FIVE THINGS TO LOOK FOR WHEN FUNDING A TECHNOLOGY PROJECT

Program officers want to fund nonprofit technology projects. But how can they be sure they're funding the right kind of projects—projects that will set organizations up for long-term success rather than chasing trends or implementing unnecessary or unadopted tech?

The overarching question is simple: Does the technology contribute to the nonprofit's mission, either directly or indirectly? But a creative person could come up with a plausible link between almost any kind of technology and any mission. Program officers need to be able to evaluate the likelihood of success. (It's also helpful to bring in a technology expert to help you evaluate these kinds of requests.) Here are five simple things to look for to help guide your decision-making:

1. **Is it the right solution?** A large investment suggests a formal selection process with a needs assessment and product comparison, while a smaller one might get by with a simplified process. Even if you aren't familiar with the technology the organization is requesting, you should be able to see evidence that the staff did their homework and due diligence.

2. **Did they include the right stakeholders?** Input from end users—who might be clients or program participants—improves understanding of the problem, leads to better solutions, and paves the way for user adoption.

3. **Is the nonprofit prepared and equipped to implement and manage this technology?** They should have qualified people on staff and/or professional services. They should also have a plan for user training and support.

4. **Do they understand (and have a plan) to sustain costs over the lifetime of this technology?** This might include licensing, maintenance, and disposal, among other things. Some technology investments lead to cost savings or increased revenue sufficient to sustain their ongoing costs, but other worthwhile investments don't pay for themselves. In the latter case, their most realistic plan might be to seek additional grant funding from you in future years.

5. **Have they considered privacy and security?** This is important for all organizations, especially those with compliance requirements like HIPAA or GDPR. There might be extra costs to get the organization's data practices up to standard.

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