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AN OPINION ARTICLE

Don't Let Technology Become the New Nonprofit Divide



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The Fulcrum Point – An Opinion Series

Technology has always promised to level the playing field. But what happens when the very tools designed to make organizations more effective become accessible primarily to those who can afford them?

We are approaching a dangerous crossroads in the nonprofit sector.

Artificial intelligence, automation, data analytics, and emerging technologies are transforming how organizations operate, communicate, raise money, and deliver services. The opportunities are extraordinary. Yet the benefits are not being distributed equally.

Large nonprofits often have the financial resources to invest in sophisticated technology, hire consultants, train employees, and experiment with new tools. Smaller nonprofits, frequently operating on shoestring budgets, struggle simply to keep their existing systems functioning.

If we are not careful, technology will become the next great divide in the nonprofit sector.

And the consequences will extend far beyond organizational efficiency.

Small nonprofits are often among the most deeply connected organizations in our communities. They serve vulnerable populations, address highly localized needs, and build relationships that larger institutions cannot easily replicate. Their value is not determined by the size of their budgets.

Yet we risk creating a future in which organizational effectiveness is increasingly determined by access to technology rather than the strength of an organization's mission, leadership, or community relationships.

That should concern every nonprofit leader, funder, and philanthropist.

We cannot celebrate the transformative potential of artificial intelligence while ignoring the organizations being left behind.

Nor can we simply tell small nonprofit leaders to embrace technology without providing the resources, training, and support necessary to do so responsibly.

Access to technology is no longer a luxury. It is becoming essential organizational infrastructure.

This requires a fundamental shift in how we think about philanthropic investment.

Foundations and donors must recognize that funding technology is funding mission. Investments in software, cybersecurity, AI training, data systems, and implementation support are not distractions from charitable impact. They are increasingly necessary to achieve it.

Technology companies also have a responsibility to make their innovations accessible to smaller organizations through affordable licensing, technical assistance, and meaningful nonprofit partnerships.

Larger nonprofits, associations, and sector leaders should explore shared technology resources, collaborative training programs, and opportunities to extend their expertise to organizations without comparable resources.

But access alone is insufficient. A discounted subscription does little for an organization that lacks the time, knowledge, or personnel to use it effectively. We must fund the people and training alongside the technology.

And we must remember that responsible adoption matters just as much as rapid adoption. Smaller nonprofits deserve the same opportunities to protect sensitive information, establish appropriate AI policies, and exercise sound judgment about emerging technologies as their larger counterparts.

This is not about ensuring every nonprofit has the newest technology. It is about ensuring that no organization is systematically disadvantaged simply because it lacks the resources to keep pace.

The nonprofit sector exists, in part, to address inequities in society. We should be particularly troubled by the possibility of allowing new inequities to take root within our own sector.

The time to address this challenge is now, before the gap becomes too wide to close.

Technology should be a force multiplier for every nonprofit, not a competitive advantage reserved for the wealthiest.

Our responsibility as leaders is not merely to embrace the future. It is to ensure that the organizations doing some of society's most important work have a meaningful opportunity to participate in it.

Because when small nonprofits are left behind, the communities depending on them are left behind as well.

And that is a divide we simply cannot afford.

For more information about Fulcrum Nonprofit Leadership, please visit our website at www.fulcrumleader.com or reach out to us directly via email at hello@fulcrumleader.com.