TAPROOT FOUNDATION 2017 CAMPAIGNS

CONNECT & RESPOND

OVERVIEW

Taproot's Connect & Respond Campaign aims to best address the timely and ever-evolving organizational needs of social change organizations. Pro bono service is a responsive, flexible tool through which social change organizations can secure critically needed expertise to address key infrastructure challenges that get in the way of programmatic success or growth. Taproot empowers nonprofits via pro bono programming to more strategically understand, adopt and use technology and tech talent to advance their mission and solve critical social issues while simultaneously supporting tech professionals in better leveraging their skills for good.

THE CHALLENGE

Technology is changing how we do business and how we operate in the world. Increased connectivity, smarter devices and even cybersecurity all affect both our personal and professional daily lives. Corresponding with these changes is the rise in the availability and need for technology jobs. Experts are predicting an 18% growth in tech employment by 2022, compared with a 10.8% growth in other industries. The availability of technical expertise and tech talent is growing. And these professionals are eager to donate their expertise to solving critical social problems. The launch and growth of organizations such as DataKind and Bayes Impact are responding to the rising interest among tech talent to contribute their skills for social good.

The partnership like the one between the United Nations Global Pulse and Datasift to analyze social data for humanitarian purposes, are becoming more commonplace. Educational institutions are now offering Data Science for Social Good fellowships. There's even an online forum that aims to list a record of all the socially beneficial data science projects. The rise in popularity of these kinds of programs, projects and curriculum is indicative of a growing market and growing requests from tech talent to help solve to societal challenges. Yet among the growing interest in pro bono service among skilled individuals, and the rise of available tech talent, the nonprofit sector's understanding and use of technology remains stagnant at best:

- For nonprofits, the median technology budget as a percentage of the organization's total operating budget ranges from 1% to 2.2%.

- While increasing, just over half of nonprofits report including technology investments into their strategic plans, and a large subset of nonprofits are not measuring the return on these investments.

- Nonprofits are not confident that they have enough skilled staff or training to effectively use their technology for their work.

Comparatively, the for-profit sector expects to maintain or increase their IT budgets, and increase their focus and investment in IT infrastructure. There are fundamental differences in the way the for-profit and nonprofit sectors are approaching technology and these differences are contributing to a growing technology divide between the sectors.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Pro bono service can begin to address the root causes of this growing technology divide. When we consider nonprofit technology challenges, we think about things like how nonprofits aren't using or adopting technology product donations. Or that nonprofits are rarely able to have the bandwidth to use data-driven decision making or utilizing data to the full extent. These are symptoms of an underlying root cause: compared to the for-profit sector, nonprofits tend to have a lower level of technology fluency. Fluency means everything from definitions and terms, to available solutions, to how to plan for and manage technology within their organization.

We have the opportunity to use pro bono service to build nonprofits' fluency in technology. By doing so, we can begin to empower nonprofits to make smarter asks around technology needs and to be able to understand, adopt and use technology to its greater potential.

A second critical piece to closing the technology divide is to recognize and address the under-utilization of available and interested tech talent. When we consider engaging tech talent for social good, we think about things like how companies aren't able to engage their engineers in pro bono service. Or that individual coders and developers don't know how their skills could help a social change organization. Whether a millennial or boomer, or a tech start-up or established firm employee, there is a growing desire among individuals to use their tech expertise to advance nonprofits' missions and solve social problems. Yet, these interested individuals misunderstand or can't figure out how to connect their expertise to the technology needs of these organizations. This is resulting in missed connections between tech talent and organizational needs, as well as growing frustration among those volunteers who are eager to contribute. We have the opportunity to use pro bono service to clarify a definition of tech for nonprofit organizations and broaden the perception of what tech talent is applicable and useful for the nonprofit sector. This new definition and perception will help us create a network of informed and useful technical pro bono consultants. They can empower nonprofits to better understand how to engage tech talent in ways that address their core organizational challenges.

A misaligned definition of tech and IT between nonprofits and for-profits, a currently narrow definition of what tech talent means for nonprofit organizations, and an under-investment in tech fluency among nonprofit organizations, has resulted in missed connections among tech talent volunteerism, missed opportunities for tech pro bono engagements and a growing technology divide between the for-profit and nonprofit fields. We can begin to narrow that divide through a strategic use of pro bono service.

WHAT WE CAN DO TOGETHER

Taproot is looking for partners and peers who want to make a difference in how pro bono service can advance the technology knowledge, adoption and use in the nonprofit sector.

We are looking for partners interested in:

- **Highlighting the fundamental differences in the for-profit and nonprofit definition of tech and IT:** Why and how do these definitions diverge? What are the implications of this divergence and how can we use pro bono service to better align these definitions?
- **Building nonprofit fluency in technology:** How can we empower nonprofits to better understand and plan for technology trends and needs of the future? How can we use pro bono engagements to build the necessary knowledge and planning for strategic technology implementation?
- **Addressing the critical, unaddressed technology challenges of nonprofit organizations:** How can we begin to address root causes of technology adoption and use with pro bono service? How can we design pro bono engagements that target the technology consultation and assessment needs of nonprofit organizations that are going unaddressed?
- **Advancing nonprofits adoption and use of relevant technology products:** How can we effectively couple pro bono service with corporate product donations or discounts to ensure the maximal use of these solutions?
- **Redefining our perception of tech talent:** How can we broaden our definition of tech talent beyond coders, developers or engineers? How can we better map all available tech skillsets to the needs of nonprofit organizations?

There are consortiums, nonprofits, intermediaries, companies and philanthropic organizations all working to promote the adoption and use of technology among nonprofit organizations. Taproot recognizes the contributions and expertise of these existing partners, and we are looking forward to utilizing our core expertise in pro bono service to partner with those of similar passion and commitment.

WHY TAPROOT

For over 15 years, Taproot Foundation has helped to define, build and advance the field of pro bono service. Taproot is a proven leader in using pro bono service as a means to take action against larger societal challenges. Our award-winning programs and corporate advisory teams are adapt at identifying the critical capacity needs of social changes organizations. As a peer, advocate and partner, we are a trusted voice among the nonprofit community, and have collaborated to re-envision the talent resources that social change organizations need to succeed. Our stakeholders range across for-profits, nonprofits, philanthropic organizations and individual community members, and by building cross-sector partners, we have successfully mobilized and organized these diverse constituents behind a shared vision of social change success. We do not rest on our reputation or achievements. Our campaign work is indicative of our commitment to continue to lead, mobilize and engage professionals in pro bono service that drives social change.