

## People & Projects - Let's Get Together

Project management methodologies abound, but the people side is just as important as the processes. Aba Maison, Information Systems Team leader at Lasa, reports back from a recent NetSquared Net Tuesday event which looked at some tips and tools for working successfully with people on projects, and takes a brief look at some online project management tools that can help.

There are several project management methodologies and processes, for example PRINCE2, which is widely used in the public sector. For a more in depth look at project management methodologies see the knowledgebase article **Project Management Which Method?** ([www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/projectmanagementmethods](http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/projectmanagementmethods)) or download the full Lasa Computanews Project Management Guide ([www.lasa.org.uk/publications/computanews-guides/](http://www.lasa.org.uk/publications/computanews-guides/)).

Whilst project management processes can undoubtedly be useful in keeping on top of projects, it's important not to get bogged down with them. For the best chance of success, ensure that project management techniques are used appropriately and adapt them to your particular purpose. Always remember why you are doing the project!

Remember that skills including:

- Communications

- Planning
- Managing intellectual property (IP)
- Skills development (e.g. to use the tools)
- Meeting facilitation
- Agenda planning
- Minute taking

...are at least as important to the success of a project as project management processes.

### Problems that can arise on projects and collaborations

Because projects involve working with other people you'll need to anticipate and have a plan for resolving issues that can arise. Being well prepared can help mitigate issues including:

- Scope or mission creep – when the project starts go grow beyond its original conception

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## computanews

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**Editorial & Production:**  
Miles Maier & Ian Runeckles

**Cartoons:**  
Phil Evans



Universal House  
88-94 Wentworth Street  
London E1 7SA

**Editorial:**  
Tel: 020 7426 4473  
Email: [computanews@lasa.org.uk](mailto:computanews@lasa.org.uk)

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### Other Lasa resources:

[www.lasa.org.uk](http://www.lasa.org.uk)

<http://ukriders.lasa.org.uk>

[www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk](http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk)

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<http://ictchampion.lasa.org.uk>

Lasa has been providing the voluntary and community sector with high quality and impartial ICT advice since 1984.



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# look back in tech

**The editors of *Computanews* take an ever so slightly tongue in cheek look at what's likely to happen in the ICT world this year.**

It's that time of year again. And, amazingly, it's 10 years on from when we all celebrated the turn of the century (even though it was a year early) and when most folk in IT were tearing out their hair over the millennium bug. Remember that? Planes were going to drop out of the sky, the world would stop turning and the economy would go pear shaped. Well, it took eight years for the latter to happen but otherwise we managed to survive.

So this is a time for looking forward – what are we expecting to happen in the ICT world this year? Before we go there, we've been looking back at January 2000's *Computanews* 105 to see what was happening then and what they thought might be happening now. We reported that ICL's Chris Yapp started his presentation at December 1999's IT think tank with the comment that "In the year 2010, every lamp post will be on the internet" – well, that hasn't happened quite yet (although we're not exactly sure what he meant, to be honest). Other articles showed how to use Outlook 2000 address books for mail merging, managers were stating that they found IT difficult, CPAG had issued their welfare benefits CD-ROM after a five year gestation period (just in time to see everything move onto the web...) and the CABnet 2000 programme was widening the use of ICT at CABs.

Fast forward 10 years and we see a vastly different and yet in many ways familiar scene. Apart from lampposts, pretty well everything else is on the web but we still have problems mail merging and many organisations are

still not managing their ICT successfully. Perhaps this will be the year that the latter changes – with the growth of online services for organisational databases, creating and storing office documents, backing up and running various security systems perhaps we can forget all that. Er, probably not actually. Many smaller organisations are still battling with keeping their membership and client records on outdated and unsuitable data systems, documents are still scattered across a number of PCs and laptops which makes backing up virtually impossible and networks are prone to viruses or malware.

The ICT-savvy forecasters and gurus are predicting all sorts of nifty gadgets coming to market this year such as tablets (which appeared originally about five or more years ago and which no one took any notice of), fancier electronic book readers (so we can carry 300 books around with us) and mobile video streaming devices.

Organisations will use more services in the "cloud" so we can be connected to our documents and data at all times, whether we like it or not, and more devices (possibly including those lampposts) will be internet connected.

Social activism will "explode" across the web with the increasing use of social networking tools for fundraising and involvement whilst geolocation will hit the big time (so that not only will we know that someone is having a coffee via their Twitter account but exactly what table in Starbucks they are sitting at). Google may or may not release its operating system and bring out its Android phone to compete with the iPhone. And Microsoft will release Office 2010 – perhaps we'll be able to get that Outlook mail merge working.

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## Computanews now accepts advertisements

If you offer a technology product, service or event aimed specifically at the voluntary sector you can draw attention to it through the pages of **Computanews**.

**Computanews** is a specialised magazine covering the use of technology within the voluntary sector. It has a key audience of:

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- Circuit Riders who provide advice and technology support to other organisations

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## cont'd from page 1

- Forced changes in project direction
- Managing different expectations amongst project stakeholders
- Communication and getting responses
- Creative vs technical people managing projects
- Flexibility (or lack thereof) within current processes
- “Forced” collaboration – organisations or departments that may not be a natural fit being thrown together by funders or other project sponsors
- Managing up and out – you won’t always have direct management control over the other partners in the project
- Concerns about intellectual property / sharing ideas

## Preparing for and avoiding potential problems

There are various strategies and techniques that can be used to avoid problems. Two useful tools are a **collaboration toolkit** and **stakeholder mapping**:

### Collaboration toolkit

Alison Coward of Bracket (<http://bracketprojects.co.uk>) suggests a collaboration toolkit that involves thinking about factors including:

- **Me to we** – remember you are working with other people, plan ahead and think holistically
- **Self analysis** – Identify what you want to achieve personally and organisationally from the project and where you need help. Scope out and identify the skills and roles needed for project tasks
- **Having a balanced**

### project team –

in order to succeed teams need to have a balance of people with different skills and roles. The Belbin model suggests teams work best with a mixture of people with action oriented, people oriented, and thought oriented roles. More information on this is available in the Mindtools.

- com article on Belbin’s team roles ([www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR\\_83.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_83.htm)) and on Belbin.com ([www.belbin.com/](http://www.belbin.com/))
- **Identifying strengths of partners and playing to them** – some partners may be better at providing more creative than technical input, or have the right sort of contacts to move your project forward for example. Involve them in the right parts of the project!
- **Resources** – identify these, including how much time you are willing able to put into the project
- **Values / vision / dream** – “future mapping” exercise – what will a successful project outcome look like?
- **Benchmarking** – how will you know when the project is “finished” and whether or not it has been a success
- **Clarity about sharing ideas / ownership** – from the outset be open about discussing, considering, and agreeing who “owns” an idea and how any intellectual property will be assigned. Contracts or written agreements may be necessary
- **Effective communication**



– identify early on what processes will be put in place. Communicate with the right people at the right time. Remember to document the project – especially decisions.

- **Letting go of control** – you might just need to close your eyes and trust...
- **Scheduling** – As well as creating timelines and milestones for completion of project tasks, remember that not everyone involved in the project needs to be involved at all stages of the project. Bring the right people in at the right time.

### Stakeholder Mapping Tool

Rachael West of Left Brain Right Brain advocates using stakeholder mapping to inform your communications plan on a project or collaboration.

The tool involves listing all the stakeholders in a project, what you need from them, and what they need from you. Depending on your situation, you might want to use the tool on your own, or as an exercise with members of the project team.

An example (below - stakeholders and requirements shown are not exhaustive) might be for a community organisation currently running a range of activities that is planning a new ICT project offering internet training. By mapping stakeholders, it's possible to see in this example what elements and features the website might need to have, and ensure that it meets the needs of all the potential stakeholders.

Stakeholders	What you need from them	What they need from you
Trainees	Money (if offering paid-for service) Information on their training needs Current level of skill Relationship / referrals to other potential service users Feedback on service	Quality / effective training Information Value for money Support during and after training Timeliness
Funders	Money to fund the project Monitoring guidelines Grants officer Clarity of expectations Ongoing	Grant applications Project plan Monitoring data Reputation / kudos "feel good factor" associated with supporting project Acknowledgement / credit Confidence Assurance / accountability
Supporters/Members	Subscriptions Feedback on organisation's activities	News updates Sense of involvement
Trustees	Strategic guidance Appropriate level of governance	Project plan overview Project updates
Organisation staff	Trainers to run the project Support staff for management, publicity, administration	Engagement in the project Information Resources and training Salary!
ICT staff	Hardware and software resources to carry out project Management of ICT resources	Requirements brief Timetable

## Online tools for managing projects

There are dozens of useful (and often free) online tools for planning, managing or collaborating on projects. It's important to use the right tool for the job, justify the benefits of the tool(s) you wish to use and get buy-in from the project team. Alison Coward suggests some of the following:

- **Google apps** ([www.google.com/apps/](http://www.google.com/apps/)) – document collaboration / sharing / calendaring and more
- **Googlesites** ([www.google.com/sites/help/intl/en/overview.html](http://www.google.com/sites/help/intl/en/overview.html)) – free websites and wikis
- **Mindmeister** ([www.mindmeister.com/](http://www.mindmeister.com/)) – free web-based collaborative mind mapping tool for brainstorming and project-management.
- **Bubbl.us** (<http://bubbl.us>) – free brainstorming tool
- **Twiddla** ([www.twiddla.com](http://www.twiddla.com)) – free whiteboarding tool
- **Shozu** ([www.shozu.com](http://www.shozu.com)) – Image sharing
- **Shout 'em** ([www.shoutem.com](http://www.shoutem.com)) and **Yammer** ([www.yammer.com/](http://www.yammer.com/)) – tools for creating your own public

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- or private micro blogging community (like twitter) to share files, photos, links and more
- Basecamp (<http://basecamp.com/>) and Huddle ([www.huddle.net](http://www.huddle.net)) – more “traditional” project management suites offering file sharing, task assignment and more. Registered charities can access donated licenses for Huddle through the CTX (charity technology exchange) programme ([www.ctxchange.org](http://www.ctxchange.org)).

## Knowledgebase

- Online Collaboration Tools ([www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/onlinecollaboration](http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/onlinecollaboration))
- Work Smarter, Quicker, and Cheaper with Online Tools ([www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/worksmarter](http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/worksmarter))
- Web Office Tools – The Virtual Office ([www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/virtualoffice](http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/virtualoffice))

## About this article

This article was adapted from the Knowledgebase article Project Management – the people side! [www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/projectmanagementpeopleside](http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/projectmanagementpeopleside) and is based on presentations and experiences from the November 2009 NetSquared Net Tuesday meetup. Thanks to NetSquared's Amy Sample Ward, session facilitators Alison Coward of Bracket (<http://bracketprojects.co.uk>) and Rachael West of Left Brain Right Brain (<http://rachaelwest.wordpress.com/>), and all the London NetSquared Community (<http://netsquared.meetup.com/31/>) members for these insights.

# Tips 154 using project management tools

**With collaborative projects becoming more common, the use of online tools to assist the management is becoming more common. We offer up some tips which might help the smooth running of the project.**

1. Appoint one person to be the workspace manager. This may or may not be the overall project manager.
2. Think about what tool is appropriate for your project. If the workspace manager is familiar with Basecamp, then maybe that's the system to use.
3. Work out and agree protocols for how you're going to use the tool.
4. If the tool includes features that aren't useful or appropriate, don't feel you have to use them.
5. When users are signed up to the system, allow them to introduce themselves and their roles in the project. If there's a user profile area, get them to update it with pertinent information relative to the project – yes, it's great that they have 10 cats but...
6. Don't assume that everyone needs to be involved in everything. Collaboration is great, but it doesn't mean that every cook has to take turns in stirring the broth.
7. Have an FAQ document or pointers to tutorials somewhere obvious on the site.
8. If possible, have an induction session with the project participants on use of the workspace. This may be possible online.
9. Discuss and agree protocols for signing work off
10. Have a plan for following up on late tasks.
11. Try to contain essential project management discussion within the workspace, rather than allowing external email in addition, for example.
12. Read Idealware's Six Views of Project Management Software [www.idealware.org/articles/lfgt\\_project\\_management.php](http://www.idealware.org/articles/lfgt_project_management.php)

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So our hope is that during 2010 through using information resources and forums such as the Knowledgebase, the Suppliers Directory, the ICT Champions, Circuit Riders and the UKRiders list (oh, and Computanews!), the

voluntary sector ICT community can continue to help organisations make the right decisions on using scarce time and money to create a safe and secure working environment which serves the needs of our members and clients.

Whatever happens, we wish all Computanews readers and contributors a happy and successful new year.

**Ian Runeckles & Miles Maier**  
**Computanews, Lasa**

## Building Bridges to ICT Excellence

Lasa is working with the City Bridge Trust ([www.bridgehousegrants.org.uk](http://www.bridgehousegrants.org.uk)), Wates Foundation ([www.watesfoundation.org.uk](http://www.watesfoundation.org.uk)) and the Cripplegate Foundation ([www.cripplegate.org](http://www.cripplegate.org)) to offer support and advice on all aspects of ICT through its three-year Building Bridges project. Lasa's Ian Goodman updates us on the project.

In the first year of the project we have worked with a number of organisations across London on a wide range of issues, including:

- Helping organisations find an ICT support company
- Advising on planning an organisation's database
- Carrying out ICT Healthchecks
- Developing ICT policies

Specific examples of the work we have undertaken include helping an advice organisation who were relocating, to work through a number of ICT recommendations which resulted in a smooth office move. We also assisted them with the recruitment of a new

staff member to oversee and take responsibility for ICT.

We have also worked closely with a recycling agency to assess their ICT infrastructure and help plan a database development. The input of the project helped reassure the organisations fears about the implications of moving to an online database. By working with the Building Bridges project the organisation was able to plan their required networking developments and be sure that their new database would function without any problems.

As well as working directly with groups funded by the City Bridge Trust, Wates and Cripplegate Foundations, the project is able to offer signposting to organisations considering application to these bodies, such as:

- Where to find ICT support companies
- Making good use of social media
- How much to spend on buying new computers

- Where to buy discounted software

To access the service or for more information see [www.lasa.org.uk/circuitriders](http://www.lasa.org.uk/circuitriders) or contact Ian Goodman at Lasa on 020 7426 4473 email [igoodman@lasa.org.uk](mailto:igoodman@lasa.org.uk)

Even if organisations don't qualify for this project there's a vast range of free ICT advice and resources over at Lasa's ICT Knowledgebase ([www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk](http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk)) and Suppliers Directory ([www.suppliersdirectory.org.uk](http://www.suppliersdirectory.org.uk)).

The project builds on Lasa's successful Circuit Rider project, funded by The City Bridge Trust and the Big Lottery, which ran between 2005 and 2007. Project evaluations can be downloaded from <http://ukriders.lasa.org.uk/publications/> where you can also find a link to the Trust's overview of building ICT capacity in London's Third Sector organisations through Circuit Riding.



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# Data Protection: Clearer guidance and tougher enforcement on Data Protection



The Information Commissioner regenerated in June 2009, when Christopher Graham took over from Richard Thomas. Perhaps by coincidence, recent developments suggest that since then the priorities of the Information Commissioner's Office have shifted slightly away from Freedom of Information and privacy, in favour of day to day Data Protection. Paul Ticher, author of the recently published Data Protection for voluntary organisations reviewed in this Computanews, looks at what's new.

## How to be fair

When an organisation asks you to provide them with your personal information, how do you decide whether you trust them enough to give it? How do you decide what information to give, and what to withhold? You would probably want to know what they are going to do with the information, and how much choice you have. If they've done their job properly you will be in a position to make clear decisions.

No organisation now has any excuse for failing to do this properly. The Privacy Notices Code of Practice which came out in 2009 (see 'Source material' below) sets out good practice and – more usefully – gives a whole series of worked examples,

comparing good and bad practice. In clear and non-technical language it covers the statements you need to make and the options you need to offer, as well as discussing situations when you don't have to give people a choice.

Anyone who collects information from individuals, for any purpose, is strongly recommended to get hold of this short and accessible Code of Practice and read it thoroughly.

## Understanding Data Protection

You probably have loads of reference material on your shelf already about the Data Protection Act and what it means. If not, the first thing you should get hold of is the Information Commissioner's new Guide to Data Protection (see 'Source material' below), a 92-page plain English explanation of the basics. It's not specifically written for the voluntary sector (unlike Paul's Data Protection for voluntary organisations – Ed.) but it has the significant advantage of being free.

## Fancy being fined £500,000?

The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 gave the Information Commissioner new powers to impose punitive

## Protecting your mobile data

If your mobile phone, laptop or USB stick should fall into the wrong hands, have you thought about how to prevent access to the data and minimise the potential harm?

You should think about methods such as:

- If possible, avoiding the necessity for information to be on physical media by giving authorised users secure remote access to your system instead
- Insisting that people who are authorised to take data out of your building for any reason use equipment or media provided, or at least checked, by the organisation
- Strong passwords on laptops
- Encrypting media whenever possible
- PIN access to memory sticks
- Remote wipe to delete all data on phones and PDAs if they are lost

security breaches. When these come into force on 6 April 2010 the Commissioner will be able to order organisations to pay up to £500,000 for serious breaches of the Data Protection Act. The penalties are intended to act as a deterrent, and the Commissioner will take into account factors such as the seriousness of the breach, and the extent to which the organisation had taken steps to prevent it (see ‘Source material’ below). There are also indications that the government might introduce jail terms for people who trade illegally in personal data - the present maximum penalty is a fine. You have been warned!

## Do you encrypt your portable media?

Several organisations have recently been taken to task for losing portable media containing data that was not encrypted even, in one case, when a laptop was stolen from a locked room. The seventh Data Protection Principle says that you must take ‘appropriate’ security measures, but accepted practice on what counts as appropriate seems to be evolving in the light of high-profile data losses.

Anything that could easily leave your premises with data on it is a risk. Laptops are obviously a tempting target for theft, while memory sticks are easily lost, and other devices – such as phones, PDAs or cameras – have more and more capacity to store data.

## Other developments

There have been several high profile enforcement actions against blatant breaches of the Data Protection Act, including that against Ian Kerr for maintaining a

“blacklist” of construction workers.

Charities of any size will still pay the lower fee, currently £35 a year, but there is a new higher tier annual registration (or Notification) fee of £500. It applies to organisations with over 250 staff or a turnover of more than £25.9 million.

The European Union is reviewing its electronic marketing rules. They may be toughened up, though there is also some pressure for charities to be exempt.

To watch out for: the Scottish government intends to extend Freedom of Information to some private organisations that are carrying out public functions. There are no plans at present for anything similar in England and Wales.

## Source material

The organisation of the Information Commissioner’s web site makes it difficult to give snappy links. All the documents mentioned above are in the document library on the Information Commissioner’s web site ([www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)). There is a link to this on the right-hand side of the home page, under ‘Information for organisations’. Note that items in the library are indexed by the full title (even if the first word is ‘the’) and that there are several fairly arbitrary sections.

The full titles and links are also given below:

Privacy Notices Code of Practice  
[www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data\\_protection/detailed\\_specialist\\_guides/privacy\\_notices\\_cop\\_final.pdf](http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data_protection/detailed_specialist_guides/privacy_notices_cop_final.pdf)



The Guide to Data Protection  
[www.ico.gov.uk/tools\\_and\\_resources/document\\_library/data\\_protection.aspx](http://www.ico.gov.uk/tools_and_resources/document_library/data_protection.aspx)

Information Commissioner’s guidance about the issue of monetary penalties prepared and issued under section 55C (1) of the Data Protection Act 1998  
[www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data\\_protection/detailed\\_specialist\\_guides/ico\\_guidance\\_monetary\\_penalties.pdf](http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data_protection/detailed_specialist_guides/ico_guidance_monetary_penalties.pdf)

## Knowledgebase

Introduction To The Data Protection Act  
[www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/dataprotectionactintroduction](http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/dataprotectionactintroduction)

Data Protection Policies  
[www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/dataprotectionpolicies](http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/dataprotectionpolicies)

Data Protection And Web Based Applications  
[www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/dataprotectionandweb](http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/dataprotectionandweb)

## About the author

Paul Ticher is a freelance trainer, consultant and author, covering many aspects of information management, ICT, Data Protection and risk management. [paul@paulticher.com](mailto:paul@paulticher.com)

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## Data Protection for voluntary organisations

By Paul Ticher

Published Directory of Social Change  
2009 £18.95 + £2.75 P&P

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If you've ever been to a voluntary sector seminar or workshop on data protection, either it will have been led by Paul Ticher or his name or publications will have been mentioned sometime during the event. Members of the UKRiders list have benefited enormously from Paul's input on data protection queries and issues.

This is the third edition of the book which originally appeared in 2000 when the Data Protection Act of 1998 (which replaced the earlier 1984 law) was finally enacted. In Paul's words, this edition "includes additional and revised material based on experience with the Act during the five years since the second edition... takes account of new and updated guidance from the Information Commissioner, key cases... policy development and other legislation..."

The book is a medium format paperback of just over 200 pages broken down into 24 chapters and four appendices. If you thought that data protection was just a case of registering with – sorry, notifying, showing my age there – the Information Commissioner once a year and not handing out your mailing database to all and sundry then you're somewhat short of the mark!

After an introduction giving

background to the law, initial chapters look at how to approach data protection compliance, the role and responsibilities of the Data Controller, what personal data actually is and who the data subjects are. There then follows detailed examination of each of the eight Data Protection Principles which is the core of the book. A separate chapter looks at confidentiality which, as Paul explains, overlaps with data protection but does not cover exactly the same material. Further chapters cover email and the web, providing data subjects (the person you are holding data on) with information, the aforementioned notification, enforcement, auditing and policy development and, last but not least by any means, staff training and good practice. There follows a resource list and the appendices covering incorporation and charitable status, processing sensitive data, references, police and CRB checks and using photographs.

The book is well laid out, with a brief introduction and overview



# Data Protection

for voluntary organisations

Paul Ticher

DSC

In association with  
Bates Wells & Braithwaite  
solicitors

of the key points covered at the start of each chapter. There's a useful summary of the key points at the end of each chapter and examples throughout in the form of possible situations and also typical questions that organisations raise about data protection.

All in all, this is an essential publication for medium to large voluntary sector organisations and should be in the reference libraries of all second tier and development support organisations.

Data Protection for Voluntary Organisations is available from [www.dsc.org.uk/Publications/Law](http://www.dsc.org.uk/Publications/Law)



# The answers to your technology questions

We've been hearing on the grapevine about a new information resource for non-profit technologists called Answr (Aggregated Nonprofit SoftWare Resources) which is being developed in the US by Aspiration. Lasa staff have attended the excellent open source Penguin Days and project management events which Aspiration have facilitated and which were not only inspirational and informative but huge fun (if you've been to any of the recent Circuit Rider Conferences you'll have a rough idea of how they work). So we were keen to find out about it and talked to Allen Gunn (aka Gunner) who is Aspiration's Executive Director...

**Ian Runeckles, Lasa (IR)** - Hi Gunner, thanks for agreeing to talk to Computanews about Aspiration's latest project. Before we get into Answr, what other projects and events has Aspiration been involved in?

**Allen Gunn, Aspiration (AG)** - Aspiration works to help NGOs (Non Governmental Organisations) make more effective use of technology, and to get better software tools created to meet their needs. We work across the range of stakeholders in NGO technology, talking to both (so-called) end users as well as software developers, and with the always-under-appreciated techies who toil in between those two extremes.

In terms of end users, we focus on helping NGO staff develop sustainable technology processes. We have an "eAdvocacy Capacity Building Program", where we coach NGOs on how to design and maintain online communication strategies and campaigns. We do training and mentoring in tech strategy, and offer coaching services where teach NGOs how to take control of their technology destiny.

For the IT crowd, we focus on knowledge sharing and capturing

the same. Our Social Source Commons platform ([www.socialsourcecommons.org](http://www.socialsourcecommons.org)) is an inventory of NGO-related software, rendered in a social network model where users of the site can share their favourite tools, and see what other NGO techies are using and what they think about those tools. And Answr, which we'll explain in a minute, is the latest offering in that effort.

And yes, we absolutely love to host NGO technology events all around the globe (<http://aspirationtech.org/events/history>).

**IR** - You mentioned software developers earlier, what have you been doing with them?

**AG** - We provide strategic consulting, both on product design as well as community processes. We're currently working with great projects like FrontlineSMS (<http://frontlinesms.com/>) and the Open Simulation Platform (<http://opensimulation.org/>), helping those

platforms to engage and establish open source communities that can both expand the reach of the projects and contribute to the ongoing development of the software.

**IR** – I’m sure I’m not guessing if I say that open standards, open source, open everything are watchwords at Aspiration, right?

**AG** – Absolutely! We now also oversee the Nonprofit Open Source Initiative (NOSI, [www.nosi.net](http://www.nosi.net)), which works to educate NGOs about Free and Open Source Software and connect them to open source developers who can help address their needs.

We’re also passionate about Open Translation ([www.aspirationtech.org/programs/opentranslation](http://www.aspirationtech.org/programs/opentranslation)), which is the use of free and open source software to support the translation of open content. We’ve recently published a book in partnership with FLOSSManuals.net (<http://en.flossmanuals.net/opentranslationtools>) documenting the state of the field in Open Translation and explaining core concepts.

There’s plenty more on [www.aspirationtech.org](http://www.aspirationtech.org), but I bet you didn’t expect me to be so wordy in the first place!

**IR** – Sounds like you have a lot on your plate already. So what’s Answr all about?

**AG** - The Answr project is an attempt to address two fundamental challenges in NGO technology.

The first is the capture, or aggregation, of up-to-the-minute knowledge about NGO tech. There are so many amazing

mailing lists and other resources to offer information about NGO technology, but so much of the knowledge that’s shared in those venues doesn’t get captured in a way that can be maintained and accessed over time.

The second challenge the platform is addressing is how to better leverage the knowledge extant in social networks like Facebook and Twitter. So much great information flows through Twitter feeds and Facebook conversations, but rarely is it captured in a usable format for posterity.

In short, Answr is sort of an “FAQ on Steroids”, a place where frequently asked questions about NGO technology can be aggregated. We’re trying to complement and link to great resources that are already out there - the Lasa Knowledgebase, TechSoup’s discussion boards, Idealware’s reviews - with a platform that’s designed to build focused knowledge sets by tapping social networks.

**IR** – That’s a huge amount of knowledge to deal with - whereabouts are you starting?

**AG** - The first version of the platform is limited to email-related topics. We’re trying to develop community processes for sharing and managing tech knowledge, and then we’ll broaden the focus to other areas including online campaigning, web publishing, CRM, security, and beyond.

The Answr platform is also integrated with Social Source Commons, so that when users are viewing the answers to questions, they’re also able to see listings of related tools and platforms. And all of that is linked with related

resources on relevant web sites, blogs and other online venues.

**IR** - So where did the idea come from in the first place and who’s been involved up until now?

**AG** - The idea has many parents. We’re grateful to have worked with Idealware, TechSoup, BCT Partners and many other great folks in conceptualizing and developing both the need definition and the initial solution. And the Surdna Foundation has been very forward-looking in supporting the development of the current platform.

**IR** – You talked about pulling in knowledge from mailing lists – this is something that has come up time and time again about the UKRiders list – in fact, following last year’s Circuit Rider conference we had a debate onlist about what we should do to address this. In the end, the vocal majority felt that the existing list did a good job and that we should stay as we were. I’m wondering whether there’s a possibility of discussion from UKRiders being integrated into Answr somehow?

**AG** – Absolutely, we’d love to make that happen. We’re working with early adopters and users of the platform to define community processes that would enable folks to flag great discussions that might generate ideas for new question/answers. Though we’re also working to be respectful of each list culture; pulling knowledge out of mailing lists has some serious etiquette associated with it.

A different answer to your question is that any data set/web site that has an interface (“API”) for accessing and searching relevant content is something

we want to integrate into the platform. The SSC integration is just the first step, we're hoping to link questions on Answr with lots of directly related knowledge from others sources, including the Lasa Knowledgebase.

**IR** – So, is Answr officially live now?

**AG** – Yes, and we are slow launching the site, inviting anyone who cares to come and look around to have a go and let us know what they think, especially about how Twitter is integrated into the process. The content set

is still smaller than we would like, and there are still some usability and workflow issues we are working out to make it easier to both find answers and contribute knowledge. And then there's the issue of establishing a believable ratings system for identifying high-quality answers. We're saving the "go-live fanfare" for when we think we've earned a bit of the same, and we're so grateful for all the amazing feedback we've already gotten.

**IR** – Gunner, thanks so much for taking the time to talk to us, we wish you all the best with

Answr and all of Aspiration's other projects. I hope you'll let us know how things are going – and also if there's any input that would be helpful from Computanews readers.

**AG** – We sure will, and we thank you so much for shining some light on all the work we're doing. We are quite passionate about building Answr into a resource that really help folks do NGO tech better, and we'll definitely keep you up-to-date as we move this forward. You can visit the Answr project at <http://answr.net>

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## Managing Technology to Meet Your Mission – A Strategic Guide for NonProfit Leaders

**Editors: Holly Ross, Katrin Verclas and Alison Levine**

**Published Jossey-Bass 2009**

**Available from amazon.co.uk from around £17**

**[www.meetyourmission.org](http://www.meetyourmission.org)**

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This recently issued 291 page book from NTEN, the US non profit technology network, is very much a set of master classes from leading non-profit ICT activists and commentators. The 11 chapters are arranged in two parts, namely Planning and People and The Tools and covers a large amount of ground.

Those readers who have attended Lasa Circuit Rider conferences will recognise some of the authors such as Beth Kanter and John Kenyon so this will give you an idea of the level of expertise on offer. The other twelve authors also have long non-profit tech track records with respected organisations such

as TechSoup.org

In the first part, the book starts by looking at how mission shapes an organisation's ICT requirements, how change can be managed, return on investment measured, ICT planned, how to recruit and retain IT staff, and budget and fund for technology. Part two starts with a technology primer and then moves online examining stakeholders, communications, fundraising and a look to the future.

The introduction opens with what might be a haiku but probably isn't – if you are trying to make sense of ICT in your organisation:

It's not your fault  
You are not alone  
You can do it

The book acknowledges a number of challenges to VCS management. As regular Computanews readers will already be aware the pace of change is getting faster; ICT jargon can be a barrier; choosing the ICT which will help with the organisation's mission is hard; failure is scary (because it's very easy to fail with ICT projects and investment); and that managing the change is not easy.

The book notes that three key themes emerge from nearly every chapter: look at the mission

EDITORS

Holly Ross Alison Levine Katrin Verclas

# Managing Technology to Meet Your Mission

A Strategic Guide

FOR **NONPROFIT** LEADERS



People Who Change the World Need the **TOOLS** to Do It

first – if that hot looking online database tool that everybody is talking about won't help meet your mission, then pass – if it looks like it could then you have some serious work to do. Secondly, people come second – staff, boards and stakeholders need to buy into mission-focused technology and the technology has to be adequately supported. Finally, every technology project needs to be evaluated and re-evaluated. I'd also suggest that planning for technology rears its head again and again throughout the book – and is something that is very often lacking in organisations.

The limitation of any book is that it is of its time. With ICT moving at a rapid pace it can date fast. This is noticeable in the technology primer chapter written by Kevin

Lo and Willow Cook at TechSoup – it's an excellent overview of hardware, software, networks, security, internet access, websites, support and so on. But I doubt you'll find too many PCs on sale now with 256Mb RAM, 1Ghz processor or a 40Gb hard drive that will function adequately with a modern operating system.

That's a minor quibble though. There's much to admire in the book – I liked John Kenyon's notion of the "clickability" of a website to mimic a conversation with a potential visitor to the site, Steve Heye's table for assessing what stage your technology is at and Peter Campbell's use of a technology SWOT analysis for the introduction of (in the example given) smartphones.

This probably isn't a book you'll read in one sitting, although it's written in a way which isn't dry like so many tech manuals or management books. The fact that it is American means that the examples of legislation in the recruitment section are obviously for a US audience so less relevant to the Computanews audience. Although aimed at those who are tasked with managing technology in VCS organisations, anyone with an interest, professional or otherwise, in the subject will gain from the material and resources. I'd suggest that this book should be mandatory for circuit riders and other ICT development workers and we'll certainly be including it as necessary reading as part of the Lasa ICT Learning Programme. Highly recommended.

The book's website [www.meetyourmission.org](http://www.meetyourmission.org) provides an overview of the book and the authors and the Jossey-Bass site gives access to "premium content" at [www.josseybass.com/go/nten](http://www.josseybass.com/go/nten) There is also a webinar that features many of the book's authors in conversation with Holly Ross, [www.nten.org/events/webinar/2009/03/31/managing-technology-meet-your-mission-book-release-party](http://www.nten.org/events/webinar/2009/03/31/managing-technology-meet-your-mission-book-release-party)

# Computanews

## Lasa services

### knowledgebase

independent ICT information + advice  
[www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk](http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk)

### SUPPLIERS DIRECTORY

connecting you with trusted technology suppliers  
[www.suppliersdirectory.org.uk](http://www.suppliersdirectory.org.uk)



### aims

advice + information management system  
[www.lasa.org.uk/aims](http://www.lasa.org.uk/aims)

### multikulti

information + advice in community languages  
[www.multikulti.org.uk](http://www.multikulti.org.uk)

### rightsnet

the welfare rights website for advisors  
[www.rightsnet.org.uk](http://www.rightsnet.org.uk)

## About Lasa

Established in 1984, Lasa has provided ICT advice to the voluntary sector for 25 years. Its two main aims are to promote social inclusion through access to social welfare law, information, advice and guidance; and to promote an efficient and effective sector through improving access to impartial ICT advice and support resources – such as Computanews and the London e-bulletin ([www.lasa.org.uk/lasa/mailling-lists](http://www.lasa.org.uk/lasa/mailling-lists))

Our online ICT Knowledgebase ([www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk](http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk)) is a comprehensive source of independent expert ICT advice for VCS organisations, now containing over 300 articles. The Suppliers Directory ([www.suppliersdirectory.org.uk](http://www.suppliersdirectory.org.uk)) connects VCS organisations with over 100 approved suppliers of ICT products and support services across England. Lasa is also noted for its consultancy work and leadership in developing the Circuit Rider model of local ICT support. (<http://ukriders.lasa.org.uk/>)

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Web: [www.lasa.org.uk/ict](http://www.lasa.org.uk/ict)  
Twitter: @lasaict  
Email: [computanews@lasa.org.uk](mailto:computanews@lasa.org.uk)  
Tel: 020 7426 4496

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