**Technology and Volunteer Management**

Panel Summary

At the April 13, 2023 meeting, TAVA welcomed three speakers for a panel on “Technology and Volunteer Management”. We extend our thanks to:

* Chantal Edwards, Manager, Public Policy at Imagine Canada
* Jason Shim, Chief Digital Officer, Canadian Centre for Nonprofit Digital Resilience
* Ambreen Ahmad, Managing Director at Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy and Director at StudyPages

For bringing their expertise to the panel.

Here’s a summary of the discussion to help inform our conversations on May 18 in our “Technology Deep Dive”.

Favourite solutions of the panelists:

* Automation (Power Automate) can make processes automatic based on triggers like someone joining a mailing list or data being entered into a spreadsheet.
* Zoom and Google Meet provide opportunities to meet virtually and increase flexibility.
* When teams are distributed/virtual, a tool like Google Suite can help enable connection – but remember that not everything will be a good fit for everyone.

Biggest threats and opportunities:

* Cybersecurity is a major concern – become aware of fraud, take training to protect you and the organization and have proper policies for collecting and storing information.
* Ensure everyone in your organization has the tools and knowledge to do their role effectively (outdated hardware or processes can create barriers)
* Choose technology that works together well – think about optimizations across tools.

Why data is so important to a tech-driven future:

* You can’t improve what you can’t measure – data helps you identify new opportunities and make better decisions to improve everything you do.
* Think about the data you collect, why you collect and what it can help you do.

What should volunteer managers know about today’s technology:

* Things are moving fast, so stay informed! Have approaches for adopting new technology – with something like generative AI (like ChatGPT), think about how new tools can help you and where they could create challenges.
* Human aspect of technology is still important – think about who will use technology and for what purpose and consider what training is needed to improve knowledge. Be mindful of any gaps between what you think a tool can do and what it actually does.
* Be strategic in deciding what tools are right for you and consider legal compliance and tech literacy.

How technology can increase accessibility:

* Create a culture where everything has to be accessible so you can start finding and using the tools that will help you. Even using Zoom’s closed captioning tool, and/or using translators in online activities.
* Tech opens up the opportunity for more people to participate – give the chance for more to raise their voice, attract volunteers from wider geographic areas.

Ways that you can develop your skills and knowledge around unfamiliar technology:

* Seek out any training or education that already exists for the tool – reach out to the provider or do a Google search. Give yourself the space to play with a tool you want to adopt.
* Make it a conscious effort to educate yourself on tech tools, and look to your volunteers to see what skills or knowledge they may have.
* Find out if there is a user group or community you can connect with on the tool you’re using or want to use.

Working with volunteers to better enable technology use:

* Consider skill or knowledge gaps on your Board around technology. Convene a committee with staff and volunteers around technology and upcoming tech.
* Learn about what’s up and coming, talk to high school students about what they use/don’t use.
* Seek out feedback from volunteers about their thoughts on the tech you use, and seek room for improvement.
* Always consider the training needed for volunteers to use/adapt to a new technology tool.

About generative AI:

* Tools like ChatGPT could address routine tasks (like templates for reference letters) and can help with summarizing documents.
* You may want to use a tool like Grammarly to help with language and tone.
* Consider what information and applications of AI will be helpful to you and to watch out for.

Sources of funding:

* Could use TechSoup to help you get started (subsidized rates for non-profits), but may also only enable one year access at a reduced rate.
* Make connections to small tech companies that might be able to meet your needs.
* When applying for any funding, budget for technology and talk about the need for costs with your funders (like Zoom account fees, Adobe access, etc.).
* Standardize operations where possible to avoid the sometimes higher cost that comes from customization.
* Imagine Canada’s Grant Connect tool has a section that identifies tech funding opportunities.