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# **Louisville Nature Center**

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## **IT Strategic Assessment Report**

**11/29/2018**

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## Revision History

| Date       | Version | Description          | Author     |
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| 11/12/2018 | 1.0     | Rough Draft          | Ryan Smith |
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## Executive Summary

This document serves to analyze the information technology (IT) at the Louisville Nature Center (LNC) and provide recommendations to help the organization reach its strategic goals.

Information technology has not been a major focus point for the LNC. However, the organization has a lot of potential to improve its processes and become more efficient and effective.

As an organization they do a lot of paper work physically instead of electronically. They don't have very standardized processes or controls for the business they conduct. They operate with a very limited budget. But they have an admirable mission and a dedicated team of staff and volunteers.

The current IT environment reflects the lack of focus that has been placed on technology. Relatively outdated hardware is used, QuickBooks and Microsoft Office are the only real enterprise applications being used. The only person with IT experience and training is a volunteer consultant who performs work on an as needed basis. The only budget for technology is to pay the volunteer consultant when the work required is a little more time consuming and extensive.

The recommendations provided in this document are realistic and affordable. The LNC could see great benefit in considering and implementing them.

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## History and Purpose

The Louisville Nature Center serves to offer a retreat from the surrounding urban areas for all ages. The Louisville Nature Center manages the Beargrass Creek State Nature Preserve; which is a 41-acre second growth woodland in Jefferson County. The land was purchased by a group in 1982 that fought to guarantee the land would always be preserved and used for education and recreation. The land will never be developed.

Some of their unique features are:

- A wildflower garden and pond
- Gardens that attract seasonal butterflies
- Hiking trails through the Beargrass Creek State Nature Preserve
- A one-of-a-kind bird blind
- Wildlife exhibits & Beargrass Creek watershed exhibit
- Rental space and a quiet library

They are in the later stages of a 3-year process through the USDA equip program where they are paid by the acre to remove invasive species and replace them with native species. When this step is completed, they will move on to a maintenance phase. The plan is to get to the maintenance phase and for the LNC to become an exemplar of restoring urban forest.

Their mission is to build a thriving resource that connects people to the environment and encourages stewardship through restoration of the urban forest. Another primary goal of the organization is to educate people about the natural ecosystem in our local community. They aim to connect with people all over greater Louisville, teaching them about nature and sustainability. Their goal is to help people enjoy being outside. Their facility is a relaxing get-a-way in the

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urban environment. It's very therapeutic for people and fills a niche in the area.

The LNC's primary visitors are children of elementary school age as well as elderly people. The LNC is a dream field trip for school kids. They offer many different educational programs for kids of all ages. A description for the education program "Animals in my Backyard" says "Foster your student's natural curiosity as they learn about the basic needs of animals that live in an urban habitat. Students will learn interesting facts about some of Kentucky's backyard animals. This program includes a visit to the bird blind, a hike, hands-on activities and live organisms." The LNC offers all these programs and events at a relatively low cost.

Their address is 3745 Illinois Ave, Louisville, KY 40213 and their website is <https://www.louisvillenaturecenter.org/>.

## Management and Business Processes

### 3.1 Booking Space Rentals

One of their major sources of income is renting out the facility for events. The facility has kitchen accommodations, indoor and outdoor seating areas, and room for 62 guests with table and chairs or 100 guests standing.

The current process to book a space rental is all done by hand. A customer will contact their office usually by phone and request a date and time. The office will look at the schedule that is kept in a binder to see if the requested time is available. The customer will be sent a physical copy of the rental form. They fill it out and send it back and it is filed by hand.

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### **3.2 Booking Camps and Programs**

Another major source of their income and large part of their mission comes through camps and programs. These are handled in a similar manner to the space rentals. The entire schedule is kept in a binder. This binder must be referenced and filled in whenever registrations are made for camps or programs. It was estimated that employees spend around a collective 2.5 hours a day on communicating for rentals. This time could be drastically reduced.

### **3.3 Gift Shop Sales**

There is a small gift shop where everything is tracked manually. Credit card processing is done in the office and there is no POS system. Inventory is manually adjusted weekly by the bookkeeper. The inventory management system consists of a single word document. Money is kept in a petty cash box. Gift shop sales are a small part of the organizations bottom line, but improved customer satisfaction with the gift shopping experience would certainly be a positive.

### **3.4 Waiver Management**

Waivers are required for all participants attending events at the LNC. Currently all waivers are stored on-site for at least 7 years. It isn't possible for attendees to sign waivers online, they must be done in person and then they are scanned onto a machine by an LNC employee. They only recently began requiring waivers to be signed. As a result, I don't believe the most efficient and effective process is in place.

### **3.5 Collect Contributions**

The single largest part of the LNCs income is from contributions, gifts, and grants. They



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accept donations online from a donation page and online through their donor society. These donations appear to be using Squarespace's donation blocks where recurring donations are not possible. It's also important to note that it is of the LNC's concern that some people don't trust their credit card information on their website.

## Current IT Environment

Currently they are lacking severely in IT. The computers they have are from donations and are a few years old. Their only source of IT work is a volunteer consultant who provides support on an as needed basis. Sometimes if the work required is substantial, he will charge them. They do a lot of work that could be done on a computer on paper instead. All of the scheduling is done by hand in a binder, waivers are filled out on a piece of paper and then scanned into a computer. There is no database, instead information is spread throughout many Excel workbooks.

Former Directory Kathy Morris cited one of the highlights of the LNC being that "There's not a lot of noise, there's not a lot of technology. You can just come and actually sit in the forest". The LNC does in fact serve as a place to escape from urban society, but that does not mean information technology can't be used to enhance the business and management processes of the organization. Fortunately, new Executive Director Rebecca Minnick recognizes the potential value in placing more of a focus on information technology and the impact it could have on the organization.

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## 4.1 Hardware

The LNC doesn't have very much hardware. They have 2 cordless phones, a few laptops, one desktop, one printer and scanner, two credit card readers, and an old LCD projector. The only hardware that is critical to their organization is the phones, the printer, and the credit card reader. Once again, this shows that a focus has not been placed on technology as the organization has grown over time. To achieve some of their goals it may be necessary to acquire some newer hardware.

## 4.2 Software

The LNC does not require very much software and their primary use of software is the Microsoft Office Suite, QuickBooks for accounting, Internet Explorer/Google Chrome for email, website editing, and social media editing. All their machines aside from the Chromebook run Windows 10 Home edition. There is an exception, a machine that still runs Windows XP that is used exclusively for playing movies on the LCD projector. Files are shared on a shared drive on their network. They are considering purchasing a fundraising software. At this time the needs of the LNC are largely being met by the software they have.

## 4.3 Staff IT Skills/Training

The staff have no formal IT training. The bookkeeper does use QuickBooks for their accounting. The volunteer consultant serves as an all-purpose IT expert. Employees are computer literate but with no formal skills or certifications. This has not been a problem because there are no frequent processes that rely on any skill or training. Having someone on the payroll who is

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frequently in the facility that has a little more technical background could be beneficial if the organization plans to increase the amount of technology they use.

#### **4.4 IT Budgeting and Spending**

The LNC has no formal IT Budget besides a \$350 yearly amount allotted to the volunteer consultant. They don't have a budget specifically for IT software or hardware. They have no plans to acquire any new equipment. If they need new computers or other hardware they would try to get it donated. Google Fiber volunteered at the LNC and donated a Chrome Book. It's not that they don't want or need new technology, but they don't have the resources for it. This is obviously a major problem if the organization wants to improve their IT because with the current budget they can't.

## **Envisioned IT Capabilities**

### **5.1 Leadership's Vision**

Leadership at the LNC realizes that there are many opportunities for them to utilize IT. New phones, security cameras for parking lot, trail cameras, dedicated computers for visitors to sign waivers on-site, online booking for rentals and camps, a POS system for gift shop including the option to round up purchases as donations, and fundraising software are a few things that the executive director would like to see for the organization.

One big part of the vision at the LNC is growth. They have high goals for expansion and a major component of growth in this environment is through online advertising and social media presence. It is difficult with their limited resources, but they would like to increase their

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advertising and social media. They do have an active Facebook page where posts are made almost daily. However, they are not doing any online advertising. There is certainly potential for the LNC to reach a new market outside of their normal visitors by advertising online.

The LNC's envisioned capabilities show a lot of promise and show that they are not just interested in maintaining the status quo, but they want to grow, and they want to use technology to help them. This is the attitude an organization needs in its leadership for real change to occur. All the envisioned capabilities are extremely realistic and would provide a positive benefit to the organization. I believe the majority of the goals outlined could be accomplished within one year if appropriate funds are allocated to the cause.

The funding problem is being addressed, there goal is to increase fundraising by 20% over the next two years. For this to be accomplished I believe that the LNC will have to do something to increase the amount of donations they receive online. This likely means that the website needs to be visually updated and their social media presence needs to be increased as well.

## **5.2 Top 10 Technology Issues**

1. Phone Service – The LNC only has 1 phone line. They pay \$180 per month for this service.

This is something that seems like a relatively easy fix, many phone and cable companies will provide reduced rates or increased service upon request or threat to find a new provider.

2. Program Sign-ups – The LNC needs a more efficient and effective way to sign up children and adults for their on-site programs. They currently don't have a standardized process to handle sign-ups and it's done primarily over the phone which takes up a significant portion of

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employees' time.

3. Facility Bookings – They face the exact same problem as program sign-ups with facility bookings.

4. Fundraising Software – The LNC needs some type of fundraising software. They are considering purchasing little greenlight (\$39 monthly). With contributions being such a large part of their income, this is a necessity.

5. Databases – All their databases are just Excel spreadsheets. Data they need is spread throughout multiple files. Sometimes they will have to look at 5 different files before finding the information they need.

6. Old hardware – The LNC is operating on older hardware. They even have a windows XP machine that's used for projecting movies.

7. Cameras – The LNC would like cameras for both security and wildlife.

8. Waiver sign up – The LNC would like a digital system to sign and store waivers. The current process requires a lot of work from employees.

9. Credit Card Processing – The LNC would like a POS system for their gift shop to avoid walking to the backroom to process cards. The current process is slow and unprofessional. They would also like to improve their website's credit card processing to make it appear more trustworthy.

10. Inventory Management – The LNC could use an inventory management system because right now it is all done by hand in a Word document that is only updated weekly. This is obviously an

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inefficient procedure. This also allows for a high probability that an error will be made at some point.

## Closing the Gap

### 6.1 Improve Online Presence

One major problem for the LNC is a lot of people don't know they exist. They have a beautiful preserve and frequently get visitors expressing that they just discovered the LNC.

Improving their online presence is potentially the cheapest and easiest thing the LNC could do. The current website (<https://www.louisvillnaturecenter.org/>) uses Squarespace, but visually looks like it's from the early 2000's and is frankly unappealing. The LNC should reach out to a web design company or contact a local University/high school to see if any students would be willing to help redesign and modernize the website visually. A visual improvement could potentially help improve the problem of older people not trusting the website with their credit card information for online bookings and donations.

The website also needs to provide more information about the organization and its staff. There are no faces to the organization on the website. This is something that is common in other non-profits. There are a lot of amazing people who work for and volunteer with the LNC and the website provides a great opportunity to highlight them. The email addresses are also very robotlike: [officecoordinator@louisvillnaturecenter.org](mailto:officecoordinator@louisvillnaturecenter.org) and [director@louisvillnaturecenter.org](mailto:director@louisvillnaturecenter.org) are two examples of current email addresses. [RebeccaM@lnc.org](mailto:RebeccaM@lnc.org) for example is more personal, shorter, and easier to read. Visitors should see names and faces on the website that they would

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recognize when they visit the center.

The entire website could use a rework. The home page is completely static and doesn't clearly offer navigation to other pages. The layout is a bit confusing and the menu bar items and their categories aren't intuitive. Alongside these website improvements, online advertising is an opportunity that should be considered.

## **6.2 Standardize the Scheduling Process**

A key problem on the business process side is scheduling. It seems that there is no concrete process for scheduling bookings of the facility and for camps and programs. This is an issue that could be solved rather easily and help organize information at the LNC. A standardized process needs to be created and enforced for bookings. This process could look something like:

1. A caller wants to book the facility.
2. Employee checks the calendar software and informs caller the date is available.
3. Payment is processed/promised, and employee marks the calendar as booked.

- 
1. A customer online views the same calendar.
  2. Customer picks the date/time they want that is marked as available.
  3. Payment is processed, and calendar is marked as booked.
- 

1. A walk-in customer wants to book the facility

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2. The same process is followed as if they were a caller.
- 

This process still allows customers to call to make bookings, but also allows a booking to be made after hours and with no employee involvement. This process also makes it so that all bookings are in the same calendar and there will be no chance for double-bookings or over-bookings. Squarespace supports online booking through their “acuity block”, third-party booking pages, and third-party booking widgets. Implementing a process like this would save extensive time and effort for the LNC in the long run.

### **6.3 Create and utilize a database**

The data in the organization is in a state of disarray. Currently, information the organization uses is stored in multiple Excel workbooks. This can create several problems.

1. It is difficult to find the information you need.
2. It creates multiples points of failure.
3. It creates data redundancies.

The LNC works with a relatively small amount of data, small enough that it could even fit in a Microsoft Access database. Microsoft Access is in the Microsoft Office Suite that they already own. Microsoft Excel was not designed to be a database management system, Microsoft Access was, and it should handle all the needs of the LNC. Transitioning into a Microsoft Access database will allow all the information they need to be in one place. It will allow the data to be backed up more easily, and it will help eliminate data redundancy. This will be a challenging



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process because most office users are extremely more comfortable working with Microsoft Excel than Microsoft Access. The extra effort will be worth it as Microsoft Access is better equipped to handle the data needs of the organization.

#### **6.4 Search for IT donations**

The LNC is working with aging equipment. In the past they have just used the technology that has been donated to them. With their current budget and needs this is an acceptable strategy but could be improved by actively seeking these types of donations. There are many organizations who work with non-profits to provide IT equipment and services for free or at a reduced cost. <https://www.pcsforpeople.org/technology-for-nonprofits/> and <https://www.cornerstonelf.org/> are two examples.

Google has a program called Google Ad Grants that gives eligible non-profits around \$10,000 per month in-kind advertising in Google Ads. This could be immensely useful because the LNC already wishes to improve their online advertising. The LNC should reach out to organizations like these or to members of the community. People are constantly upgrading their technology, and someone might not contribute money, but they could contribute excess hardware that they have. Many discounts for non-profits also exist for software as well. The LNC needs to utilize these opportunities to improve their IT makeup.

#### **6.5 Create an IT Budget**

The LNC operates on minimal resources. With that being said, it will be impossible for the organization to grow in today's environment without more of a focus on IT. The

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recommendations I've provided so far will likely require an investment either in time or money.

The LNC needs to recognize the benefit that these investments will have on the organization.

Some amount of money needs to be planned for IT. What if the volunteer consultant was no longer volunteering? The LNC needs to be prepared for a scenario like this and have funds set aside for IT acquisition and maintenance.

The LNC has historically never had this type of budget and it may be difficult to justify to the board of directors. The threats of not adopting an IT budget and the benefits of doing so should be highlighted to help justify this new expense.

## **6.6 Implement Security Measures**

The LNC expressed concern for the physical security at their facility specifically in the parking lot. This could be addressed by having some sort of security cameras or even fake security cameras. As far as information security the LNC does store information about some visitors like name, gender, birth date, age, address, state, city, zip code, phone number, emergency phone number, email, and optional health issues. This information needs to be protected not only from potential hackers, but also from environmental hazards. It is my understanding that the LNC has no off-site backups for its digital information. Cloud storage services exist that can provide satisfactory back-ups for the LNC for a very reasonable price (around \$20 per month).

I would recommend that the LNC begin improving its physical security by installing noticeable authentic looking security cameras in the parking lot and installing a sign advising cameras are in use. I recommend that the LNC also subscribe to a cloud storage provider and

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start backing up their critical files at least weekly.

## **6.7 Allow Digital Signing of Waivers Online and On-Site**

This would likely be one of the tougher recommendations to implement, as there is no real preset path for implementing this. The LNC would need to recreate the waiver online so that it is legally binding and supports electronic signatures. They would also have to acquire hardware that could be dedicated to this purpose for signing waivers on-site. Since they deal with larger groups, they would need multiple devices. These devices would have to be programmed to only access the waiver forms. Implementing this would be a great benefit. Physical records of waivers would no longer have to be kept. It would save time for LNC employees and visitors. This option is a lot more scalable, as the number of visitors increases the work of managing the waivers does not change.

## **Conclusions**

The LNC is an organization with a very respectable mission. They have provided a sanctuary in the heart of the city for many years. Up until this point in time information technology has taken a backseat in the organization. Current management and business processes do not utilize IT to its full potential. Changes need to be made to the way the LNC conducts its business if it wishes to achieve its goals.

First, changes need to be made to their website. A makeover is necessary to give the website visual appeal. A functional change needs to be made to the website that allows visitors to book facility rentals, camps, programs, and sign waivers online without interacting with an

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LNC employee. This change needs to be reflected in the organizations business processes in the office as well. Steps need to be taken so that if there is an opportunity for work to be done on a computer instead of on paper it will be done on the computer.

The LNC has a lot of opportunities to improve their business processes by utilizing information technology. However, the organization has limited resources to do this. The LNC needs to take advantage of opportunities afforded to non-profits from other organizations. They should look to acquire discounts on hardware and software. They should ask the community for hardware donations. They should consider applying for a Google Ad Grant.

Unfortunately, they will not be able to obtain everything they need technology wise from donations. The LNC needs to establish an IT budget for the maintenance and development of IT solutions within the organization. They can't expect to have all their technology needs be serviced by a volunteer, it's not a viable long-term strategy.

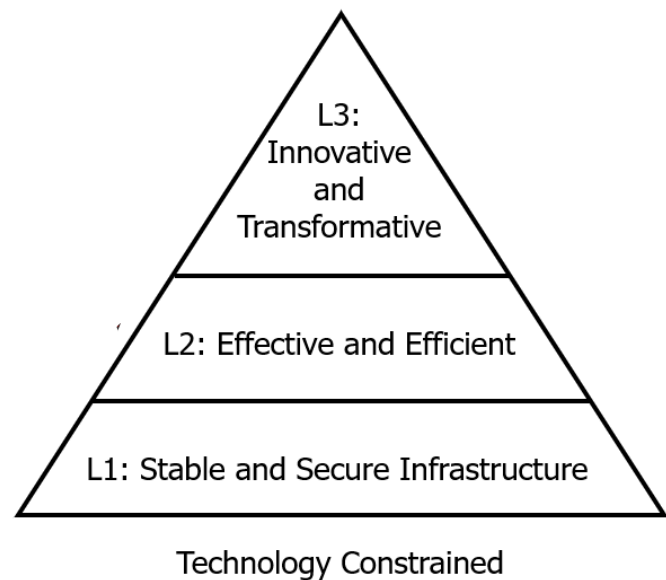
If the LNC takes these recommendations into consideration and works to apply them I believe it will greatly help them achieve their strategic goals.

## Appendices

### 8.1 Basis of Analysis

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One of the things I used in my analysis was the IT pyramid. It is very easy to see that the LNC is tech constrained. Their current IT architecture is not aligned with their organizational goals. The focus needs to be primarily on designing an architecture that is stable and secure and then making them effective and efficient. What that means for



the LNC is establishing a real IT budget. Working to acquire new technologies that will further their opportunities as an organization.

I also considered the following Industry Competitive Analysis:

**Mission:**

The LNC's mission is to create and maintain an urban forest to be enjoyed by and educate the people of Louisville.

**Core Competency:**

Their core competency is providing a unique nature experience in an urban environment.

**Market:**

Their primary market is elementary school age students and elderly people. They capture their younger market by providing educational programs and camps. This leads me to believe they have an untapped market at least in the 20s-30s range. This market could be penetrated by improving online presence. The LNC isn't ignoring this market, they have plans to do more

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programming centered around sustainability for adults. Also, they plan to add pre-school programming, as this has been successful at other nature centers outside the county.

### **Strategy:**

Their generic strategy is differentiation. The LNC's draw is that they offer something that no other place offers in the area. The nature preserve is different from parks, there's no dogs or very much human interaction at all. The preserve is supposed to be exactly what it says; a preserve.

They offer the chance to experience real nature in the middle of an urban city. This is an experience that you won't be able to find anywhere else in the city of Louisville.

### **Structure:**

The LNC like most non-profits has a Board of Directors. This board oversees the organization's activities and discuss and vote on the affairs of the organization. Under the board of directors is the executive director and then the rest of the employees. This is a functional organizational structure.

### **Porter's Five Forces**

*Inter-Industry Competition:* Low. As stated, the LNC offers a truly one of a kind experience for the area. Parks could be considered competition, but they offer vastly different experiences than the LNC. The LNC has no real competition in the area.

*Substitutes:* Low. There is no real substitute experience to the LNC. As stated, they offer a unique experience for the location.

*New Entrants:* Low. The threat of new entrants is extremely low. The LNC is located on 10 acres

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of land and oversees the 41-acre Beargrass Creek State Nature Preserve. This is the largest forest in the area and all other green spaces are already parks.

*Suppliers Bargaining Power:* High. As a non-profit the LNC is at the mercy of its board of directors and its contributors. If you consider these groups to be the suppliers, then the LNC has very little bargaining power over them.

*Customers Bargaining Power:* Low. As stated, there is no experience like the LNC in the area. As a result, customers don't have much bargaining power.

Looking at these factors shows that the LNC is in a good position from an organizational standpoint. They have very little competition and their customers have low bargaining power. One of the LNC's main goals is growth and this analysis shows that the potential for growth certainly exists.

### **Identifying Stakeholders:**

Board of Directors – Responsible for the direction of the organization. Their main priority is making sure the organization has a reasonable budget and operates to serve out the organizations mission.

LNC Employees / Volunteers – Responsible for performing their duties. They care about the organizations mission and success.

LNC Visitors – Their primary concern is the experience and service they receive at the LNC. They will expect high quality service from the LNC's staff and volunteers.

Wildlife – An unusual circumstance, but I would include the wildlife the LNC preserves as a stakeholder in their organization. This wildlife is dependent on the LNC to preserve and

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maintain the environment they live in.

## 8.2 Technology Inventory

AT&T Cordless Phone Model: 4H20 Count: 2

Ricoh Printer and Duplicator Model: ZT989 Count: 1

Verifone Credit Card Reader Model: VX 520 Count: 2

Lenovo 320-15 - 15.6" HD - AMD A12-9720P - 8GB Memory - 1TB Hard Drive – Gray Count:1

Wireless Logitech mouse Count:1

HP Chromebook 14 G5 Count:1

ASUS Laptop K55N-DS81 AMD A8-Series A8-4500M (1.90 GHz) 6 GB Memory 500 GB

HDD AMD Radeon HD 7640G 15.6" Windows 10 Home 64-Bit Count:1

Dell Latitude D505 Intel Pentium M 1.7 GHz /1GB RAM/15"/ Wi-Fi/DVD/CD-RW Count:1

Epson LCD Projector EMP-X3 Count:1

Stapler 23415 Wired Mouse Count:1

HP Desktop, Intel Core i3-4170, 3.7 GHz, 1 TB, Intel HD 4400, Windows 10 Count:1

HP Wired Mouse Count:1

Samsung S24E310HL 23.6-Inch Screen LED-Lit Monitor Count:1

This inventory reflects the small amount of hardware the organization has and the lack of budget for new hardware.

## 8.3 Top 10 Technology Issues

1. Phone Lines

2. Program sign-ups



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3. Facility Bookings
4. Lack of fundraising software
5. Multiple Excel spreadsheets being used as their database
6. Outdated hardware
7. Lack of cameras for parking lot security and trails
8. Waiver sign up
9. Credit Card Processing
10. Tracking Inventory

No additional documents were provided.

#### **8.4 Strategic Planning/Visioning**

No documents were provided.

#### **8.5 IT Budget/Spending Documents**

No documents were provided.

#### **8.6 Comments**

I believe this organization would be an excellent candidate for a CIS 320 system analysis and design project. At the core what it seems they need is a website redesign with some functionality for booking the facility, camps, and programs, and functionality for waivers to be signed online. They don't have complicated business processes, but their processes would benefit immensely from being standardized and computerized.

The facility is really a special place and they provide an important resource to the community.