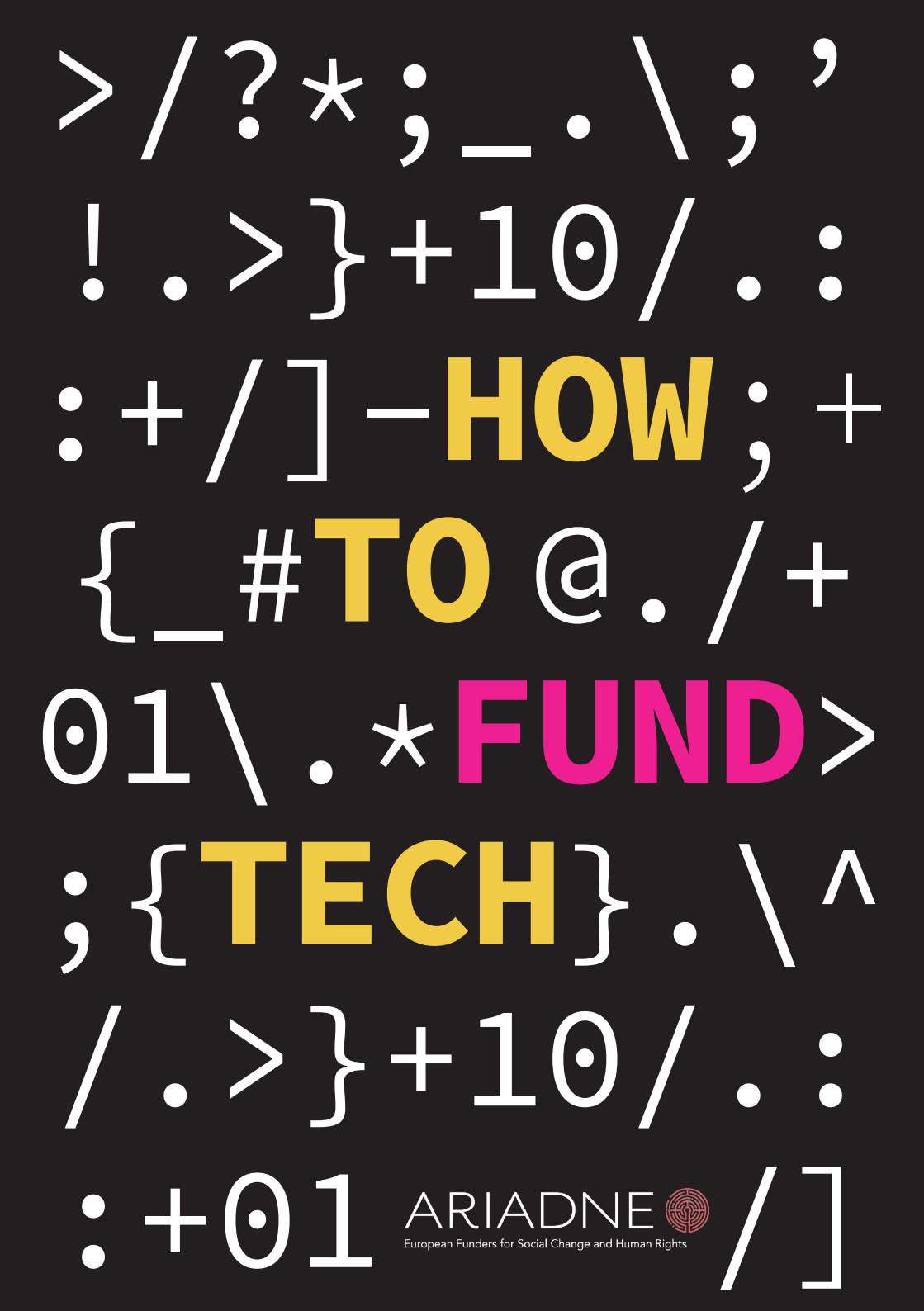
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ARIADNE
European Funders for Social Change and Human Rights

HOW TO FUND TECH

A GUIDE FOR TRUSTS AND FOUNDATIONS THAT WANT TO FUND TECHNICAL MATURITY OF ORGANISATIONS, SCOPE TECH-HEAVY GRANTS OR SIMPLY HAVE MORE PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS WITH GRANTEES ABOUT DATA AND TECHNOLOGY

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Many trusts and foundations are grappling with the same challenges: they want to support impactful, inclusive technology and innovation in not-for-profit organisations and address the societal changes brought about by emerging technology.

This guide is for people working in trusts and foundations who want to effectively fund technology. It offers guidance and processes to help in understanding the technical maturity of not-for-profit organisations, or assessing the feasibility of technology-heavy grants. It also gives notes on how to have productive conversations with grantees and partners about technology.

The contents of this guide are shaped around conversations within foundations that are focused on equality, justice and human rights.

Trusts and foundations are referred to collectively as 'philanthropy'; organisations that receive funding to accomplish socially beneficial outcomes are referred to using 'the social sector'. Technology is approached as a set of politics and capacities; the term 'technology' is used throughout to encompass many ideas, tools and concepts, including those related to 'data'.

WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

Since the original release of How to Fund Tech in 2020, we have seen rapid adoption of new technology by philanthropy and civil society attempting to adapt their work to fully remote contexts. Shifting internal-facing technology–video conferencing software, hiring software, CRMs, grantmaking tools, and so on–and operational processes to meet the needs of grantees is already a challenging task. Adding to that work is a heightened urgency to understand the implications new (and old) technology has for the human rights issues foundations seek to address. To further complicate the task, governments are introducing new rules, regulations and technologies at breakneck speeds, making it even more challenging for foundations to stay abreast of digital rights issues for themselves and their grantees.

ARIADNE HAS BEEN SUPPORTING MEMBERS ON LEARNING JOURNEYS FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS, ENGAGING NOT ONLY ON TOPICS OF UPDATING INTERNAL-FACING TECHNOLOGY BUT ALSO ON STRATEGIC AND FIELD-FOCUSED FRAMINGS SO FOUNDATIONS CAN MEANINGFULLY RESPOND TO THE CHANGING DIGITAL LANDSCAPE.

Ariadne has been supporting members on learning journeys for the past two years, engaging not only on topics of updating internal-facing technology but also on strategic and field-focused framings so foundations can meaningfully respond to the changing digital landscape. The resounding takeaway from this work is that it takes significant time and patience for foundations to absorb and embed this knowledge into their existing programs and strategies.

It's not all bad news. You are not alone in this process. Even digital rights foundations find it challenging to stay updated. We are stronger when we acknowledge what we don't know and take steps collectively to learn together. Below are a few takeaways from conversations held with funders as part of Ariadne's digital power programme:

- There is profound relief that can come from simply gathering grantmaking peers and openly discussing questions and frustrations stemming from the complexity of funding at this intersection. There is a strong desire to continue and build on these peer-learning spaces to maximise impact and avoid duplication of effort.
- Members want to take an intersectional approach to the integration of digital rights issues into their programmes, rather than create a separate track for digital issues in their foundation. They want to find a way to combine their deep issue-area expertise with technical knowledge, and avoid either side dominating the conversation.
- Technological or digital power is both a vast and deep theme. If a foundation decides they need to hire a technologist to inform their strategy, what specific expertise and experience should that technologist have? It's too easy to follow the hype and hire someone with knowledge on AI ethics or emerging technology, whether or not that is the most relevant knowledge for the foundation's mission and programmes.
- Social change and human rights funders realise they need to learn these topics but struggle to make sense of the noise and sheer number of topics, resources and news. They need guidance on where to focus their limited time and attention. Regardless of who is providing the guidance, there is a need for building and maintaining a network of peers and advisors to keep track of these rapidly emerging issues.
- When deciding who to fund, funders are often presented with two categories: human rights organisations who understand the long-standing issues deeply and reflect communities most often harmed by these systems; OR well-resourced, often international, digital rights organisations who speak the language of technology fluently but have fewer connections to grassroots and movement work in the issue areas. This leads to repeat funding for the same digital-savvy organisations without investment in the long-term capacity of the human rights organisations who have the foundational knowledge and connection to movement networks that is needed to sustain the work.

WHILE THE ISSUES ARE URGENT, WE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THAT INTERNAL CHANGE TAKES TIME AND CONSISTENT ENGAGEMENT ACROSS THE FOUNDATION. REFLECTING HONESTLY ABOUT WHERE YOU ARE AS A FOUNDATION AND STARTING THE CONVERSATION IS THE FIRST STEP.

While the issues are urgent, we must acknowledge that internal change takes time and consistent engagement across the foundation. Reflecting honestly about where you are as a foundation and starting the conversation is the first step. And it is essential if you want the work to be both impactful and sustainable. There is no doubt, we need time to address some of the gaps and challenges above. Time to build trust and share what we are finding difficult. Time to develop long-term, yet flexible strategies that can adapt when the next world-altering crisis arrives. We can take cues from the groups we are funding, how they approach movement building, and their cadence – moving at the speed of trust.

We are offering this resource to social change and human rights funders as a jumping-off point, a place to begin discussions within your foundation and ask questions to help you navigate a technology-heavy grant, even if you feel you lack the expertise to evaluate the project completely. It is our hope that this resource will help to build a larger pool of funders who do not identify as tech funders or digital rights experts but feel capable to speak to some of the ways technology is impacting their grantees and long-term vision for society.

If you have skimmed the report and want to dive deeper or get 1:1 support, reach out to info@ariadne-network.eu.

Maya Richman
Digital Power Programme Lead

USING THIS GUIDE

For guidance on understanding an organisation's data and technical maturity, go to **The organisation (p. 68)**

For questions to keep in mind when reviewing applications for a technology-heavy project, jump to **The project (p. 22)**

When considering the dynamics of technology and data – and how they canaffect your decisions and grants, jump to **The field (p. 28)**

For starting initial conversations with your foundation about the intersection of technology and your issue areas, jump to **Laying the groundwork (p. 32)**

If you want to chart a path for your trust or foundation in its overall approach to technology, head to **Crafting your own approach (p. 36)**

LETTER FROM ARIADNE DIRECTOR

We are living in a time of rapid technological change, and our adaptation to that change has only been accelerated by the events of the 2020s so far. Remote working and virtual transactions of all kinds are now the norms across many sectors. During a period when movement has been curtailed, technology has made it possible for us to keep working and pursuing the issues we care about, enabled connections with loved ones, and facilitated ongoing services from government and businesses. Even as offices reopen and travel resumes, the transition to virtual platforms and services will not be completely reversed.

WHILE TECHNOLOGY HAS LONG BEEN SILOED IN THE SOCIAL CHANGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS ARENA AS AN ISSUE FOR 'DIGITAL RIGHTS' ACTIVISTS AND FUNDERS, THE REALITY IS THAT DIGITISATION IS A CROSS-CUTTING PHENOMENON THAT AFFECTS ALL ISSUES AND ALL PEOPLE.

In this environment, it is no longer possible for funders to ignore the impact of technology on their work and on the issues that they support. While technology has long been siloed in the social change and human rights arena as an issue for 'digital rights' activists and funders, the reality is that digitisation is a cross-cutting phenomenon that affects all issues and all people. It touches questions of access, participation, discrimination, and power. Moreover, funders are faced with proposals for technology-based solutions to a range of social problems. It is no longer possible to set technology aside as a niche issue.

However, most of us working in the field of social change and human rights are not technology experts. It can be overwhelming to try to apply a technology lens to your work if you feel that you lack the necessary knowledge and expertise. Sometimes the fear of getting it wrong can prevent us from taking any action at all. We hope that this guide on How to Fund Tech, aimed at funders without a deep technological background, will help give social change and human rights grantmakers a starting point for evaluating grants with a technology component. The guide aims to demystify the process of assessing technology-based projects and give funders the tools to make judgments about such applications, including deciding when outside expertise is needed.

WE HOPE THAT THIS GUIDE ON HOW TO FUND TECH, AIMED AT FUNDERS WITHOUT A DEEP TECHNOLOGICAL BACKGROUND, WILL HELP GIVE SOCIAL CHANGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS GRANTMAKERS A STARTING POINT FOR EVALUATING GRANTS WITH A TECHNOLOGY COMPONENT.

Ariadne has been supporting social change and human rights funders to integrate a technology and digitisation lens into their work through its Digital Power Initiative over the past two years. The call for practical assistance from participants in that programme has been clear, and we hope you find this guide helpful as you embark on your own journey.

Best wishes,

Julie Broome
Ariadne Director

TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPACTS FOR THE SOCIAL SECTOR

GOOD USE OF TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP BUILD ROBUST, COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND UNDERSTANDING OF KEY HISTORIES OR PUBLICS.

A good grasp of technology in the social sector can help to make organisations, groups, and networks more efficient and effective. It can also increase engagement and access, as more people use technology to find information, express views and navigate the world. When put to use by civil society, technology can strengthen advocacy and tactically surprise even the most entrenched and powerful actors.

Good use of technology can help build robust, collective memory and understanding of key histories or publics. It can open up decision-making, policy and advocacy to broader groups and facilitate moments of collective action. It can also help to incorporate the views of social sector organisations and publics into the policy questions of our digital future.

And crucially, a good understanding of technology – especially its limitations and potential harmful impacts – is critical to preventing technical tools and methods from being weaponised and used against vulnerable groups and social sector organisations.

A failure to grasp technology in the social sector can mean that organisations and projects chase short-burst innovation, leading to wasted resources and the breakdown of key support services. This in turn can harm the communities that rely on social sector organisations to use resources wisely.

When marginalised groups are not considered in the design and deployment of new technologies, advances can exacerbate exclusion and inequality.

When funder don't have a good grasp of technology, they may overlook highly effective social sector institutions because they can't frame their work as 'innovative'. The inverse is also true. Funders who don't grasp tech may support methods that are unproven, ultimately ineffective, and sometimes downright dangerous, because of an overemphasis on newness and scale.

Technology will continue to have huge positive and negative effects on society. The social sector will be a key voice in preventing technology from reducing harm. It will also play a crucial role in articulating and pursuing an equitable, digital future. Both of these roles will rely heavily on social sector organisations that are able to learn and adapt to technical possibilities.

WHEN MARGINALISED GROUPS ARE NOT CONSIDERED IN THE DESIGN AND DEPLOYMENT OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES, ADVANCES CAN EXACERBATE EXCLUSION AND INEQUALITY.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ‘TECHNOLOGY AND DATA’?

Everyone is talking about technology and data, but they are rarely defined. They encompass many ideas, tools and competencies, and they are ever changing. This can make it challenging to know what we don’t know. And it can make learning more difficult and intimidating.

DEFINING TECHNOLOGY AND DATA

The use of technology by civil society groups should be implemented in line with their mission. And the mission of organisations should reflect a worldview about the way that technology should affect society.

Disclaimer: The terms here are not fixed definitions. The ways that artifical intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML) and data science are used in practice vary widely across sectors and over time. As a grantmaker, you must find ways to assess meaning beyond buzzwords and ask questions that identify the ultimate purpose of using that technology. Take this framework on the uses of data[1], for example. Is the data used to:

OBSERVE:
Take a snapshot of the world. What does it look like today? What did it look like in the past?

REASON:
Draw conclusions about how the world works. How do things relate to one another? What might the world look like tomorrow?

ACT:
Physically change the world. Take an action that moves the world into a new state.

Technology is any hardware or software that is used to provide some sort of digital functionality. This can include:

- Websites
- Applications (mobile, cloud, and computer applications that provide a particular functionality)
- Devices and other physical infrastructure (phones, tablets, computers, servers)
- Digital services (digital support to achieve a goal)
- Connectivity (wired internet, wireless, mobile data)

Data is digital bits of information that can be residually or intentionally collected during the course of running operations and programmes. Data can include:

- Operational data from service delivery
- Financial data
- Data about the individuals and communities an organisation supports

[1] Jake Poroway, “The Three Uses of Data”. https://data.org/news/the-three-uses-of-data/

- Documentation of incidents (e.g. human rights documentation)
- Multimedia (e.g. photos, video, audio)
- Data sets about a topic (e.g. quantitative research data, content from interviews)
- Logs, metrics, and traces from servers and services
- Open source intelligence (e.g. social media data that can be used to investigate a claim)
- Location information (e.g. data about where devices are that can be used to locate people in an emergency)
- Social media data (e.g. information that can be used to understand how a community feels about an organisation or an issue)

Analysis and analytical tools are used when we combine data to understand something. Analysis can include:

- Algorithms, or formulas that take a series of inputs and produce an output. (If we know a person's age, history of services, education level and postcode, we can make an educated guess as to the likelihood they will need our services again.)
- Machine learning, or algorithms that evolve over time as they are exposed to more data and reinforcement. (As we provide services and collect data about people using services we provide, our educated guess about whether a person is likely to need our services again becomes more precise.)
- Data science, or when models are developed based on what we can infer from large data sets. (We have a large data set about all of our services and clients, and after using data science we find that two factors – e.g. time of day and education level of the person – are more closely connected than we realised, and can explore the relationship between those factors further.)
- AI, or when a machine-learning system is applied to answer a particular question. (We have built a machine-learning system that we can now put to use in our operations and if a person is more than 40% likely to need our services again, we reach out to them proactively to see if they need assistance.)
- Statistics, or when we determine probabilities of something happening, and can calculate the level of confidence we have in those probabilities based on the size and quality of the data we have. (Using a survey of a representative sample, we can be 90% sure that people who do not have a university degree are 20% more likely to need our services.)
- Authentication, or when a system can confirm that a piece of information is accurate. (Using an ID number, an organisation can confirm that a person is eligible for a particular service.)
- Verification, or when we use various sources to confirm the accuracy of a piece of information or an assertion. (We have a series of recordings from a protest, and we use them to verify the protester's account of the event.)

WHY SHOULD FUNDERS CARE?

All organisations use technology and data, whether they think of themselves as 'technical' or not. Successful organisations explicitly address the role that technology plays in an organisation, so they can proactively plan and improve their technical maturity over time.

Shifting technology from a reactive, organic practice to one that's intentional and planned can bring huge benefits to organisational security, effectiveness and inclusiveness. All this planning and development takes resources, namely money. This is where philanthropy comes in.

Philanthropy can have a profound effect on how a grantee – or even a field – considers and uses technology. But to support strategic uptake, funders must address the topic directly, with care, and a mindset for learning and curiosity.

Funders can be an obstacle to strategic use of tech in the social sector if they:

- have unrealistic expectations of the time-scale of impact that technology can have,
- focus on technology as an 'end' and not a 'means to an end',
- chase the latest and trendiest technology issues at the espense of considered engagement,
- ignore the need to invest in key digital infrastructure, or the effect their funding could have on the wider ecosystem of technology in the social sector (see 'The field' section for more on this),
- expect immutable strategies and budgets, or 'shiny projects' and wholly positive report-backs,
- lean on projects or pilots, rather than organisations, for impact with technology.

Funders can be a positive force for technology use in the social sector if they:

- work with grantees to co-design meaningful definitions of success rather than fixed, vanity metrics,
- make it clear to organisations that they are interested in co-defined, meaningfully determined impact – not superficial innovation,
- prioritise diversity, inclusion and shared equity in the innovation they support,
- ask good questions about feasibility, and manage shared expectations,
- allow and encourage flexibility, learning and iteration,
- discuss and encourage organisations to articulate how their values and priorities affect their technical choices,
- approach technology with humility, curiosity and rationality, rather than fear and awe.

GRANTMAKING AND TECHNOLOGY

Grantmakers fund **organisations, projects and fields.** Each of these types of funding presents different challenges when they involve technology. We will go through each of these areas, and make suggestions for effective grantmaking.

THE ORGANISATION

Every organisation will use technology differently, and have different levels of technical maturity. The first step to funding technical and data growth is to understand the current maturity of an organisation, and how technology connects with their mission.

ASSESSING MATURITY

Technical and data maturity are complex to measure, and there are many ways to measure them. As with other types of assessment, the questions you ask and conversations you have will impact how the grantee sees your priorities. Different missions require different assessments of maturity and technical ambition.

THE ELEMENTS OF TECHNICAL MATURITY

An organisation should:

- know what devices and hardware are being used in its work,
- know what technology services it uses and why it uses them (functionally and politically),
- know what technology its constituents use and how they prefer to engage with content and services,
- consider how technology will change its field and its work in the coming years,
- have a basic set of strategic goals and priorities for technical development of the organisation,
- have an idea of how their priorities, budgets and hiring will affect their technical maturity in the coming years,
- have a clear understanding of digital threats, and responsibilities the organisation has and will have.

THE ELEMENTS OF DATA MATURITY

An organisation should:

- know what data it collects, and actually use this data,
- clearly understand how it protects the data it holds,
- have protocols in place for controlling access to the data it collects,
- think critically about how it wants to evolve its data capacities, analysis and governance,
- look outward when considering new possibilities for data practices in the future,
- understand how its values and community responsibilities shape its data practices.

LEVELS OF TECHNICAL AND DATA MATURITY

LOW	The organisation has limited experience using tech; tech for operations is haphazardly deployed; tech for programmes is nascent, and rarely incorporated into areas outside of communications functions; discussions about how tech affects the mission are rudimentary or non-existent.
MEDIUM	The organisation has some success improving operations and programmes with data and technology; the team engages in questions about tech; includes technology initiatives in project and core proposals; and considers technology and data growth in its strategic planning.
HIGH	The organisation experiments with cutting-edge tech policy or practice; is seen as a leader in technology and data in their field; and has an integrated view of technology and data in its operations, programmes, and staffing.

Questions to ask

Different sets of questions will be appropriate for different types of projects and organisations. Familiarise yourself with the questions, and use those most relevant and helpful in conversations with your grantees. This list is not exhaustive or prescriptive.

? KEY QUESTIONS ?

1. What have you learned about technology (as it relates to your organisation's operations and programmes) over the past two years?
2. How do you want your organisation to change how it uses data and technology over the next two years?
3. How is technology and data changing the dynamics of the issues that you care most about in your work?

1. Community engagement

- How do your constituents use and understand technology, and how has that changed over time? How might it change in the coming few years?
- If building a product, has your organisation carried out any type of market research to better understand the scale and details of the need?
- How have you considered off-the-shelf solutions versus building something yourself?
- How do you use technology to engage with your community?
- How might you use technology to engage with your community in the coming years?
- What challenges have you faced when engaging your community and constituencies with technology?
- How might the technology that you are developing – or the things you are learning about technology – be useful for your peers? How could you share your learnings?
- What new skills will you need in your network and organisation, so the tools you are building or incorporating can be used effectively and responsibly?

2. Security

- What digital threats does your organisation face? How do these connect to other types of security threats?
- What digital threats do you think civil society faces in your country or location of work?
- How does your organisation plan to protect itself and staff from digital threats?
- How do you incorporate digital security with physical and psychosocial security?
- What resources – in-house and outsourced – do you allocate to digital security protection?
- What are your priority areas for digital security improvements, and what resources would you need to improve?

3. Communications

- What are the most effective communication tactics you have used?
- How will technology change your communications strategy over the coming years?
- How do you know if your communications strategy is working?

4. Societal impacts

- How is technology changing your issue area?
- Does your organisation advocate or have opinions about the way that technology is changing your field or your issue area?
- What are your biggest concerns about how technology will change society, as it relates to your issue area?
- Are you planning programmes to help shape these emerging areas? Will you develop partnerships with organisations who are addressing these issues?

5. Learning

- What technical capacity does your team have, and in what roles (dedicated technology roles, or in 'accidental techie' roles?
- What professional development opportunities do you offer – or would you like to offer – your staff around the areas of technology and data?
- How does your team learn about new developments in technology?
- What organisations do you work with or learn from in areas of technology?
- What are the biggest opportunities that technology presents to your work? How will you decide if they are right for your organisation?
- What do you think funders should understand about the role that technology will play in your organisation, geography and field?

6. Organisational values

- How do your data and technology practices connect with your mission and values?
- What types of technology or data practices might you avoid because they don't align with your mission or values?
- How does your organisation document and share information about its data and technology practices?
- What obligations do you have to those you collect data about?

THE PROJECT

Many funders are regularly approached by organisations who want support to ‘make an app’ or ‘build a database’. And while there are many technical projects that can have a big impact, there are many questions that technology-dense projects should raise for funders.

BEFORE OUTLINING HOW TO EVALUATE A TECHNOLOGY-HEAVY PROJECT, CONSIDER THE PRIMARY PRIORITIES FOR HEALTHY TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOCIAL SECTOR:

1. Technology should address a clear problem and be thoughtfully connected to other parts of the solution (organisations, communities, tools, and resources).
2. Technology should be reliable, provide needed functionality, and be designed responsibly.
3. When generating, managing, sharing and using data in a project, people should do so responsibly. They should explicitly communicate what they are doing with the data, and follow an appropriate duty of care to the constituencies represented in it.
4. Analysis and analytical tools developed in the project should be developed transparently and incorporated into processes with care and appropriate levels of confidence.
5. Communities and community needs should drive design and technical development.
6. Organisations adopting new tools and practices should plan the projects as part of coherent organisational maturity processes.

PREDICTING LEVELS OF IMPACT

Likelihood of negative impact

The technical project i) hasn't effectively defined the problem it is working to solve, ii) does not consider the lived experience of those that might use their technology, iii) overestimates the effect that even a technically perfect implementation would have on the issue it is working on, or iv) isn't built by a team that understands the issue they are working on.

Overall it has an overly simplistic view of the way that technology can bring about change.

Likelihood of neutral impact

The project designers clearly articulate the problem, and the technical project makes logical sense as part of a solution (it passes the 'sniff test'). The team has the technical skills to implement what they are suggesting, they are able to clearly explain what the project is and how they would go about building it, and what types of resources they need to build it successfully.

It is unclear how much demand there is for the project, but key stakeholders who understand the problem well think that the project is worth doing and could be impactful. The project team hasn't done something like this before.

Likelihood of positive impact

The project is clearly designed and responds to a very specific and well-understood problem. The team has experience delivering technical projects, and the project is situated in an organisation committed to incorporating the project into key aspects of their operations. The application demonstrates that the team has tested and refined the idea, has already generated excitement in communities of potential users, and has planned for adaptation and iteration.

There are clear plans for how the technology will be rolled out and these factor in the human dimension of uptake and a realistic assessment of possible harms and mitigation for those harms. There is a longer term plan for the project – to fund, sustain, or responsibly end.

? QUESTIONS TO ASK ?

When considering a technology-heavy project, don't think you have to know everything about the technology to be able to discuss it with a potential grantee. Try not to get hypnotised by technical buzzwords - ask them what they mean by those words and how it connects to the ultimate goals of the project. If you feel intimidated or are interested in learning, consider inviting a more technical colleague to your meeting with the organisation.

1. What problem are you trying to solve? What are the barriers to solving it?
2. How do you know this project is needed? And who do you think will use it?
3. What is a similar project that you are inspired by when designing this? And what is a project that you have seen go awry that you can learn from?
4. Are you the best-positioned to take this project on? How will you staff it?
5. Will your project reuse existing technology? Will it be reused by others?
6. What will the costs be for maintaining the project in the long term, and how do you plan on funding those costs?
7. What staff or other types of expertise will you need for the project? How will the staff demands change over time, based on the role? Will this need to be in-house for it to be sufficiently strategic?
8. Who will 'own' the assets of the project (URL, code base, data, etc)? Are parts of the project being outsourced? How and why?
9. How will you adapt the project plan as it develops and you learn more? How will this project help to mature your organisation as it is implemented?
10. How will you know when it is time to end the project, and what would you do to close the project responsibly? What resources do you need to close the project responsibly?

THE GRANT

When reviewing an organisation's funding application, how can you assess whether its technical and data components are sound? There are several steps you can take.

HERE'S A SUGGESTED ROUTE:

1. **Engage directly with a potential grantee using appropriate questions.** If you are confused, don't assume it is because the project is technical – it may be the plan isn't clear. Check yourself to ensure you aren't swept up by an overly simplistic idea or strategy. Continue asking questions until you have a reasonably clear idea of the project, the organisation, and the technical and data components they suggest you fund.

2. **There are four main phases: scoping, development, testing, and post-launch.** Organisations often dramatically under budget scoping, post-launch, and sometimes even testing. Discuss how they plan to allocate resources between these four phases. When considering budgets, assume that every project will go over budget and discuss that with the organisation. What will they do if and when that happens?

3. **Directly discuss the project plan for collecting, managing, using, and securing data responsibly.** Every risk may not be preventable but a project plan should reasonably and robustly consider how it may go awry to map prevention and response.

4. **Identify areas you need to learn more about before funding a project, and find people in your foundation or your network that can help answer questions you find particularly important or challenging.** This is not to delegate learning, but rather to grow your own understanding.

5. **Check for misalignment between the organisation's proposal, its capacities, and the level of technical ambition of the project or product.** Be particularly mindful of the division of outsourced and in-house capacity. And remember that entirely outsourcing strategy and sustainability is impossible.

6. **Find similar projects or grantees that you can discuss with colleagues.** See if there are any pitfalls or other learning that you can consider in your grantmaking, or in your conversation with the potential grantee.

7. **Find deeper technical support (and develop your network of technically proficient grantmakers or civil society representatives,** if you don't know who to consult) for specific questions you might have about i) resourcing (people, expertise, time, and money) for the proposal, ii) the feasibility of the idea itself, and iii) any lingering concerns or ideas you may have. *This may require going to conferences that have a more technical bent a few times a year to grow your network, or reaching out to more technical colleagues.*

THE FIELD

Technical considerations can live outside of any one organisation or project. They exist at the field and ecosystem level as well. While grantmaking at this level is a challenge, it is important to keep in mind that - just like any other area of funding - the aggregate of the grants will have an effect on the ecosystem and field.

HOW CAN WE WRAP OUR HEADS AROUND THE ECOSYSTEM OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE SOCIAL SECTOR? IT IS BEST OUTLINED IN DYNAMICS

Like many other areas of speciality, technology has logics and economies. Without thinking about these underlying dynamics, it can be difficult to support technology that works in the long run. The social sector – and philanthropy – must consider two sides of the technology coin: the applications of technology that can improve their work, and the way that technology will affect rights in society. Some organisations may be more adept at considering one or the other, but every organisation should be capable of addressing both, in conversation and through strategy.

DYNAMICS AND CONSIDERATIONS: SKILLS, COST AND CHOICE

→SKILLS

- No matter how much of an expert someone is in technology, they still need to mix it with different types of expertise to successfully implement technical projects. Technical experts who cannot collaborate effectively cannot be successful and should be avoided.
- Using technology effectively as an organisation requires sustained curiosity across the team – it cannot be completely delegated to technical individuals in the group.
- The means with which technology is produced are incredibly important in the social sector. Extractive or abusive practices during technical production are inherently harmful and will null any later gains. Vendors and technical people that operate in ways antithetical to a community's values should not be accommodated. No level or area of technical skill is worth compromising your values.
- Technology changes quickly. The capacity to collaborate, organise, empathise and project manage are just as – or more – important as deep technical proficiency in any one area. An effective collaborator can always find an expert to fill in the gaps.
- Technical implementation is challenging, and it is easy to be overwhelmed by technical challenges and lose sight of the longer term goals of a project. This is exacerbated by project-based funding that limits adaptation over time.

→COSTS

- There are perpetual costs to technology. Sustaining technology – at the project or organisational level – always requires resources. This means that project-based funding for technology is likely to result in dead-end projects if there isn't a longer term financial sustainability plan.

- Organisations looking to build complex, custom technical systems should be able to explain why off-the-shelf technology cannot fill the need. Making technology that powers core operating functions or long-term projects is a huge, unrelenting endeavor and failure has significant cost. At a minimum, they should have a clear idea of what existing technologies might serve a similar function, and a rationale for why starting over is an appropriate use of resources.

- Free and open-source software (FOSS) is free as in freedom, not free as in cost. It costs to configure, embed, and roll-out open-source software. And sometimes open-source software is not the answer for an organisation. Ideologically, FOSS is more aligned with the politics of civil society and can have positive network effects – when an organisation uses open source software it often improves it, so the next user of that software reaps those benefits. This can have many positive effects on the availability of the right tools for civil society over time. That said, building from scratch, or repurposing open source technology, can lead to resource drain, distraction, and immature functionality.

→CHOICE

- Every technical decision is contextual, which means there is no right answer. It is difficult to evaluate a decision from the outside. What is right for you may not be right for another organisation. You may see grantees make different decisions based on their relative positioning, and you should encourage that type of reflection and customised action.

- Collecting data is far easier than using it. This dynamic can lead organisations to take on unnecessary risk. 'Data minimisation' is a strategy of only collecting what you need and using what you collect. Given the often vulnerable nature of the work of the social sector, it is critical that organisations think carefully and intentionally about what data they collect before they collect it.

- Over time, technical choices become harder to undo. We experience this as individuals, but also as groups. The friction to change the tools we use is called 'lock-in'. This dynamic is especially true in low resource organisations. The cost of mainstreaming a technology into an organisation is high (think about the last organisation-wide tool you adopted). This means choices about technical change should be managed with care and with a true understanding of longer term needs.

- The lack of division between personal and work use of technologies and devices creates considerable challenges and vulnerabilities. 'Shadow infrastructure' emerges that is difficult to protect and manage. Newer organisations may overly rely on the personal use of technology to get things done, but that should change over time as they professionalise.

- Many of the constituents of the social sector are not able to opt-out of services. Because of this, informed consent for experiments and 'innovation' is not possible. Do not confuse experimentation *on* vulnerable populations with innovation.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Before you begin funding technology-heavy grants, you first need to assess your institution's technical maturity and nurture a learning culture on technology topics. It is essential that you understand your starting point and have a sense of where you want to go.

You may have read the previous sections and felt it was a step ahead (or five steps) from where you and your institution currently sit vis-a-vis technology. You may have long-term goals to grow the technical maturity of your foundation to allow you to eventually fund technology-dense projects. Perhaps you are not interested in funding technology projects but are simply curious about how technology affects the other issues you work on. Whatever the end goal, this first step is reflecting on your starting point and building from there.

This section is intended for those in philanthropy that have not funded any technology projects but would like to encourage a learning culture around these topics. The conversation can start with just one or two interested staff, but in order to shift culture, you will eventually need to distribute engagement across the institution. This is a long-term and active process.

TECHNICAL MATURITY WITHIN PHILANTHROPY

Philanthropic institutions, like their grantees, also fall on the spectrum from low to high technical maturity, although the definitions reflect the goals and needs of philanthropy which are distinct from their grantees.

LOW	We struggle to adopt new technology internally, and have an aversion to discussing how technology is impacting human rights work. We tend to outsource all work connected to operations and strategy on technical topics.
MEDIUM	We are fairly comfortable adopting new technology on an operational level and holding conversations about our internal technology and data practices. We have some internal discussion about how technology affects issue areas, although conversation is limited to a few keen staff. We are aware of some of the topics we are interested in learning more about.
HIGH	We have commitment across the institution and can articulate the key impacts that technology has on human rights issues we work on. We are comfortable adapting internal systems and growing a learning culture on emerging topics. We have begun to discuss our foundational approach to funding technology and addressing technology in our grantmaking.

TAKING STOCK

Before you open up the conversation to the entire foundation, you should have a clear picture of your interests and motivations. Start from a place where you are curious and build from there.

AS AN INDIVIDUAL OR WITH A PEER, ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- What am I personally interested in learning more about?
- What areas of technology excite or scare me?
- What is the motivation driving my self-study on this topic? Where do I get stuck?
- Where on the spectrum does my institution fall from low to high technical maturity?
- What does my institution need support to understand or make choices about?

OPENING UP THE CONVERSATION

Once you have answered the questions above, you will have a better articulation of why you think this work is important. It's now time to enlist a few more allies to build a broader picture of the motivations and challenges facing your team.

With a larger group, such as a program team, answer the following conversations:

- What are you collectively interested in learning more about?
- What are your goals for the work?
- What spaces, physical or digital, people and resources do you currently refer to when exploring technology-related topics?
- For your team's work, what is the urgency of grappling with these issues versus other learning and strategy goals in the institution?
- What real-life stories and examples helped you understand the connection between your work and technology issues?
- Imagining a thriving learning culture has blossomed in the future, what are you now able to do? What kind of work is your team able to do?

It can be helpful to draft a pitch or even make a slidedeck to concretize your argument for investing resources into learning on technical topics. Reflect on how it connects to strategy and reference the work other funders are doing to encourage group action. Remember that it may not be immediately obvious to the rest of the team how this work connects to the remit. Lean on powerful examples of how technology is intersecting in the issue areas you fund. Know that you may need to seed the conversation slowly at retreats, in strategy design sessions, in program meetings, and with the board before it can become a project the institution is committed to.

If you have successfully brought in other staff members beyond yourself, congratulations! Doing internal changework can be slow and challenging. You are at a point at which it might make sense to build a consistent internal technology learning group, discussed more in the next section. You don't have to reinvent the wheel. If you already have tools you use for learning on other topics, lean on them here. Consider:

- Developing a living document with resources, a reading list or syllabus organised by topic
- Attend peer-learning spaces organised by digital rights funders and others in philanthropy who are attempting to grow their knowledge like yourself
- Reaching out to funder already funding topics that interest you to get a better sense of the landscape

CRAFTING YOUR OWN APPROACH

Now that you have laid the groundwork, it's time to dig deeper and analyse the impact of the technology you've funded. Discussing redlines and developing specific grantmaking principles can prevent harmful repercussions and elevate the most impactful interventions.

BUILDING AN INTERNAL LEARNING GROUP

Each grant officer in a foundation or trust is always learning about how technology is affecting issues and organisations. It isn't possible to have a fixed approach to technology, so it can be very helpful to build internal relationships and capacities to consider technology on an ongoing basis.

YOU MIGHT CONSIDER:

1. Organising internal discussions about your approach to technology funding, and developing an internal learning group. Start with those most keenly interested. These are the colleagues interested in learning about technology, and end up answering most questions internally about technical ideas (e.g. the woman you email to ask her thoughts on every pitch you get to 'build an app').

2. At an internal meeting, or even one-on-one with colleagues, talking through questions like:
   a. What patterns do we see in how we have funded technology in the past?
   b. Where have we seen the most impact?
   c. What grantees have had the most technical growth and what have we learned from watching those organisations evolve?
   d. In what areas do we think we need in-house expertise?
   e. What conferences or communities of practice do we lean on?
   f. What practices do we think are important in how technology is built: long-term sustainability? Co-design with communities? Innovation with emerging technology?
   g. What personally are we interested in learning? What areas of technology excite us, or scare us?

3. Organise meet-ups to support colleagues who are reviewing applications that have big technical dimensions.

4. When you encounter inspirational grantees or leaders leveraging technology in your field, invite them to come to speak and share their ideas and perspective. Use these talks to learn and broaden the group in your organisation interested in these issues.

5. Identify key conferences and encourage colleagues who might be intimidated about technology to attend together.

WHAT YOU FUND

While it's probably unwise to set a technology strategy in stone, it is a good idea to have conversations internally in order to know what you definitely won't fund, what you would consider funding, and the types of grants you want to make.

This discussion could include answers to questions like:

- Do we fund the development of technology applications? Apps for specific projects? Products meant to be used by a field?
- Do we fund projects at the cutting edge of emerging technology? Do we fund uptake of tools and technologies that are stable and established?
- Do we fund intermediary organisations who help other groups improve? Do we fund technology training?
- Do we expect communities to be involved in designing the technology projects that the social sector is doing 'for' them?
- Are we interested in insights that analysis can provide for advocacy? Or for increased efficiency in organisational operations? Or for community mobilisation?
- Do we support projects and organisations who are taking digital security risks?
- Do we have the internal capacity to support organisations taking on, or with higher risks of, digital security risks?
- Do we fund the upskilling of older organisations? Are we looking for upstarts?

DEVELOPING PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE YOUR APPROACH TO TECHNOLOGY FUNDING

The complexity or newness of technology can lead to short-sighted or overly technical thinking about the implications of using a new technology. In all sectors, there is too little thinking about the socio-political effects of technology. A funder can have a big effect on how organisations consider the implications of technology in operations and programmes. Every philanthropic organisation will hopefully have a clear set of values when it comes to their funding practices. Below is an example set of principles for funding technology.

- **STAY CURIOUS** – technology is a learning journey. Every individual and organisation has an obligation to understand enough about emerging technology to make strong choices and advocate for the future we want to see. Delegating curiosity is impossible and shouldn't be a goal for leaders in organisations, or funders.
- **COMMUNICATE CLEARLY ABOUT YOUR TECHNOLOGY PRACTICES** – internally, for documentation, and externally, to allow others agency. Your constituencies and partners should know what tools you use, what data you collect, why you make the choices you make, and how you work to use tools with care and with community in mind.
- **ADOPT TECHNOLOGY WITH INTENTION** – innovation does not mean lack of planning. Haphazard uptake of new technologies may be glorified in the private sector, but civil society and philanthropy have a higher duty of care. 'Innovating' should not be mistaken for experimenting on people, and it is no excuse for poor planning.
- **DON'T PRIVILEGE NEWNESS OVER EFFECTIVENESS.** If a grantee thinks that you value novelty over impact, they may design projects and proposals that respond to that perception.
- **TECHNOLOGY IS A COMMONS** – contribute to it. Most of what the social sector and philanthropy learn about technology is useful for others. A commons mentality when developing technology, or when implementing technical projects, is important if we are to move quickly as a field to make the most of what technology has to offer and minimise the costs (technical, financial and human).
- **REMEMBER THAT TECHNOLOGY IS POLITICAL** – we should create, maintain and follow responsible data practices. We have a higher calling to treat those whose data we hold with respect. We are often working with sensitive data about vulnerable communities. Our decisions – about what technology we use, what services and vendors we engage with, and how we honour our commitments about the data we use – are key to our integrity and overall impact.

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If you have any suggestions, feedback or want to talk about this topic, reach out to info@ariadne-network.eu.

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European Funders for Social Change and Human Rights

www.ariadne-network.eu
info@ariadne-network.eu
@AriadneNetwork