

Non-Profit Needs Survey

Charlottesville-Albemarle Region

Overview

Sponsored By:

Virginia Piedmont Technology Council's
Connected Community Initiative

Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce
Non-Profit Roundtable



**Strategic Technology
Partners**



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Non-Profit Needs Survey Overview

Several local groups have recognized the need to determine the most pressing issues facing our regional non-profit organizations in order to formulate solutions to those needs. The Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce **Non-Profit Roundtable** and the Virginia Piedmont Technology Council **Connected Community** worked in partnership to create this Needs Survey. It captures information from 60 non-profit organizations in Charlottesville, Albemarle and surrounding areas. Strategic Technology Partners, a Charlottesville-based technology consulting firm, also donated substantial time to assist in this effort.

The survey questions are focused on two primary areas: technology needs of our regional non-profits and the need for a Non-Profit Resource Center.

1. **Technology Needs:** An assumption behind the survey is that technology is a pressing issue for many non-profits. One goal of the survey is to gather information that will assist in developing or facilitating technology programs specifically tailored to the needs of local non-profit organizations.
2. **Non-Profit Resource Center:** A Non-Profit Resource Center would potentially serve as a resource library, a home for seminars, a center for our sector to benefit from the economies of scale, and as an advocate and a clearing-house for the non-profit sector. A second goal of this survey is to assess the need for a Non-Profit Resource Center in our region.

How the Survey was Conducted

The survey was distributed on April 2, 2001 to approximately 250 regional non-profit organizations. The response due date was April 13, 2001. In order to reach as many organizations as possible it was distributed via e-mail, fax and regular US mail using several different mailing lists. These mailing lists were provided by Monticello Avenue, United Way – Thomas Jefferson Area, Commission on Children and Families, and the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce Nonprofit Roundtable. Since multiple lists were used some organizations received multiple copies of the survey. Recipients were encouraged to distribute duplicate surveys to others in their organization.

Sixty surveys were completed and returned for a survey response rate of 25%. Survey respondents included:

- 14 human services agencies (including agencies serving children, seniors, women, people living in poverty, etc)
- 8 health services agencies
- 8 educational nonprofits
- 8 arts / historical society agencies
- 6 UVA affiliated organizations
- 6 recreation-focused nonprofits
- 3 other miscellaneous
- 7 anonymous responses

The geographic region covered by the respondents included the City of Charlottesville, Albemarle County, and most of the surrounding counties. Many of the respondents cover most or all of Planning Districts 9 and 10.

As both an additional incentive to complete the survey and a way of saying “thank you” for participation, four completed surveys were randomly selected from those returned by the due date. The organization with the earliest survey return date received a grand prize consisting of a detailed technology assessment and recommendations from Strategic Technology Partners. The other three winners each received a prize of four hours of free technology consulting services in areas of particular interest to their organization from StudentTechies.

Highlights

On the technology front:

- **Nonprofits are using technology in many of the places where it makes sense.** 75% of the respondents felt their organization’s level of technology use was adequate or better.
- **Most nonprofits are “getting along” with their current level of in-house technical competence.** 85% of the respondents rated their organization’s level of technical competence as adequate or better.

However,

- **Multiple barriers remain to reaching technology goals. Most of the responding organizations indicated they want to be able to do more with technology.** Funding, time and expertise are perceived as equally significant barriers to reaching the desired level of technology use.
- **External assistance would be useful.** Respondents view technology consulting and group training as the most valuable forms of outside technology assistance.

- **Database software #1 on the technology wish list.** Database software to help manage client files would be the most useful technology for regional nonprofits if it could be successfully implemented.
- **Training needs most frequently cited were Internet training and training on software to manage client files.**
- **Most organizations are connected to the Internet via modem.** Nearly 97% of respondents have an Internet connection. 52% of these are dial-up connections.
- **A large percentage of local non-profits maintain websites.** Over 88% of the responding organizations maintain a web site. The primary function of non-profit web sites is providing information about the organization.
- **Internet is used mainly for e-mail.** E-mail is, by far, the primary use of the Internet in the organizations surveyed.

Concerning a Non-Profit Resource Center:

- **Resource Library would be useful.** 71% of respondents said they would use a resource library occasionally or more often.
- **Seminars are a valuable training tool.** 78% said they would utilize educational seminars occasionally or regularly.
- **Rental space an identified need.** Seven organizations of 57 expressed interest in renting space in a facility—a sufficient number to fill a medium size facility.
- **Organizations are willing to pay for a Center.** 76% of respondents said they were willing to pay either an annual membership or a per program fee to have access to a Center.
- **Multitude of uses identified.** Organizations expressed interest in a resource center that is a physical space, a clearing-house, and one that synthesizes information onto Internet based resources.
- **Importance of volunteerism noted.** Volunteer management is a primary training need.

Recommendations

On the technology front:

- **Group Training.** Group training is clearly recognized as the most valuable type of external assistance in improving the effectiveness of technology use in local non-profit organizations (47%). **Training on the Internet and software to manage client files** were most frequently cited as those group-training classes that would have the greatest impact.

The first step in meeting this need is developing an inventory of existing training programs available to non-profits in these two areas. This could be done in partnership with local technology training organizations. This will help to determine the source, extent and appropriate solution to the problem. Based upon the inventory VPTC can determine the appropriate role it needs to play in the training area.

- **Technology Consulting.** Database software to help manage client files and desktop publishing were cited technologies that would be most useful to the organization if it could successfully implement them (32% and 22%, respectively). These were also selected as the areas in which external consulting services would be of greatest value (31% and 21%, respectively).

The first step in meeting this need is to determine the nature and extent of the problem. This can be done by a phone follow-up to or focus group with selected Needs Survey respondents. Once the technology consulting need has been defined an inventory of existing resources in this area should be compiled. This could be done in partnership with local technology firms. In this area in particular the survey points to a potential business opportunity for local technology providers.

- **Web Sites.** Non-profit organizations use web sites primarily to provide information about their organizations (35%). Providing information to clients is second (21%) and maintaining client contact a distant fourth (13%). In general, the Internet is used primarily for e-mail (32%), research (23%), and maintaining a web presence (21%).

The Internet is, first and foremost, a relationship management tool. There are numerous potential opportunities for using the Internet to further the primary mission of local non-profits. Given the time, funding and resource constraints cited in this survey, it is very unlikely that these organizations are even aware of the ways in which the Internet might be used to enhance client relationships. A well-defined research project which identifies and reports on the five or six most valuable ways in which non-profit organizations have benefited from the Internet would provide useful information to our regional non-profits, and could point to the need for additional consulting or training services. This study could be undertaken by VPTC, a local technology firm or even as a project within the Darden School.

- **Technology Needs and the Resource Center.** Technology needs are repeatedly mentioned in the responses to questions about Resource Center services. VPTC and the Non-Profit Roundtable should work together to determine the most effective way to deliver the needed programs and to avoid duplicating programs that consume scarce resources.
- **Help Desk Services.** Respondents indicated that a help desk service offering support for hardware problems, website problems and guidance on use of specific software would be a valuable service. This was frequently cited as a need under the questions pertaining to establishment of a Nonprofit Resource Center as well.

Concerning a Non-Profit Resource Center:

- **Further Research.** Follow up with interested organizations to clarify the need for a Resource Center and identify more precisely what the focus of a Center should be.
- **Disseminate Survey Results.** Share this study with prospective community partners in and initiate appropriate discussions.
- **Research Potential Funding Options.** Follow up with discussions with potential funding sources to explore their interest in creation of a Non-Profit Resource Center.
- **Explore wider opportunities.** Explore the potential of widening the Resource Center concept to include small business with Small Business Development Center and others.
- **Volunteerism.** Share the information regarding volunteer management with local and state organizations involved in this area and discuss opportunities to meet this need.

Key Findings

A. Technology Use & Barriers

Question 1: How do you rate your organization's level of technology use?

Out of 60 respondents to this question, 34% rated their level of technology use as more than adequate or excellent, 41% as adequate, and 25% as less than adequate. The mean was 3.2 (where 5 = excellent and 1 = completely inadequate).

Question 2: What are the barriers to reaching the desired level of technology use in your organization? Please rate in terms of significance where 5=major barrier, 3=moderate barrier, and 1=minor barrier.

Lack of funding, lack of expertise, and lack of time were all cited as the most significant barriers to technology use (31%, 30%, 29% of points resp.).

Question 3: What sorts of external assistance would be most valuable in improving the effectiveness of technology use in your organization? Check all that apply

Out of 204 responses to this question, need for group training (47%) and technology consulting (30%) led need for access to a computer help desk (14%)

Within **technology consulting**, help setting up client, volunteer or other databases is the most pressing single need (31%). Web page design (6 responses), network administration/support (5 responses), and trouble-shooting (4 responses) were cited as “other in-house consulting” needs.

In the **group training** area, training on the Internet and software to manage client files (25% each) ranked slightly higher than software to create budgets (15%) and newsletters (19%). How to create, use & maintain databases (8 responses), Windows software/MS Office training (6 responses), and word processing software (6 responses) were most frequently cited as “other group training” needs.

Hardware trouble (13 responses), using specific software (6 responses), and website problems (4 responses) were most frequently cited as problems for which help desk support is needed.

Several respondents (3) commented under “other services and technology assistance” that “we don’t know how to ask the right questions or how technology can help us.”

Question 4: Which of the following does your organization use? Please rate these in terms of frequency of use in your organization where 5=constant use, 3=occasional use, and 0=not used at all.

Word-processing and e-mail received the highest percentage of points for frequency of use (17% and 18% respectively) with Internet and database a close second (15% and 14% respectively). Overall, the point spread across responses is quite narrow.

Question 5: What technologies would be most useful to your organization if it could successfully implement them? Please check all that apply.

Out of 92 responses to this question, database software to help manage client files (32%) was selected as the technology that would be most useful to the organizations in the survey. Desktop publishing to help with newsletters, brochures, and other print publications (22%) was rated the second most useful technology.

B. The Internet

Question 6: Does your organization have a connection to the Internet?

Of the 60 organizations responding, 58 (96.67%) have a connection to the Internet. Of these 58 organizations most (52%) have a dial-up connection:

Question 7: If your organization maintains a website, what are its primary functions? Please rate on a scale of 5=most important to 1=least important.

Of the 60 organizations responding, 53 maintain a web site (88%). Of these, providing information about the organization is the most important web site function for the organization (35% of points awarded for this question). Providing information to clients is a fairly distant second (21%).

Question 8: What are the primary uses of the Internet in your organization? Please rate on a scale of 5=critical to 1=insignificant.

E-mail is the most critical use of the Internet in the organizations responding to the survey (32% of the points awarded for this question) with a web presence (23%) and research on topics of interests to clients (21%) running second.

C. Technology Support

Question 9: How do you rate your organization's level of technical competence?

Of the 60 organizations responding to this question 25% rated the organization's level of technical competence as more than adequate or very high, 60% as adequate, and 15% as sub-adequate. The mean was 3.1 (where 5 = very high and 1 = inadequate).

Question 10: Which best describes your organization's approach to technology support?

Most organizations describe their approach to technology support as “distributed across the organization with different people specializing in different areas” (25%) or “a few people understand and use the technology but most people ignore it” (20%). There are also a substantial number of “other” approaches to technology support.

D. Non-profit Resource Center

Question 11: How would your organization benefit from a resource library of books, periodicals, videos, etc., regarding Non-Profit issues, e.g. resource development, volunteer management, Board development, strategic planning.

Of 61 responses, 23% said they would use such a library at least once per month, 48% occasionally, and 29% not at all. The mean was 2.9 (where 5 = at least once per week and 1 = no use for such a resource library).

Question 12: Would your organization benefit from more low cost seminars similar to those currently offered by the Chamber Non-Profit Roundtable?

Of 57 responses to this question 19% would access such seminars on a regular basis, 59% would use them occasionally and 22% would use them rarely or not at all. The mean was 3.0 (where 5 = one of organization's greatest needs and 1 = no use for such seminars.)

As a follow up to this question organizations were asked what seminar subjects they would find most helpful:

Seminar Topic	#
Recruiting, Managing, Retaining & Motivating Volunteers	6
Board Development	3
Leadership/Management Skills	3
Technology Training	3
Grant Writing	2
Human Resources Laws & Issues	2
Recruiting, Managing & Retaining Members	2
Staff Recruitment, Development & Retention	2
Strategic Planning	2
Communications	1
Conflict Resolution	1
Fund Raising	1
Managing Difficult People	1
Marketing	1
Negotiation	1
Update on Status of Area Youth	1
Youth Development	1

Question 13: Would your organization be willing to pay a membership to belong to such a Center to help fund its operations?

Of 62 responses to this question, 13% would be willing to pay up to \$100/year, 21% up to \$50/year, 21% would be willing to pay for particular programs, and 24% have no funds to utilize a Resource Center. The mean was 2.2 (where 4 = up to \$100/year and 1 = no funds to utilize a Resource Center).

Question 14: What are the primary challenges your organization faces that could be addressed by a Resource Center? What programs or services would you recommend be offered?

The challenges cited most frequently include:

Challenge	#
State of the art facility for meetings, conferences, to give presentations	4
Marketing assistance – including Public Service Announcements, advertising with no budget	3
Technology problems	3
Training shortages (getting our people trained)	3
Clearinghouse for information – we get tons of information – the problem isn't where to get info – it is finding time to look at it and determine what is most relevant to our needs	2
Local networking – have some of us who have experience share it with others; networking with other agencies	2

Question 15: Do you think established organizations with just a few employees need a facility to rent office space?

Of 57 responses to this question 12% expressed interest in renting space, 48% felt there was a need for such a facility, and 40% did not see a need for such a facility. The mean was 1.7 (where 3 = would be interested in renting space and 1 = don't see a need for such a facility).

Question 16: What other economies of scale do you see a Resource Center providing?

The economies of scale cited most frequently include:

Item	#
Shared consulting/ technical support / training services	5
Office supplies co-op - bulk discounts	4
Shared office equipment – color copier, laminating, color printers, binding for presentations, booklets, etc – things we use only occasionally, multilanguage & Braille translation services	4
Access to information & technology which we otherwise couldn't afford	3
Group insurance – health, other	3
Grant writing help – also grant reading / consulting	2

Question 18. What other comments do you have about the need for a proposed Non-Profit Resource Center?

A representative sample:

- Yes – I wholeheartedly support this idea!
- I think it sounds great!

- Many of us hardly have the time to do the work before us. I know I'll have a rough time utilizing a resource center. My resource center is at home
- Inclusion is key in an idea like this one – make sure everyone's voice is heard
- Would be most useful if services were available online – no time for staff to visit a resource center
- I would be interested not simply in facilitating non-profits but in coordinating their presence and efforts in the community
- I think plenty of resources already exist in this community, the problem seems to be awareness and connecting to them – we would rather see a facilitator than a facility
- In the community we serve, there are many people asking for help, guidance, donations, etc – it would be helpful to find out who else is out there with resources to assist instead of calling on the same group of volunteers or corporate donors
- I would like to see Charlottesville have a well maintained list serv for all various and sundry nonprofit arts organizations where the public could get subscriptions to receive regular emails in their area of interest – say, theatre, music, literary events – and participating organizations could issue bulletins of their upcoming events
- I think it would benefit the community tremendously