level. I also wanted to work on something I could contribute my whole self to, not just my engineering skills."

- [Neil Sharma \(he/ him\), USDS Engineer](#)

Resources

For Information: Resources about tech jobs with social impact

USDS Wants You: A Guide to Joining Our Team	US Digital Service's guide to joining their team. Keep in mind, they work with the federal government so their process has a more thorough background check (including a drug test) than other social impact organizations will require. But it can be helpful to understand other hiring processes!
The Climate Careers Podcast: The Climate Tech Landscape for Job Seekers	This podcast episode explores how tech folks can find their place in climate tech work.
So you want to serve your country: A (biased) guide to tech jobs in federal government	Erin Meyer provides an overview of government hiring processes - but keep in mind, this is NOT Tekalo's process. Our goal is to make it much easier than this.
A day in the life of an 18F Engineer	Working in tech for social impact isn't all that different from other roles in tech on a day to day basis. Read an account from an 18F engineer about his role. (Also available in Spanish!)
Building Technology With, Not For Communities (An engagement guide for civic tech)	Laurenelle McCann gives tactics and examples for how technology can be built in partnership with communities to have an even greater impact.
All Tech Is Human Community Slack Group	A slack group you can use to connect with other folks who want to use tech for good!

For Inspiration: stories from tech workers doing social impact

Tweet thread by the previous CIO of the City of Miami	Mike Sarasti was the Chief Innovation Officer for the City of Miami and he describes some of the impact his team had in this tweet thread.
The Climate Careers Podcast: Big Tech to Climate Tech with Lauren Fraser	Lauren Fraser describes her transition from Big Tech (Facebook and Twitter) to being a Co-Founder of Canopy.
Why we serve: Fatima Noor	Fatima Noor is a product manager and while she was working at the White House, she noticed some people walking around in jeans which was unusual in a generally formal environment. But that's how she found out about USDS! (See? Suits aren't a necessity!)
We asked our coworkers: Why did you join 18F?	Learn from perspectives across departments about why they are working in tech for social impact!