

Mark Wilson:

Good morning and welcome to the Spring Research Forum. It has been a true pleasure to work with INDEPENDENT SECTOR to plan this event. On behalf of those of us who volunteered to make this a success, to join with INDEPENDENT SECTOR, I welcome you. I think that INDEPENDENT SECTOR and their staff have put together an outstanding event, in spite of me, and I think that they deserve congratulations for all that they have done.

Our program over the next two days spans a wide range of issues, interests, needs and places. We have participants from six continents. And, short of a few penguins, we couldn't really have asked for more. We have total global coverage, and we look forward to enjoying those different voices about information technology and the nonprofit sector.

You represent many interesting groups and organizations – the nonprofit community, business, government, the media – and I'm sure you all have a great deal to share with us and each other. When planned two years ago, the topic of information and communication technology as part of the nonprofit sector was just emerging. But in that time a lot has changed. The number and quality of papers we've received is testimony to the analysis and innovation that the sector now generates.

Our wish for this forum is to encourage discussion and interaction. The Spring Research Forums have a tradition of being open and collegial gatherings, so we encourage you to do a number of things.

To welcome the many international participants to the community of nonprofit scholars to Washington, to the United States.

To meet and encourage the emerging leaders in their work and research. They have a lot to offer and a lot to gain from joining us.

And to bridge the interests of practice and research.

At many conferences, the model is for many to observe the presentations of a few. Not this time. The presentations are a catalyst for discussion and inquiry. There are 280 people registered for this event, and so we have 280 participants, discussants and analysts on our program.

We're watching you. We expect great things. No one can escape this responsibility.

In addition to this event, we're working with NPSQ – Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly – to develop a special symposium issue. We invite the presenters and speakers to submit their papers for publication, to combine their research and the lessons of this meeting to reach a wider audience.

I now want to turn to the theme of this forum, the impact of information technology on civil society. By information technology, we mean a wide range of electronic technologies. Items such as computers, telecommunications networks, the Internet, worldwide web, that have emerged so powerfully during the past decade.

In considering this topic, it is valuable to pause to remember that technology is not a force disconnected from society. It is a force of our own making. Embedded in the technologies and their associated institutions are the strong social forces that have long

shaped how we interact and behave. We create technologies, yet often forget that we created them.

We see them as inevitable forces, hence the subtitle for our meeting today, “How will online innovation, philanthropy and volunteerism serve the common good?”

We’re turning the tables; not just accepting, but creating what technology can do for the nonprofit sector. Technologies can change our lives dramatically. Think about how the automobile has changed the way we interact, we live; how the form of our cities is dramatically different because of the automobile than it was in a period of walking or riding public transport.

Think about the way television has shaped our values and behaviors; how it influences our social and political lives.

And even think about simple technologies. The simple device of the microwave oven. By itself, nothing particularly exciting. But it has had the power to change what and how people eat, and also how families eat and how families interact.

We cannot really underestimate the length and the connections that new technologies have and the power to change our lives.

As technology shapes our lives, we must remember our responsibility to influence how technologies evolve and are used. Technology is not, should not, be a one-way force. We need to negotiate our relationships, and not accept what we may mistakenly see as inevitable.

The information and communications technologies of our day offer great appeal. It’s easy to be distracted and seduced by all that is new and magical and electronic. But what is new and magical and electronic is not divorced from our basic issues and institutions.

To give you an example. My own interests span on one hand nonprofit organizations and on the other the political economy and geography of cyberspace. If we look at the geography of cyberspace, on the surface it is often seen and represented as a seamless network, a system of connected, integrated parts accompanied by a rhetoric proclaiming the death of distance and the linkage of all.

This web is a blanket. We need metaphors when we discuss cyberspace because there is no “there” there, so we need other things to describe it. So if we think of the web as this seamless blanket that covers our world... it covers gaps and chasms, mountains and volcanoes.

But, and this is an important element, as we surf across a terrain, we surf across territory that lacks signposts and signals of location. We don’t necessarily know where we are in cyberspace.

But that is just frequently the appearance. On further examination, the seamless blanket is not so seamless. The web is shaped by people and places, by institutions, government regulations, commercial realities, cultural values, and legal jurisdictions. As soon as this blanket is disturbed or lifted, underlying social, economic and political terrain emerges. We are looking at an image, but as we dig into that image we see that what was so important in the past remains important today.

Some elements of our technology are new, but they are also constrained within strong pre-existing relationships and conditions.

To conclude this introduction, I want to mention the contribution of one young woman – Annie Ellsworth, who made a choice in 1844 that lives with us today. Samuel Morse, wishing to demonstrate the power of the telegraph, links the U.S. Capitol, just a few blocks away, to the *St. Claire depot in Baltimore. He asked Annie, the daughter of a friend, to choose the message. She chose a verse from Numbers 23, the infamous “What hath God wrought.” The first message sent in the telegraph.

It was a prescient and fitting statement for what we now have renamed in some texts the Victorian Internet. But it is a statement we could well use today. “What hath God wrought?” as we think about the power of technology and our use of it.

So let’s spend some time now talking about, examining, the issues of technology and the nonprofit sector; thinking about what we can do for technology and what technology can do for us.

What I’d like to do now is invite our three panelists – Tae Yoo, Trabian Shorters, and Marian Becton – to join us in the living room. (My living room has Legos all over the floor, so this is a vast improvement.) And we will have some time for presentation by each of our guest, and time for conversation about information technology and the nonprofit sector.

As in any living room, we invite you to come to the front. Join us; don’t be shy. Make your way up here. We want you to be comfortable. It’s our living room, you have a role here. We’re glad you have come.

We now move directly to our opening plenary session, “Charting the Future of New Technology: Implications for a Civil Society.” What is the impact of the Internet? Are we connecting and interacting more? Are we merely browsing alone?

We start our session with commentary by Tae Yoo, director of corporate philanthropy of Cisco Systems. Ms. Yoo has worked globally and locally in the realm of information technology, and currently addresses social action through the work of the Cisco Foundation and the Cisco Community Investment Organization. We welcome her and look forward to her comments.

Tae Yoo

I want to address three areas within my discussion. One is the impact of technology in nonprofits on an organizational perspective, the impact of technology on civil society, and finally some of the challenges associated with them.

As Mark mentioned, I have spent the majority of my career in the business environment, in the technology sector, and specifically in networking. When Cisco decided that we wanted to find ways to leverage and add value in the philanthropic sector, we wanted to find out what were our corporate assets that would most add value in philanthropy.

Is it our financial assets, our technology, our partnerships? We wanted to pick out the most important asset. Can any of you guess what that was? How many of you would say it was technology?

It was actually customer advocacy. The whole notion of customer advocacy was started by our founder, Sandy Learner. She was a customer, and she said that she was very frustrated working with technology organizations that were pushing technology on her. They may have great service organizations, but they weren't real advocates in helping her fulfill her mission.

The organizations that she really enjoyed working with, and that had the best partnerships, were those organizations who took the time to learn about her organization, what her missions were, what her challenges were, who her customers were, and help to craft infrastructure and a technology plan that made sense for her specific individual need.

So when we went through this process, that was the one area that we felt was the most important aspect. That we listened, and asked three very important questions. The first was, “Who is our customer in philanthropy?” And, obviously, it's the nonprofits in the U.S. and NGOs internationally. The second was, “What are their missions, their obstacles, their goals?” And the answer was, “It depends.” They're all unique, they're all individual, and it takes time to find out if any one type of solution would fit a plethora of organizations. And the answer is, “Maybe.”

The third question was, “Who are their customers? Who are their constituents?” And only then did we ask the question, “Can technology positively impact and accelerate these organizations' ability to fulfill their missions?”

The short answer to this question was, “Yes.” But only if it was more of an accelerator than an inhibitor or a burden. We were not interested in donating equipment that turned into doorstops, because there are a lot of other organizations that could use that equipment and it would be mission-critical for them.

The other thing that we acknowledged was that being a technology company, technology is exciting and interesting for us always. But in this instance, the value of that technology really depended on what these organizations were doing with it. So it was very much an application-specific focus, and not just dumping technology because it's great.

We all like to use it, but again, a lot of these nonprofits barely have time to provide services to their constituents, much less integrate technology unless it has some specific value to their core missions.

I'd like to share with you our experience of where nonprofits were, and how they were using technology. We had a plethora of organizations doing very interesting things. One organization was actually teaching technology to a workforce in transition – people who were from industrial-type jobs into more technology-oriented jobs. It was interesting to me because although they were teaching technology, they weren't using technology within their own organization. When I pulled the executive director aside and said, “What do you think of that? Don't you think that's kind of ironic?” She said, “I have a plan. I have a strategy. When these students graduate from this, I can guarantee we'll have a few who will work for me and be able to help me pull my technology plan together.”

We had other organizations whose Internet technology was very sophisticated, but we had challenges doing conference calls on their telephone systems.

So it was a whole gamut of different experiences.

I think that if we can encapsulate into five key areas; I think most of them fell somewhere into these five areas.

One was very, very basic technology, primarily applications like word processing for documents, for grant proposals, et cetera; spreadsheets for budgets; and basic email. Then there was what I call a basic website or a billboard. “Website” means different things to different people. A website in the business environment meant it was an interactive place where we could share information, solve problems, provide services. There was one nonprofit that I felt very strongly about and wanted to make a donation to. So I logged on to their website, and I liked what I saw. There was a comment section for feedback, so I clicked on it and it responded so I assumed it was working. I left a message. It was very brief because I knew they were busy. I started out by saying, “I want to make a donation, but I need to have a few questions clarified. Please don’t go through the trouble of writing a proposal.” A lot of organizations go through the time and money of writing a proposal; I didn’t need that. I just needed two questions answered.

I never heard back from them. That’s what I affectionately term “the brick wall website.” You’re excited, you’re engaged, you like what you say, you’re running, and all of a sudden you hit a brick wall.

It would have been perfectly OK to say, “This section is under construction, or in development. Please call this number.” Because we all know that in technology something is always in development. So that would be a perfectly OK thing to say, but I don’t think they realized that.

Then there are the more advanced websites where they use it more interactively, primarily for communications to communicate with their constituents as well as their donors, advocacy groups to put out breaking news and issues they’d like to discuss.

Then you have a much more sophisticated internal use of technology, where you can use it to do e-learning and capacity-building. It’s really interesting in the sense that businesses have derived great savings using technology. You can cut down on travel, so you can do management training on line. And yet the organizations that could derive the most benefit and savings are the nonprofits, because money is always tight in a nonprofit environment.

So the challenge, obviously, is how do we get nonprofits to a point where they can benefit from the opportunities there.

I’d like to use one example of an organization who went through all of these stages. By that way, they were not the brick-wall website.

The organization City Year, which most of you know, is a *Key Americorps program. They’re focused on helping young people dedicate two years in service to their communities; a thousand corps members and 265 or so employees. It was interesting watching them go from a basic website and basic applications to integrating technology into almost every aspect of their organization – recruitment, communications, fund raising, training, finance. The list went on.

They actually put together a technology plan and came to us. It didn't start out this way, but as they were using more and more technology and focusing it toward their applications, that in fact this would be a cornerstone of their strategy and their success moving forward.

The first week that they put their applications on line, they had a 250 percent increase in applications that were downloaded. So think about time savings. When you get applications in the mail, somebody opens it up, looks at it and sends it over to the person who reviews applications. They go through it and say, “Oh, this has to go to someone in Cincinnati,” so they fold it up, stick it in the mail, and it goes there.

And most of us have already acknowledged this. But I think it was at that point when they actually measured the impact it's had, and that's just in one area.

The other area was in training. They think that they can save several million dollars over five years because of the fact that you use e-learning and train online. Also update on new opportunities and attract new corps members.

One other area that I want to touch upon is just as important, but probably less tangible. And that is using technology to proliferate your culture. It's a very important thing. Every organization has a specific culture, and it gets challenging as you grow and as you have larger geographies. The internet, and technology, and internet-based applications can help you in maintaining and growing that culture that you want to preserve, even though you want to grow and progress in other ways.

The conclusion we came to, and again, this was not a scientific study, was that if we take information technology – the internet, internet-based applications – and we apply them specifically for individual nonprofit goals, not necessarily focused on getting all the technology at once, but a well-thought-out strategy, multi-year implementation, key partners, that it can have significant impact on the nonprofit organization.

Many have asked if the nonprofits were lagging behind in adopting technology. My personal opinion was no, not necessarily. When you build out technology, you usually have to have someone on the other end to talk to. A lot of these nonprofits, as was mentioned earlier, serve organizations and constituents who don't even have a telephone. So the timing is right when the timing is right.

But timing is critical in terms of how you launch technology and in assuring that you take on a strategy of assuming technology will change. And that's why I think leasing companies have done so well. People are not buying equipment like they used to. They're actually leasing it knowing they will upgrade within an 18-month, two-year timeframe.

So that's pretty much where we came out on the technology impact on the nonprofit organization. Because of this we are in partnership with INDEPENDENT SECTOR launching a formal survey and getting some real data. We've had the first preliminary survey done in nonprofit healthcare providers. And I think that probably April 19th we'll be announcing the results of that.

The second area I want to talk about is civil society. I don't think that anyone can question the impact technology has had on civil society. The Internet particularly has enabled this vast world to feel very small. And because of that, because you can feel that

somebody in India is your next-door neighbor, that you feel compelled to get involved in issues, and problems and opportunities that impact a country like India.

We're no longer forced to wait until regularly scheduled newsbreaks to tell us what's going on. People log on and they get breaking news. And even more importantly, you're seeing people building direct relationships with clients, constituents across the world independent of the middlemen or the censors or somebody else's opinion of what's going on. It's really being able to talk to what is happening to someone over in India.

If you look at the earthquake that happened a month ago, within 24 hours our employees were able to find out exactly what happened, who was in most need, make an assessment of whether we should support rebuilding or relief, who were the organizations that we need to get in touch with. A website was up, breaking news was on, a series of fundraising activities was announced. All that happened within a very, very short period of time. And the impact it had was incredible.

In addition to that, you're also finding what I call a more involved donor, and sometimes a more demanding donor. I have had nonprofits praising the fact that the Internet has enabled them to access a much larger cadre of donors. They also bemoan the fact that some of these donors are very pushy, and actually slow down the process. In the end, they thought it was very valuable because of the fact that the donors push the envelope and really made nonprofits stop and think about their own priorities.

Last, but not least here, is the fact that information about nonprofits is readily available. Nine-nineties are on line. And organizations like Guidestar, who actually extrapolate that data for you. And so what will happen is that within a very short timeframe you will see interaction between the information flow, the communications, and hopefully the dollars.

When we talk about these two areas, and certainly being a technology company whose benefit is from technology, you really have to address the challenges that we face. And the most pervasive challenge is access.

It's access not just between for-profits and nonprofits, but it's also small grassroots advocacy nonprofits versus the much larger multinational global-focused nonprofits. There is definitely a digital divide between those. And how we can work together – the technology community, the business community, government, and nonprofits – to find ways to provide technology very easily and affordably to any nonprofit, whether it is two people starting something up or an organization that has been around a hundred years.

One of the enablers to access, obviously, is literacy. And if you look outside the U.S., certainly in the developing countries and least-developed countries it's a huge issue. And what are we doing in working with those organizations that are addressing literacy? Are we using the best technology? Are we working with them to ensure that they're teaching good programs that might be able to proliferate faster, quicker, and to more people using the Internet?

I'd like to close with something that all of us face. It's very interesting when you are a non-participant donor. You read the literature, you meet some people, and you donate money. When you actually go out into the field and see the work that these nonprofits are doing, the challenges they face with very little funding, it's hard not appreciate what these nonprofits really do. Some of the people that we see in nonprofit organizations,

quite frankly, are some of the most talented people that I’ve ever met. And I’ve met a lot of talented people in the technology industry.

They do what they do because they have a passion for the work. And the challenge is to keep them excited about what they do. How do we find ways of leveraging technology to help their jobs be easier?

And finally, when we talk about technology, I don’t think you can look at technology independently. You really have to look at what it can do for the basic needs. There are a lot of enablers to access, to literacy, that have to be fulfilled before you have any success. Food, clothing, health care, shelter, on a global basis. How do we use technology to proliferate, highlight issues and encourage more donors and more involvement from the rest of the community?

These are areas that no one organization can address nor solve. It is a partnership across government, nonprofits and the private sector. And so I encourage all of you, if there are interesting ideas out there, to create this community on line to discuss them and find ways that we can work together to use this technology to make a difference.

Thank you.

Wilson: Thank you, Tae. I’d like to ask just one question. How does an organization start its thinking about integrating technology?

Yoo: One of the things that we found is that organizations are really not interested in technology unless someone presents to them and gives them a value proposition. What can I do with this? If I incorporate this technology, how much time does it save me? If I’m a social worker at a hospital, and there is technology available that enables me to discharge patients 20 percent faster... It’s really putting together a value proposition that shows the people who are providing these services that it will make their life more effective, more efficient, and easier.

Wilson: Thank you. At the end, we’ll have a chance to revisit each of our speakers and ask questions.

I’m now pleased to introduce our next speaker, Trabian Shorters, who is president of Technology Works for Good, which is a network of nonprofit organizations looking to build their capacity in use of technology. Mr. Shorters has long been involved in and committed to the nonprofit sector and nonprofit action, including a leadership role in the AmeriCorps national service proposal.

Trabian Shorters: Good morning. My name is Trabian Shorters. I’m the founding president of an organization called Technology Works for Good. Technology Works for Good is a network of stakeholders in this question of how do we use information technology to benefit our nonprofits and the sector.

What I’d like to do is speak about capacity-building in this space. And I will use terms that are general terms, like “digital divide,” and “technology” and “culture,” and these are things that we use to describe this space that we don’t exactly understand so it means different things to different people.

One of the goals of Technology Works for Good is to make the Internet and other digital technologies live up to the potential that they have as far as society through these organizations.

Technology Works for Good was founded by four principal interests – the America Online Foundation, Microsoft Corporation, Fannie Mae Foundation and the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation. These are four organizations that have very distinct interests in civil society as well as in this question of the role of technology in our civil society.

The actual mission of Technology Works for Good is to build nonprofit capacity. And in this case, it is through the use of digital technology. I emphasize that because capacity-building is the watchword here around all of the work that we engage in.

Why is it so important that nonprofits be able to use digital technology? Prior to coming to this work, I was a technology circuit rider. This is someone who would go out to nonprofits, help them to understand what are some of the ways that digital technology can specifically impact the work that they do, and then how we can develop plans, and then implement those plans to make that technology work better for those organizations.

One of the things that became very true to me as I was doing the work is that anyone – any organization, any person, and corporation – who is able to understand and master digital technology necessarily will enjoy a greater latitude in our democracy and a greater longitude in the economy.

This digital revolution that we’ve all been hearing about is all about opportunity. There is an essential nature of the Internet and the way that it functions. The Internet, more so than any technology that has come before it, makes it easier for us to identify people who share our interests, to connect to them around ideas, and to engage them in our mutual interest. For the time being, it’s an access that is not limited by class in the way that some others may be. Obviously, you have to have access to the infrastructure itself, but it is at this stage a more open resource for doing this very important work than we’ve seen in recorded time.

Since our goal is to increase capacity in nonprofits, I think it’s important to understand two things. First of all, what do we mean by “nonprofit?” Secondly, what is the current capacity of our nonprofits?

I studied for a number of years at the IU Center on Philanthropy, where the definition of the nonprofit space was made very clear to me. If we were to look at our sector in society, as we talk about the business sector and the government sector and the nonprofit sector, there are some essential functions of government and its role. There are some essential functions of business. Businesses, whether they want to help society or whether they are engaged in only their self-interest, have to meet a bottom line. They are organized around turning a profit.

What is the nonprofit space? What is the human-service sector organized around? It’s organized around making a better society. The nonprofit space is our civil society. It’s where we voluntarily get together and engage in giving, engage in voluntary action, engage in creating organizations that are dedicated to improving the quality of life for all the people we can reach with those organizations.

It's for that reason that this space is not to be overlooked in this question of the role of digital technology in our society. It is this space, our space that will make or break the real value of the Internet and its related digital technologies.

What is the current capacity of nonprofits to master this technology, to use it well? We did a number of studies here in trying to form Technology Works for Good, but there are also correlating studies around the country. The numbers I'm quoting are from the National Association of Community Action Agencies. Forty percent of the organizations that they surveyed had computer equipment that was four years old or older. That doesn't seem like a long time, unless you reflect back on the fact that it was almost six years ago that we heard about Windows 95, and that it was supposed to change the way that we did our work. It was also the time period when the Pentium computer was hitting the market. And having modems and communication equipment built into your computer was more the norm, which means the computer was going from being a word-processing device to more of a communications device.

There really was a change that took place five years ago, sort of subtle to those of us who weren't involved directly in the industry, but also profound in its implications.

So a lot of our agencies don't have appropriate equipment.

Secondly, when it comes to using that equipment, although 55 percent of those surveyed said that their staffs had adequate knowledge of how to use technology, and 80 percent of them said that using technology was of great strategic importance to their mission as a nonprofit, only six percent of them said that they actually train their staff on a regular basis around how to use these technologies. There's a significant disparity there.

We also recognize that in the nonprofit space there is a sense that we are lagging behind. I'm not so sure that we are. What I am sure of is that when it comes to the questions of access to technology, education on how to use this technology in our organizations, and technical support to make this whole process sustainable, there hasn't been a concerted effort in the nonprofit space to address all three of these questions in some organized way. We're all sort of wrestling the beast on our own, ad hoc, to whatever degree that we can even though this internet and the related technologies give us an opportunity to be better connected and better organized in our approach.

That's macro. When we were looking at individual nonprofits, we also found that there's another factor that is very important in how we're able to use this technology. And that is culture.

Each organization has a culture. And when we talk about technology, let me define what I mean by technology. Technology is new tools. It's new tools and the processes related to using those tools. That's technology. And I define it in that essential, basic way because maybe 10 years ago there was technology thrust upon us called the fax machine. I remember that this new technology was slowly adopted in a lot of organizations because you stick the piece of paper on a machine, it goes through a roller, and then it comes out the other side and nothing happened.

The promise that a document had been delivered somewhere was not something that many folks early on felt that they could trust. How do you know that this thing has happened? Why do we have to use this machine?

Nowadays, we don't think of the fax machine as technology. But obviously it is. We don't think of the television as technology; obviously, it is. We don't think of radio as technology; obviously it is.

So technology isn't just tools, and it's not just digital. Technology is the new stuff. That's important to understand.

The first part of the technology cultures is technology; the second part of technology culture is culture. By culture we mean that set of beliefs and activities that allow an organization to survive. In this case of technology cultures, what are the beliefs and activities around the use of technology that relate to the survival of our nonprofits?

We found there were four different stages in how you approach technology in your organizations. These are essential markers. By that I mean that you'll see some variation, but essentially some nonprofits regard technology as unessential – unnecessary to the work that they do. Yes, it's important. It's important to other people. Sure, it could be good. But we help children. We work on education. We work on workforce development. Technology isn't exactly what we do, and we don't want our people wasting a bunch of time fiddling around on the Internet.

These are things that I've heard. An organization in that culture will upgrade their technology as an absolute last resort. I went to organizations where executive directors actually bragged that they were able to keep their 386 running and piping along for so long. I was impressed and that was good, but obviously these are technologies that are not supported any more, that lack certain capacity. And if you view technology as unessential to the work you do in your organization, you're less likely to upgrade, you're more likely to have mixed-platform software, you're less likely to invest in training, et cetera.

The second group regards technology as necessary, but evil. You know you have to use it, so you acquiesce to the fact that you're going to use this technology, but you'd really like to use it as little as possible because I know that it will disrupt the way that I've done things before. I know that it will break down when I need it most. I know that I will be required to use it, and it will make new work for me in ways that I never intended.

A third culture is the group that regards technology as necessary and good when they think about the work they do, but still they have challenges around what is appropriate technology, what am I supposed to use and why, how am I supposed to handle that IT consultant who speaks some arcane language about what I thought was a simple process and then charges me a lot of money for it.

Even in the “necessary good” column, we have work to do.

The fourth group regards technology and has been able to use it as a strategic advantage in the work that they do.

In our study, we found that about 10 percent of our nonprofits have this immediate rejection of the role of technology in their organizations. Another 60 percent do understand that we have to tackle this question; they're in the “necessary evil” category. About 25 percent are in that space where it's necessary and good and they're making the commitment and the resources to try and master technology actively. And about five

percent have reached some plateau of understanding about using technology and they're able to take strategic advantage of in a way that's sustainable in their organization.

Those are our four layers.

These, as you can tell, are multifaceted issues. But we were able to break down the problem into three types of activities.

First is the question of access. How do we get the equipment and the tools and the available knowledge to nonprofits? The second is around education. Staff level, volunteers and, in particular, executive directors of organizations need a better way of understanding the role of this technology in the work that they do and then how to use it. And the last is around support.

When we look at access, education and support, there are stakeholders in this question outside of nonprofits. They are, if you're talking about access, the IT vendors and the software providers. If we talk about education, then it's schools, it's the training providers. And if we talk about ongoing support, it is the consultants, and technical-support people, and maintenance-agreement people, and the funding community that could make this work for us.

So Technology Works for Good was organized by our founding funders and our founding board members to help organize the effort to make digital technology work for nonprofits. So we work with these stakeholders. We work with the IT companies to reduce their prices. We want them to drive down the cost of technology, so at least our nonprofits who tell us, “Yes, it's important to have technology,” and, “No, we don't want to pay for it,” that they have a chance to try to take some brave new steps.

The second thing that we do is help those executive directors, board members and program officers in the philanthropic space to understand the strategic role of technology, and then what are their strategic questions around fundraising, client management, outreach, and marketing, all the things you do to keep your organization going. How does technology give you a chance to do it better and faster?

The third thing we do is work with the consultant community, both management consulting and IT consulting, around how to provide a better-quality product and service to nonprofits.

We have three initiatives around working with these stakeholders. The one that you'll probably hear about the most, because people understand it the easiest, is circuit riding. A technology circuit rider is someone like me who has a great appreciation for the real value of the nonprofit space. I think we often sell ourselves short, and get sold short, for the work that we contribute to society. They have a real value in that, but they're really kind of geeky. Not in a bad way, but they're very technologically inclined. At the same time, they are human beings and they can translate techobabble. They have an affinity for the work that nonprofits are doing, and they go on site and work directly with them in the course of trying to implement new technologies.