

# Improve IT Maturity for Greater Technology Value

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## Technology: What's the Problem?

Our goal in writing this white paper is to introduce you to a new way of thinking about technology in your organization. Rather than thinking of technology as a department, tool, or means to automate a process – we're making the case for you to think and talk about technology in a more systematic way. Adopting this type of approach towards technology will leave you with a more structured understanding of how to strategically use it to accomplish your organization's mission. We've developed a fresh, new way of approaching technology, that up to now, we haven't seen in the association or nonprofit community.

As you know, technology is a double-edged sword. Like so many other functions of an organization, technology can greatly help or diabolically hinder an organization's ability to achieve its mission and vision at the highest level possible. However, technology has a special place reserved in today's world because it has become a linchpin to many of our business processes and plans. It is intended to support an organization and make it more efficient, capable, and progressive. Yet, technology can be complex and if the 'wrong' technology is selected or if the correct technology is not implemented properly, it often has the opposite effect and makes an organization less efficient, less capable, and deters progress. Also, it is easy to lose control of technology since there is more to it than

simply the technology itself. There are training, integration, governance, budgeting, and management issues that can limit the effectiveness of technologies in use. Many organizations blame the technology when in actuality it's often due to these non-technical issues that some technologies work while others don't. Naturally, these organizations focus on fixing the specific technologies that aren't working; however this lacks an overall appreciation for technology as a whole. As a result, general characteristics of organizations that aren't getting the most out of their technology include:

- A lack of systematic processes to review technology's role within the organization.
- A view of technology on a project-by-project or department-by-department basis.
- Perceiving IT only as a necessary evil.
- Technology that is reactive and rarely shows the organization new ways to improve on its effectiveness.
- IT is used without vision and focused tightly on solving specific issues rather than serving the overall mission and vision of the organization.

Throughout our many years of involvement with the association and nonprofit community, we've spent a great deal of time talking to organizations of all types and sizes about technology's role, what 'the problem' is and how to solve it.

## Technology: What's the Problem

- Lack of systematic processes
- Viewing technology on case-by-case basis
- Perceiving IT only as a necessary evil

## The Solution: IT Maturity

- Evolves technology within organization
- Increases effectiveness of organization as a whole
- Prepares technology to support organization

## DelCor's View on IT Maturity

- Five Functions of IT
- Four Phases of IT Maturity
- IT Maturity Model for Nonprofit Organizations

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## The Solution: IT Maturity

Maturity - we want it for our children, peers, investments, and our organizations. We expect our attitude, writing ability, perspective, and capabilities to mature as well. In the same way, we should also expect our technology to mature. Your organization's success depends on its ability to leverage available technology fully and properly to fulfill its mission and vision.

Maturing your technology will cause your organization to think and talk about IT in a new way: as a means to increase the organization's effectiveness and improve the value delivered to its constituency. Maturing your IT allows your technology to evolve and function within a strategic framework. This initiative should be done in an organized and planned manner, with executive level buy-in to ensure success. At the completion of this initiative, you'll find your technology more mature and better able to support all facets of the organization.

## DelCor's View on IT Maturity

### *Five Functions of IT*

DelCor polled the association and non-profit community to help form a widely-accepted benchmark against which organizations can compare their level of maturity. So as to make this relevant to the entire community, we realized the importance of first finding a consensus on the main functions of IT within an organization and have identified five functions as follow:

- **Network/Infrastructure:** Your organization's network is its backbone. Almost every function within the organization is supported by the network – HR, financial, and even security is supported by the central network. It's plainly clear that a properly managed network can drive your organization forward and push it to achieve its mission better than ever before. It's also equally as clear that a poorly configured or managed infrastructure will hinder your organization's ability to achieve its full

potential.

- **Technical Support:** With all the value technology offers, we realize there are still times when systems fail, computers crash, and data is lost. When a computer goes down, a staff member's productivity also drops. Organizations that want to leverage technology must have support teams ready to respond to any issues that might arise. It's not important that the support team is

**“Your organization's success depends on its ability to leverage available technology fully and properly to fulfill its mission and vision.”**

comprised of in-house staff or external vendors – just that it's able to quickly resolve problems to get staff back up and running following a support issue.

- **Database:** Your constituents give life to your organization – without their support you would be unable to exist. If your organization lives or dies by how well you understand and address their needs, then your ability to manage related data in a systematic, best-practice method is pivotal to your success.

- **Web:** Your organization's Web site is the main path of communication to its constituents. Members, donors and other constituents are logging onto your organization's online presence every day.

- Are you delivering a consistent branding message?

- Is the Web site properly representing your organization: its mission & its value?

- Are visitors able to complete their tasks on the Web site? Can they register for an event? Can they locate and purchase a research publication? Are they able to renew their membership?

Your organization's Web site is often its first and main point of contact with the people that ensure its success. Due to these factors, any attempts to raise

the level of IT maturity would have to include improving the Web site in order to be complete.

- **Technology Management:** IT should be proactive rather than reactive – it has to lead the organization in its quest to improve on the value delivered to its constituency. In DelCor's history, we've found that a big hurdle for organizations trying to reach a proactive technology state lies in the way that IT is

managed. This doesn't necessarily refer to staff placement, but much more to the planning and budgeting that occurs – not only for the upcoming year, but for five years following. IT staff should be aware of future technology and researching how to incorporate it for the benefit of constituents.

### *Four Phases of IT Maturity*

The next piece in this benchmarking tool is the defined labels of IT maturity for associations and nonprofits. We found that the level of IT maturity within these organizations mainly falls into four phases which speak to how well IT is being leveraged within the organization. The four levels are:

- **Restrictive:** In this phase, IT in the organization is doing more harm than good. Ineffective technologies or an ineffective IT team result in inaccurate constituent data, network and communication failures creating data loss, and a loss in staff productivity. Typically, organizations in this phase will only have a basic understanding of what effective technology can add to their value.

- **Functional:** Organizations occupying this phase tend to be more successful in their implementation of IT, yet still have not harnessed technology fully. This phase in IT maturity is characterized by attributes that tend to be just one step shy of automation and integra-

tion. Typically, this can include a form of Web site integration that requires a staff member to bridge the gap between the ‘pseudo-integrated’ systems. It also tends to be marked with spartan technology planning within the organization – usually without buy-in from the executive level.

- **Effective:** At this phase, technology reaches a level where it properly matches and actively supports the achievement of the organization’s mission. This also tends to be the point where technology begins to change its internal focus to external; serving the organization’s constituency. While technology at this phase is working in support of the organization’s mission, an outlook on the future needs of its constituency remains lacking. A critical step to improvement at this stage would be to look ahead and identify future needs of the constituency and employ technology to meet those needs.

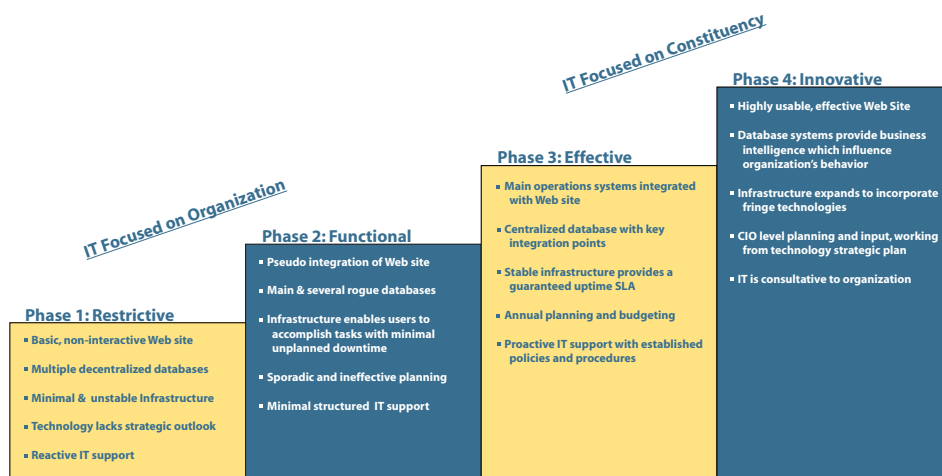
- **Innovative:** This phase is the ideal state of technology within an organization. At this point, the organization effectively employs its technology while continuously adopting new systems and procedures to respond to future needs of its constituency. This is the point in IT maturity where the organization has become as effective as possible in serving constituent needs.

As you see, in the less mature phases, technology actually works against the organization and holds it back from achieving its mission. However, as technology continues to mature, it adds real value to the organization and helps it be more effective in meeting its goals.

Now that we have the Five Functions of IT and Four Phases of IT Maturity, we can integrate them visually to allow an organization to grade its IT maturity as well as map its path towards matured technology.

This IT Maturity Model has been created by DelCor, but built from the discussions and experience of working with hundreds of organizations for more than twenty years. It provides a frame-

work for analysis, discussion, and most importantly, results. The maturity level is simply a measurement of how well your organization is leveraging technology. The model is designed to provide users with a framework to move from using technology simply in support of operational functions to employing technology with a greater strategic perspective and an organized, planned approach. As you will see, by using the IT Maturity Model you will be able to not only realize more utility and value out of your IT investments, but you will also further your organization’s mission and vision – which is why you exist.



IT Maturity Model for Nonprofit Organizations



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## Appendix A: IT Maturity Model for Nonprofit Organizations

