

AUGUST 2016

Technology Needs Among Immigrant Rights and Immigration Legal Services Organizations

A Survey of the Field



Immigration Advocates
NETWORK

idealware



INTRODUCTION

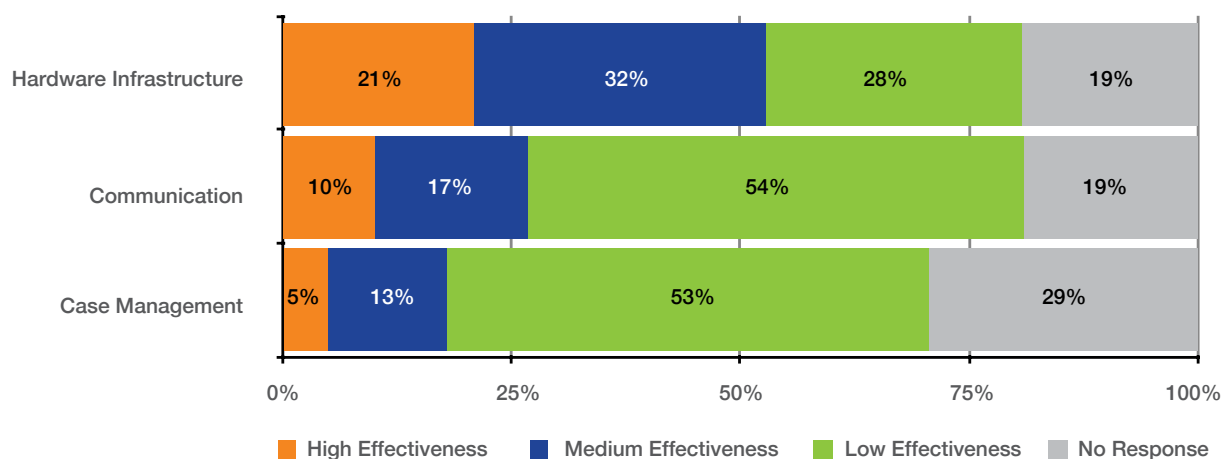
In June 2016, the Immigration Advocates Network, in partnership with Idealware, distributed a survey to nonprofit immigrant rights and immigration legal services organizations to better understand their technology needs. Over 300 organizations responded, making it the largest technology needs assessment of this field to date. This report presents findings from that survey as well as specific recommendations based on the issue areas that we identified from our analysis of the results.

The survey was divided into three sections to cover three different areas of nonprofit technology:

- 1 Hardware Infrastructure**, which investigated the physical resources organizations are likely to need, including computers, phones, and internet access, in addition to related technologies like file sharing, networking, security, and replacement cycles.
- 2 Communications Software**, which looked at websites, broadcast or “blast” email clients, email and friend-to-friend fundraising, and social media.
- 3 Case Management**, which explored the organizations’ use of database software to track constituents—including clients and volunteers—and data on program outcomes, as well as how well their records were maintained and organized.

Within each area of technology, we analyzed the survey responses to assess each organization on how well it met best practices. Those that answered at least 80 percent of each section positively were assessed as having a “high” level of effectiveness; those that answered 50 percent positively or less were rated as having a “low” level of effectiveness; organizations in between were rated “medium” effectiveness.

Effectiveness Score



As the chart indicates, organizations were most effective in the area of **Hardware Infrastructure**, with just over 20 percent rated high and almost a third as medium. Just over a quarter were rated low.

Organizations were less effective at **Communications**, with less than a quarter rated high or medium. Over half of all respondents were rated low, significantly more than in **Hardware Infrastructure**. Combined with the low proportion of respondents with a medium effectiveness rating, this suggests that the majority of organizations surveyed have only recently started shifting their focus from infrastructural technology to communications, addressing only the less-expensive, low-hanging fruit of their marketing efforts—for example, focusing more on email outreach than on investing in website improvements.

Organizations were least effective in the area of **Case Management**, with only 5 percent rated highly effective and only around 13 percent rated medium. These numbers should be cause for some concern. The majority of respondents reported that they could not easily generate immigration forms, and less than half reported using a database to manage client data. While purchasing and implementing a case management system represents a major investment in terms of both cost and staff time, these tools have been proven to save organizations money and staff time in the long term, as they allow advocates and attorneys to make better use of their time and more effectively track and serve clients.

Based on the data, we believe that the technology capacity of nonprofit immigrant rights and immigration legal services organizations is not influenced by size or type of organization, as the next two sections of these findings show. That suggests that adoption of the technologies represented in the survey questions is not determined purely by budgetary concerns, but likely a combination of factors.

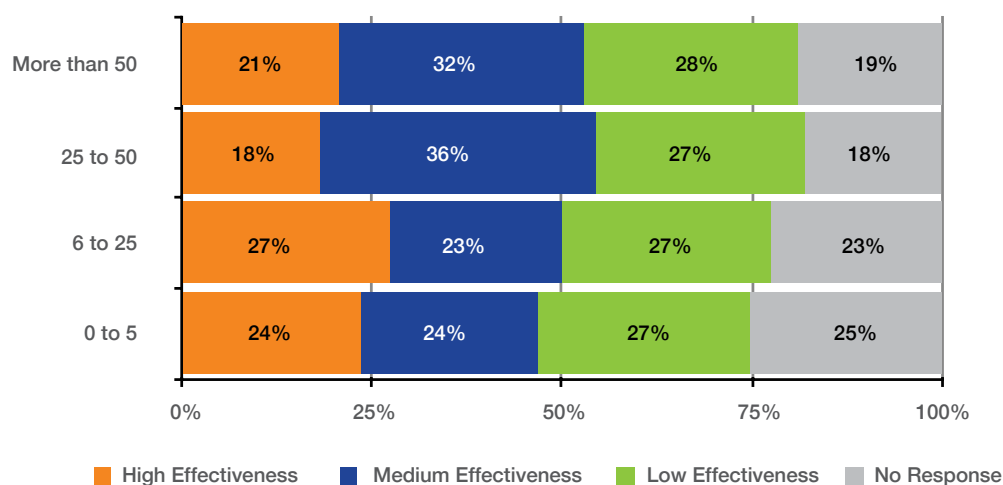


Effectiveness by Size

The majority of surveyed organizations were smaller: about 30 percent had fewer than six staff members; about 32 percent had between six and 25 staff members; about 17 percent had between 25 and 50 staff members; and about 20 percent reported more than 50 staff members.

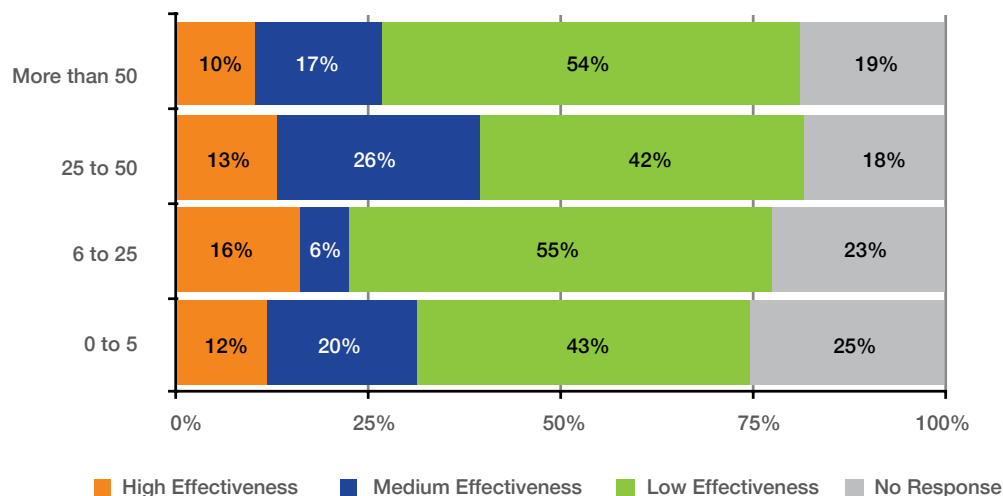
Overall, the size of the organizations had little perceived effect on effectiveness. In the area of **Hardware Infrastructure**, around 50 percent of respondents were rated high or medium, although organizations with between six and 25 staff members had the largest proportion rated high, at approximately 27 percent.

Hardware Infrastructure

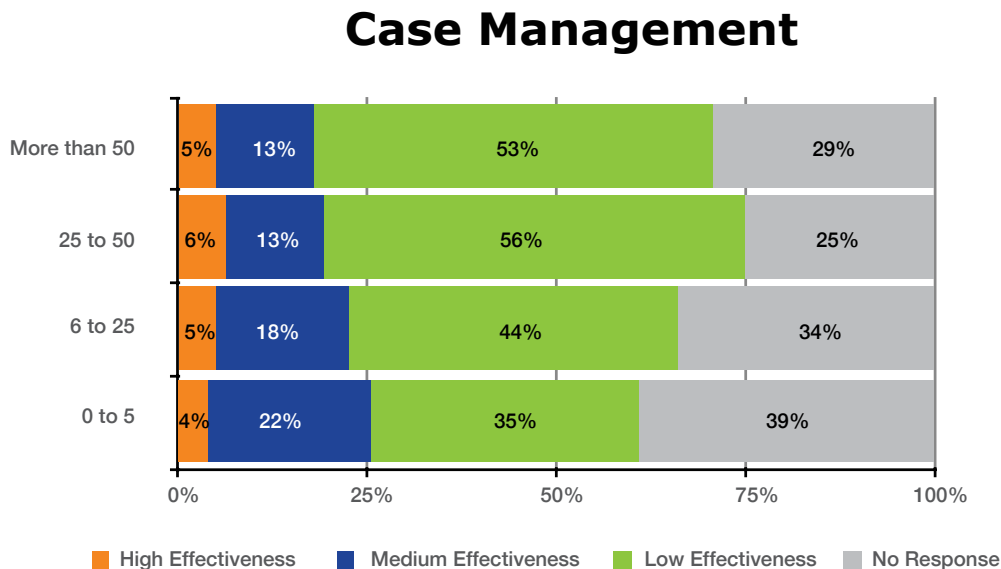


In the area of **Communications**, organizations reporting between 25 and 50 staff members were the most effective, with just under 40 percent rated high or medium. The six-to-25 group again had the highest proportion of organizations rated high, with 16 percent.

Communication



In **Case Management**, all respondents regardless of organization size were overall less effective than in the other two areas, with the proportion of those rated highly effective in single digits across the board. The smallest organizations, those with five or fewer staff members, were the most effective by a slim margin, with around 22 percent rated medium and only four percent rated high.



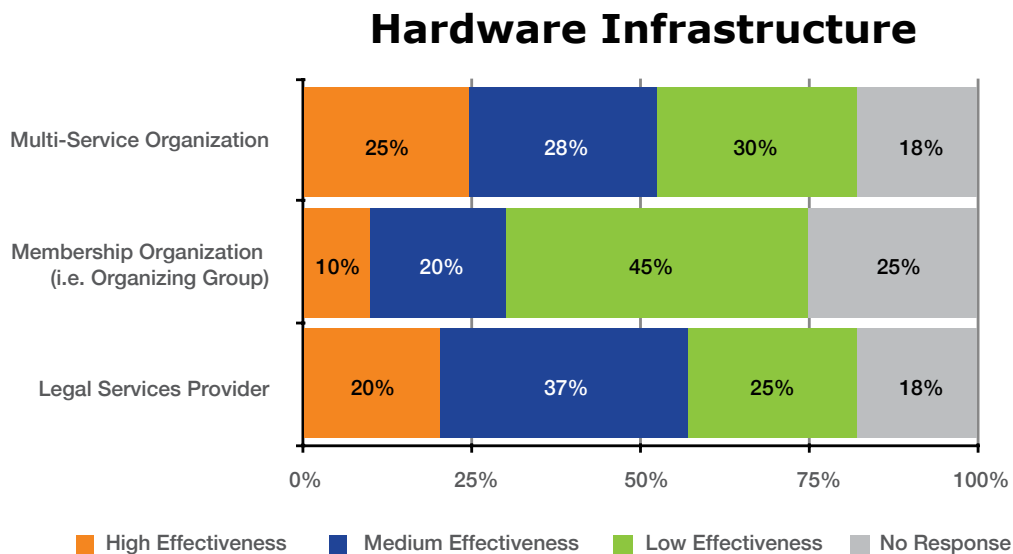
The proportion of respondents who chose not to respond increased substantially in this third and final section of the survey. The largest number of respondents who did not finish this section of the survey was among the smallest organizations. We expect response-rates-by-question to decline near the end of a survey, but the substantial increase in the drop-off rate combined with the overall low ratings for this section may suggest that respondents chose to stop responding out of discouragement with a high number of negative answers.

Effectiveness by Type

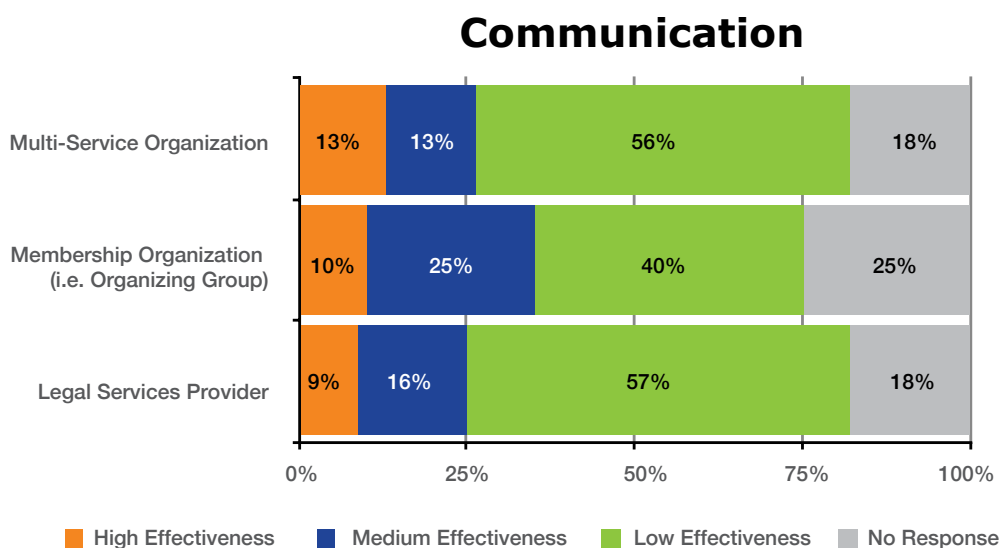
We also asked survey participants what type of organization they represented: multi-service organization, membership organization (e.g. organizing group), or legal services provider. We found little in terms of a trend between effectiveness and the type of organization. Overall, respondents who self-identified as belonging to a membership organization were the least effective across all three areas, with only 10 percent rated high in **Hardware Infrastructure** and **Communications**, and no membership organizations rated high in **Case Management**. However, as only 20 respondents identified as membership organizations, representing just seven percent of the total sample population, results for these organizations may be skewed by the low response rate.



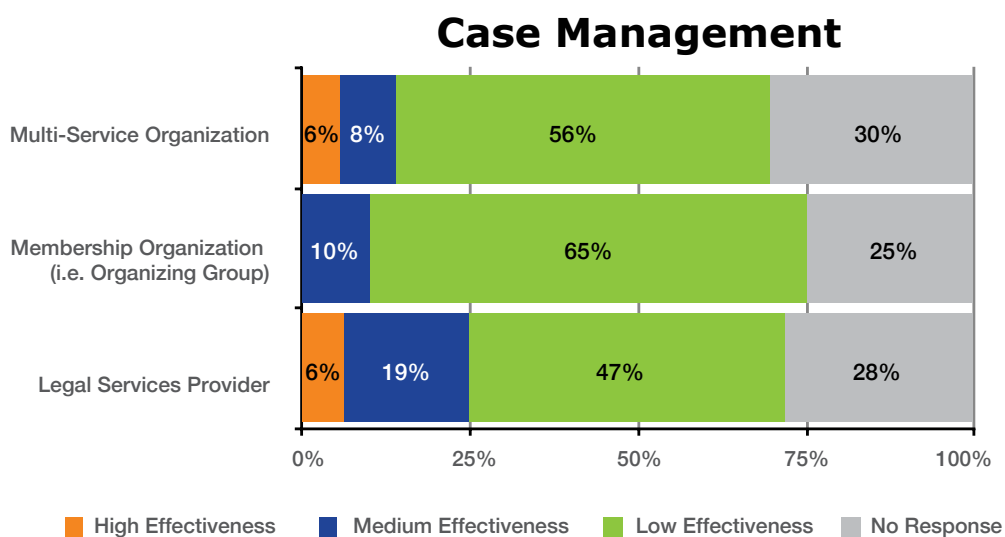
In the area of **Hardware Infrastructure**, multi-service organizations had the highest proportion of respondents rated as highly effective (25 percent), while legal services providers had the highest proportion receiving a medium rating.



In the area of **Communications**, membership organizations were the highest rated, with a combined 35 percent receiving either a high or medium effectiveness rating, a slight increase over the same proportion for the previous section. However, as evidenced by the following chart, this lead seems to come from the overall drop in effectiveness for multi-service organizations and legal services providers. Both types of organizations dropped to about a 25 percent high-or-medium rating.



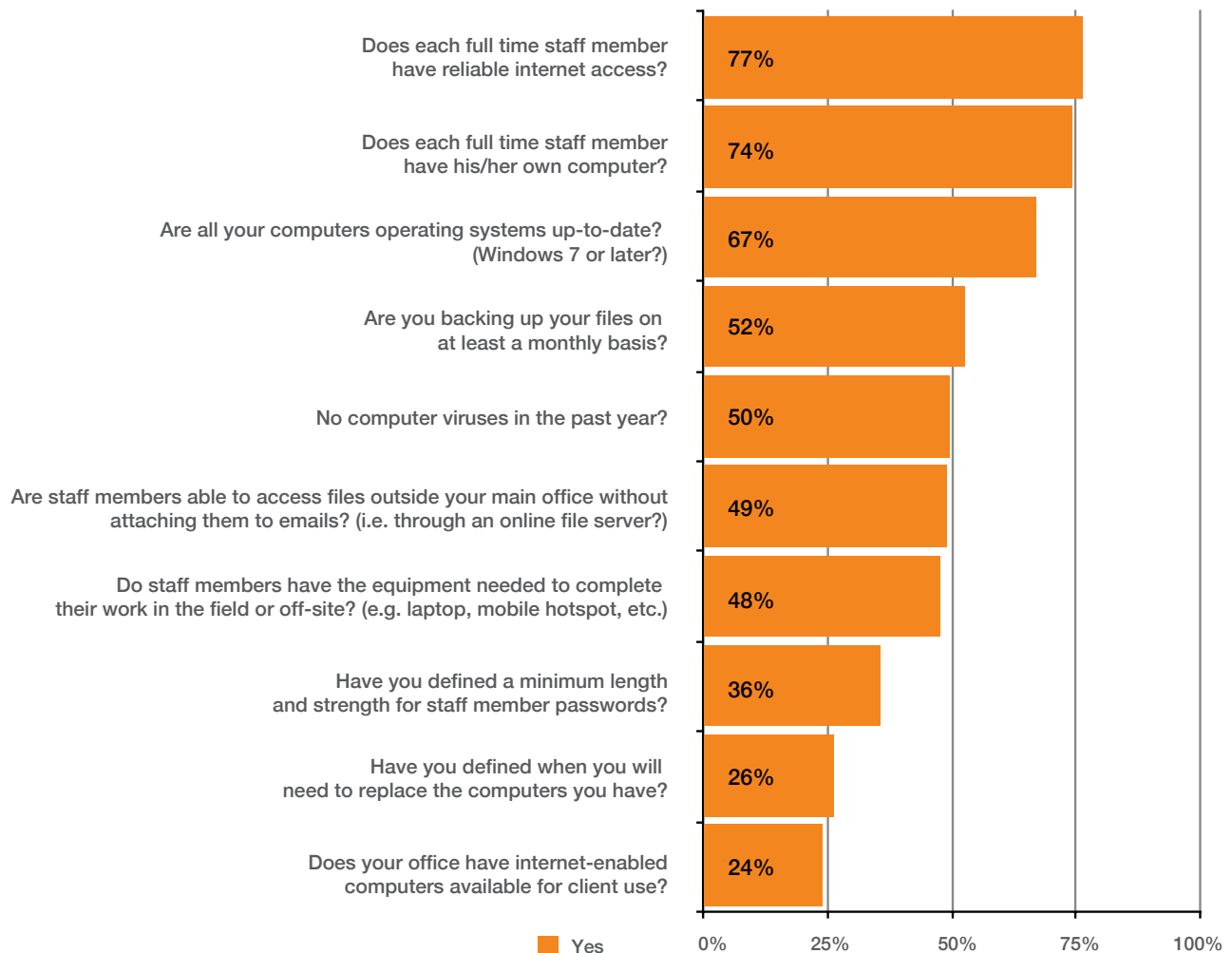
Finally, as we saw in the previous charts, effectiveness drops sharply in the area of **Case Management** for all respondents. Only 25 percent of legal services providers received a high or medium effectiveness rating, and less than 15 percent of multi-service organizations were rated either high or medium.



Hardware Infrastructure

As previously stated, surveyed organizations were most effective with **Hardware Infrastructure**. Around 77 percent of respondents reported that all staff members had reliable internet access, and almost 75 percent reported that each staff member had a dedicated computer workstation—approximately two-thirds of those were using up-to-date operating systems (Windows 7 or later). However, very few of the organizations—just over a quarter of respondents—have defined a plan for when those computers should be replaced.

Hardware Infrastructure



Overall, the majority of organizations that responded to the survey felt that their hardware infrastructure was sufficient for their needs. Just over 60 percent reported that their current infrastructure was reliable. Finally, 58 percent said that they had someone, either staff or a contractor, who can help with more complex technology issues that they cannot resolve on their own.

However, far fewer survey respondents felt that their organizations know how technology fits into their work. Only around 42 percent reported having defined a strategic plan for how technology can best help their organizations. Combined with the low proportion of respondents who reported having defined a plan or schedule for when computers should be replaced, this suggests that organizations are approaching infrastructure and technology with reluctance, seeing them as necessary to their work but distractions from their missions. This in turn may partially explain the overall low effectiveness ratings for organizations throughout the survey. Overall, we see a lot of opportunity for improvement in the areas of security and support for remote staff, as detailed in the following sections.

Security

Of particular concern is security. Only 50 percent of respondents said they had not experienced problems with computer viruses in the past year, while around 20 percent said their organization's computers had been infected in the past year (another 30 percent did not respond to the question or said they did not know). Considering that only about 52 percent of respondents are regularly backing up their files, organizations may be at risk of losing substantial amounts of data to security issues or viruses, which could have significant impact on their day-to-day operations and potentially risk the leak or loss of sensitive client and organizational data.

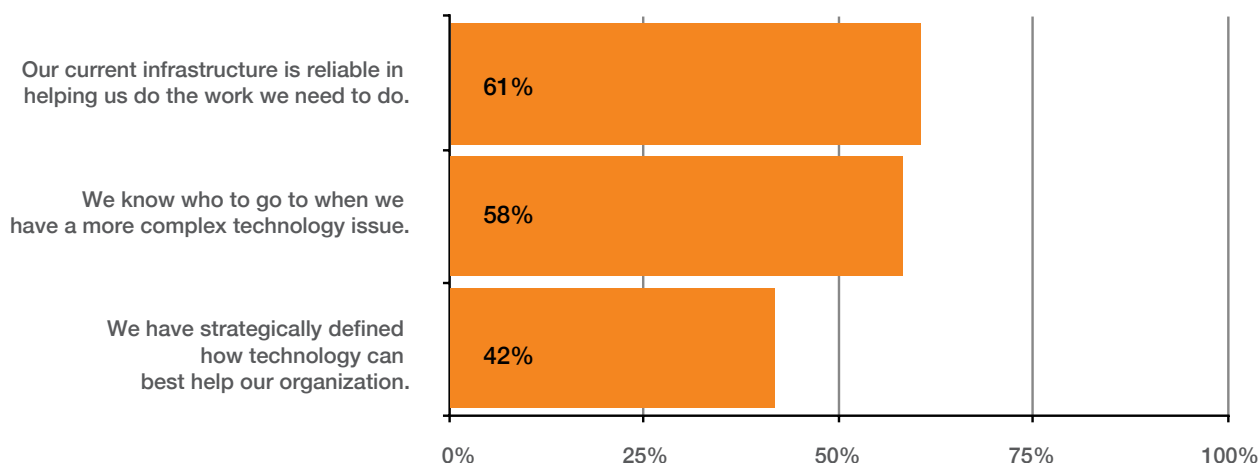
Organizations also fell short in the area of password management. Just 36 percent of respondents said their organizations had defined standards for staff passwords. While most smaller nonprofits are unlikely to be the target of directed security threats or hackers, proper password management that complies with industry best practices (e.g. passwords must be at least eight characters long, with a mix of upper and lower case letters, numbers, and symbols) can help prevent crimes of opportunity and potentially limit the impact of a breach.



Support for Remote Staff

While not as high a priority as security, fewer than half of survey respondents said they have the technology to support staff members working remotely or in the field. Less than 50 percent said that they have an online file server to allow staff members to access files from outside of the office, and around 48 percent said they had laptops, mobile hotspots, or other equipment to help staff members work off-site.

For agencies that frequently need to meet clients outside of the office, these technologies can save staff time by not requiring advocates to return to the office to record their case notes or update client files. While this is an area for improvement, we recommend that improving organization security should be addressed prior to providing remote access.

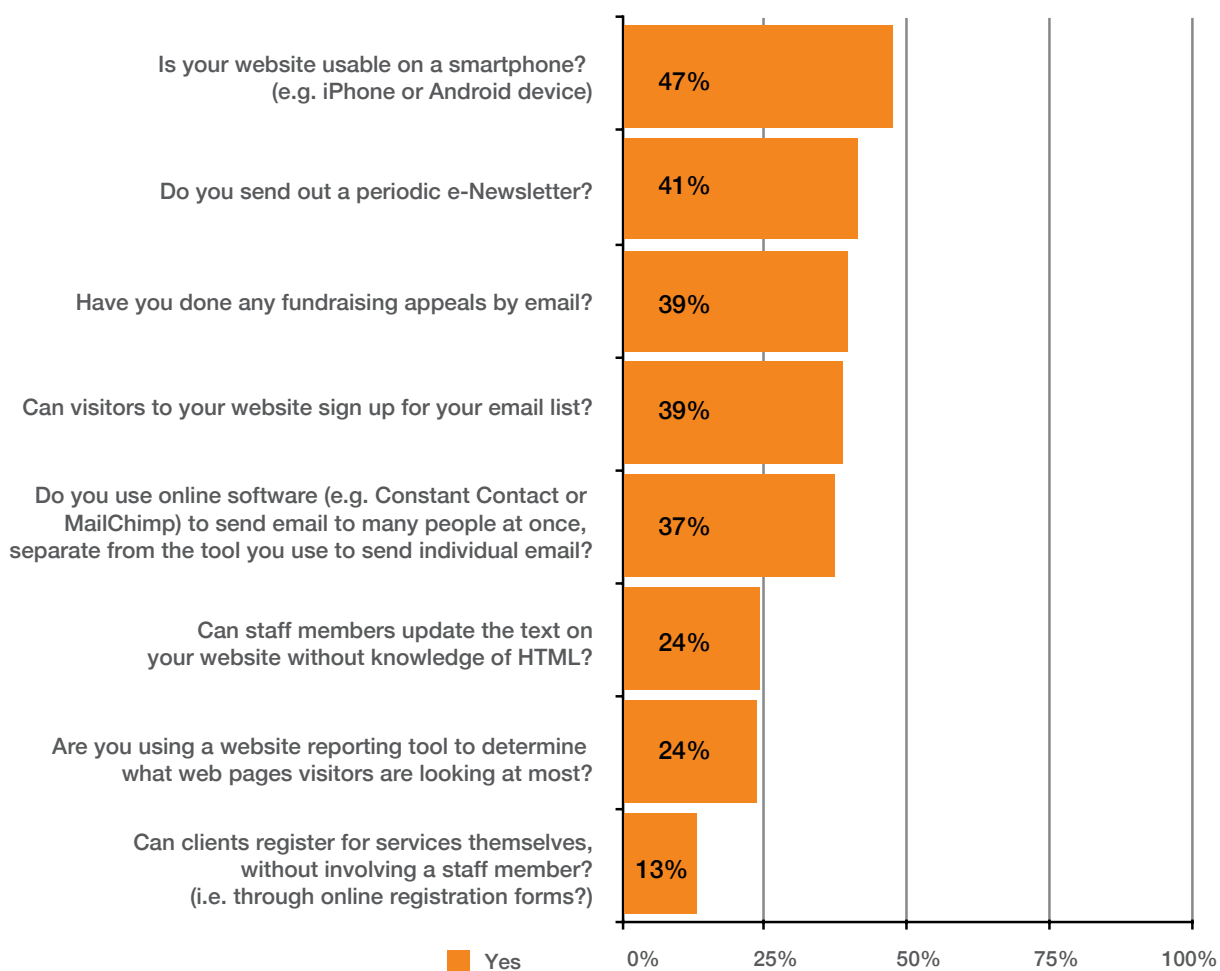


Communications

Overall, the organizations that completed the survey were less effective in their **Communications** efforts than with their hardware infrastructure. Over 40 percent of respondents said their organizations send out a periodic e-newsletter to supporters. Around 39 percent allow supporters to sign up for emails from their websites.

Obvious opportunities in this area are for organizations to implement a broadcast email tool for their periodic e-newsletters, and to transition their websites onto Content Management System (CMS) platforms. We also see opportunity for organizations to benefit from better usage of metrics to measure and track their communications efforts; the solution to this problem is likely a combination of training to educate about better data gathering practices and improved software—such as a broadcast email tool and CMS—to improve data collection.

Communication



Email

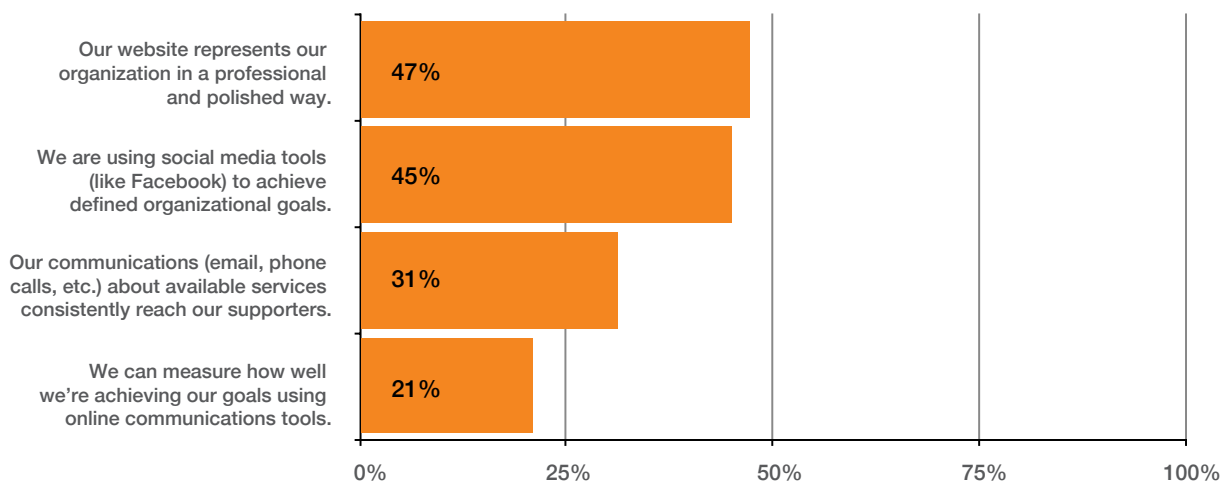
Many organizations seemed to see the value in their email communications efforts. About 39 percent have conducted an online fundraising campaign through email. However, only 37 percent reported using a broadcast email client to send these emails, suggesting that many organizations have been sending newsletters or fundraising solicitations through individual organization email accounts, which can lead to the blacklisting of an organization's entire email domain if such emails are flagged as spam.

Considering that only about 30 percent of respondents said their emails consistently reach their supporters, implementing a broadcast email client, combined with periodic updates to their active supporter list to replace outdated email addresses, would be a prudent and cost-effective course of action for these organizations.

Websites

Almost half of all respondents felt that their websites represent their organizations in a professional and polished way, and about half said their sites are usable on mobile devices. However, less than a quarter of all respondents said they could edit or update their website content without needing to know HTML.

This suggests that the majority of organizations surveyed are using older websites built on static HTML pages rather than modern web Content Management Systems (CMS), which allow non-technical staff to update site content through a user-friendly interface. These organizations would likely benefit from website redesigns, which would also significantly raise the mobile responsiveness and potentially improve accessibility as well.



Metrics

Finally, the majority of organizations that responded to the survey reported that they do not have the ability to measure the effectiveness of their online communications efforts. Less than 25 percent reported that they use a website analytics tool (like Google Analytics) to measure which of the pages on their site people visit the most, and only about 21 percent reported positively that they can measure how well they're achieving their communications goals.



Case Management

Nonprofit immigrant rights and immigration legal service providers have the most room for improvement in the area of **Case Management**. Less than half of respondents said they had a proper case management system for managing clients. This suggests that most organizations are tracking this data in spreadsheets like Excel or Google Sheets.

Of those with case management systems in place, less than 40 percent feel that their systems allow them to work effectively, and only 31 percent said they can easily create the lists of clients and supporters they need for outreach efforts or programs.

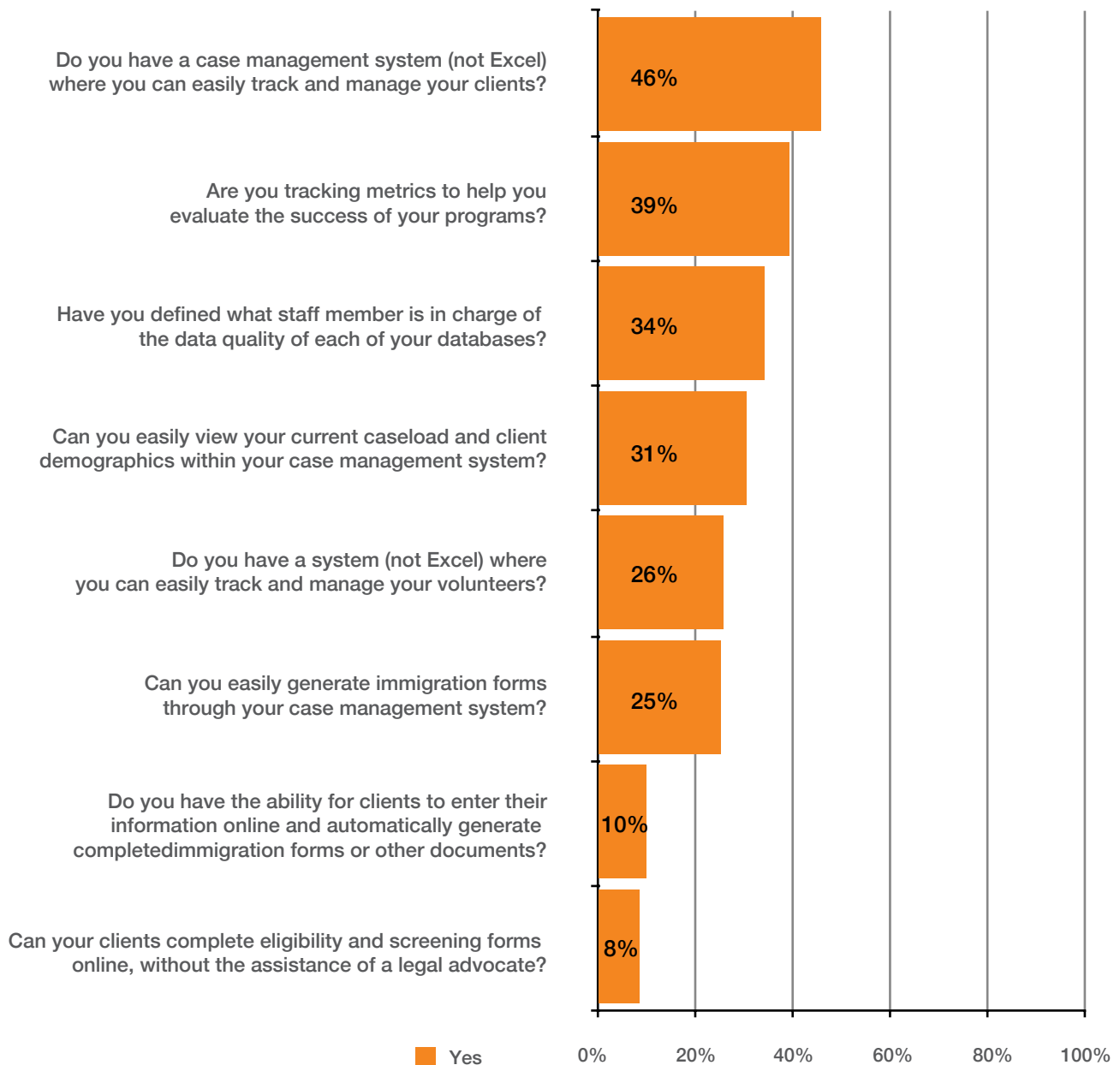
This is similar to what we learned in the **Communications** area, where only 31 percent of respondents felt their communications consistently reached supporters, suggesting that many respondents are working with outdated or inaccurate constituent and supporter records. This is unsurprising, as less than 40 percent said their organizations had identified a staff member to take charge of the quality of the data stored in their systems.

Data hygiene and similar routine maintenance is often ignored by nonprofits due to the perception that it takes up staff time that should be spent working with clients. Without this level of care, however, staff and advocate time may be wasted trying to find the correct contact information for clients; clients may miss appointments or important messages because reminders were sent to the wrong address or mobile phone number; and fundraising emails may not be delivered to supporters who otherwise might donate.

The most obvious opportunity in this area is for organizations to implement case management and database systems. All organizations can also benefit from improved training and planning around data collection and maintenance practices.

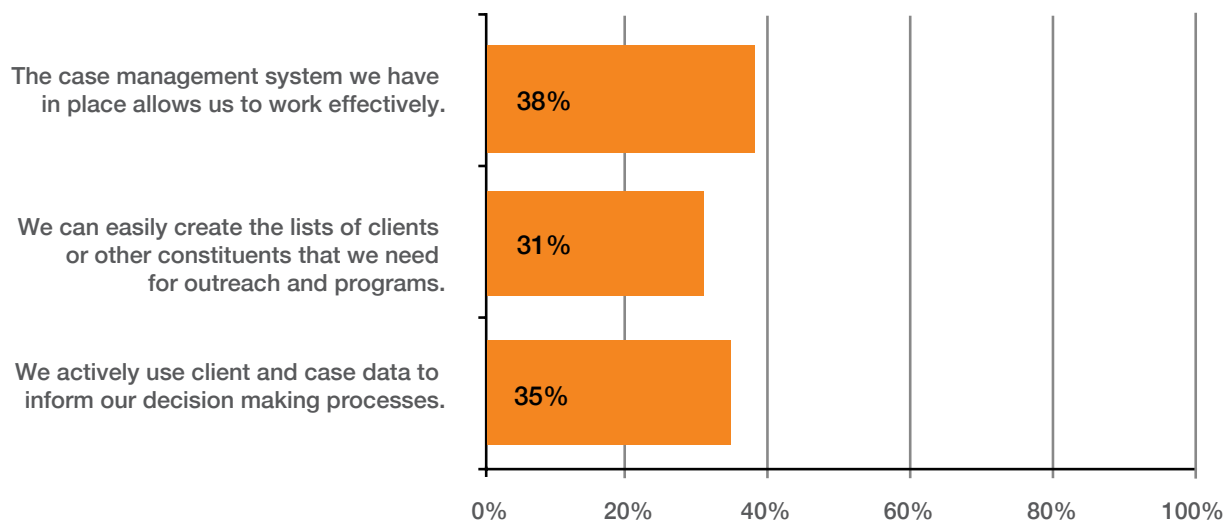


Case Management



Caseloads and Forms

Beyond merely tracking client data, a case management system allows advocates to easily view current caseloads. Many also allow staff to generate the necessary immigration forms with existing client information. Only around 31 percent of respondents said they could easily view their current caseloads, and only 25 percent said that they could easily generate immigration forms. The ability to perform these tasks within a case management system is crucial to improving program performance.



Program Metrics

Organizations are also struggling when it comes to measuring the success of their programs. Fewer than 40 percent said they were tracking information to help them evaluate how well their programs are working. Only 35 percent said they use client and case data to inform the decisions they make about their programs.

This echoes responses in the [Communications](#) section, where very few respondents can measure how well they're achieving online communications goals. Taken together, the data strongly suggests that while organizations have adopted technology solutions to solve individual issues or meet particular needs, they have not yet begun to think strategically about their technology as a whole and how technology can help them achieve mission-focused work rather than distract from it.



Recommended Areas of Focus

Based on survey findings, we have identified the following six areas where improvements will likely have the greatest impact on overall program performance:

- *Client and Case Management Data*
- *Security and Password Management Best Practices*
- *Technology Planning*
- *Websites*
- *Online Communications Measurement and Goal-Setting*
- *Fundraising*

For each focus area we have also included our recommendations on the best methods for addressing the issue. These recommendations are also being integrated into a six-part [webinar trainings series](#) and a forthcoming field guide to nonprofit software that the Immigration Advocates Network is developing to better promote and support effective technology adoption among immigrant rights and immigration legal services organizations.

Client and Case Management Data

Overall, organizations that participated in the survey were by far least effective in the area of [Case Management](#). Less than half of respondents reported having a case management system in place to manage client and case data. Of those, the majority felt that their systems do not allow them to work effectively, and many felt their systems do not let them easily view case load, client demographics, or generate the forms they need.

As the quality and effectiveness of a case management system is only as good as the quality of the data stored within, we recommend that organizations using case management systems develop plans for data collection and maintenance. For organizations still struggling with data quality, we recommend the following:

- Program and management staff should identify and define guidelines for how client and case information should be entered, including the minimum number of fields that must be completed and the formatting for each field (for example, how to record apartment number with street address, five-digit or nine-digit ZIP codes, etc.) to establish a baseline for gathered data. If possible, the data entry forms for the system should be configured with required fields and instructional text to reflect these guidelines. A single staff member should be assigned ownership of data quality, with the responsibility of checking to make sure that client and case data has been entered correctly at regular intervals and that new staff members and volunteers are properly trained on entering data.
- A staff member or team should work to update existing records to reflect the new data quality guidelines.



For those organizations with effective case management systems currently in place, we also suggest that they work to streamline program delivery to clients, including self-service online intake forms and automated form and document assembly tools to empower *pro se* (self-help) or assisted *pro se* models for clients with less complicated cases.

Security and Password Management Best Practices

Overall, organizations that participated in the survey are somewhat effective in terms of **Hardware Infrastructure**. However, sufficient respondents reported being infected by computer viruses in the past year to indicate a need for more proactive steps to protect computers and data. As only around half of all respondents are regularly backing up their files to an offsite server, it's only a matter of time before important client or organizational files or data are corrupted or lost as a result of viruses on individual workstations. Furthermore, we would recommend a focus on the importance of defining minimum password requirements for staff members, as well as resources for password management. Many modern, hosted software solutions for nonprofits now support password and security best practices, including multi-factor authentication (where you must enter a password in addition to another form of identification), and requirements that passwords must be a certain length or contain a certain mix of letters, numbers, and symbols.

We recommend the following:

- Management and staff responsible for technology should meet to define an organization-wide policy for user passwords that complies with industry best practices. Passwords should be a minimum of eight characters; they should include a mix of upper and lower case letters, numbers, and/or symbols; they should be replaced every eight weeks; and they should not be reused for other accounts.
- Two-factor authentication should be enabled for user accounts on systems that support it.
- Regular organization-wide meetings to discuss and reinforce the importance of password and security guidelines.
- An off-site file storage and backup solution should be implemented (e.g. Amazon AWS, Box, Dropbox, etc.) that allows users to sync with their on-premise files automatically on a scheduled basis—preferably weekly, but at least monthly.



Technology Planning

One of the primary takeaways from our survey is that organizations have not yet begun to think about how their technology—including **Hardware Infrastructure**, **Communications**, and **Case Management**—fits into their overall work. We recommend that organizations start this process by defining a technology plan, detailing replacement cycles for computers and other equipment, and establishing goals and policies for how online communications efforts can support service delivery. We also recommend databases and other tools that can work to support their mission rather than distract from it.

We recommend the following:

- Take inventory of all physical hardware (including computer workstations, printers, and phones, for example), and note the approximate age and condition of each item. This list can help determine what equipment should be updated or replaced next.
- Speak with program and development staff to identify all the processes related to their work (data entry for new clients, generating lists for general emails, etc.) and brainstorm ways that these processes could be simplified or automated by using existing technology.
- Solicit thoughts from staff members on how the systems in place work, where the technology impedes their work, and ways that existing systems might be improved. This can help guide efforts when looking to replace these systems.

Websites

While most organizations reported that their websites were polished and professional, few were able to update their content without knowledge of HTML or a technical background. We would recommend that organizations invest more deeply in website audits, analytics tools, mobile usability, and web Content Management Systems (CMS).

We recommend the following:

- Set up a website analytics tool (like Google Analytics) and assign a staff member to be responsible for checking analytics and reporting findings on a regular basis.
- Identify who at the organization should be updating or writing content for the website and train them on how to use your website platform or CMS.
- In the near term, evaluate the usability of the existing website (on both desktop and mobile device) and how well it aligns with services and goals.
- In the long term, plan on updating the site with the help of a consultant or designer. Start budgeting for this now.



Online Communications Measurement and Goal-Setting

While most respondents felt they had a handle on websites and social media outreach, and a substantial amount are actively using email to solicit donations and keep clients and supporters up-to-date on services, the majority reported not knowing how well their communications efforts were meeting their goals. We recommend that programs define specific, measureable goals for their communications efforts and implement the tools they need to measure their progress toward those goals.

We recommend the following:

- Meet with communications/marketing staff to identify current goals or aims for communications efforts.
- Meet with development and program staff to gather input on how communications and outreach could support mission-centered and fundraising work.
- Meet with staff to identify which communications goals are worth measuring for now and to define the specific metrics that can be monitored to measure progress toward those goals.
- Define a schedule for how frequently to check communications metrics and report those numbers to the organization.
- Investigate tools to aid with automating and measuring responses to social media or other online communications posts.

Email Fundraising

While most of the organizations said they had used a broadcast email tool to send e-newsletters or conduct fundraising drives, a substantial number reported problems reaching supporters with their communications. We would suggest that organizations build and maintain an accurate and up-to-date list of supporters, develop a plan for measuring the effectiveness of emails, and educate organizations on low-cost tools for sending mass emails if they have not done so.

We recommend the following:

- Assign one or more staff members to review the list of active supporters for out-of-date or incorrectly formatted information and update or remove outdated records.
- Define metrics to track for broadcast email (e.g. open rate, click-through rate, bounce rate, etc.) and assign a staff member to take charge of monitoring those metrics and reporting them regularly to the organization.
- Investigate tactics for building the mailing list, such as encouraging social media followers to sign up for email, or considering conducting a list swap with peer organizations.



Recommendations for Funders

Investing in a nonprofit's technology infrastructure—whether purchasing actual hardware, helping them choose software, building technology skills, or providing technology consulting—has a direct impact on their work. The effective use of technology can often quickly and directly affect an organization's ability to serve more people, better reach the people who most need services, and help to ensure consistent, high quality services.

The power of a technology investment is particularly significant for the vast majority of nonprofits that are understaffed and that have under-invested in technology. The staff and leadership often have a deep skill and passion for their missions, but no specific technology skills. Even straightforward technologies may provide a new window into more effective and efficient ways to do what they do best.

Based on what we've learned about the organizations surveyed, we recommend the following tactics for supporting grantees with similar technology needs:

- **Distribute existing resources to your grantees and encourage idea sharing.** Many people and organizations already offer free and helpful technology resources—just providing easy access to these resources can be a very useful step. In addition to our [webinar training series](#) and forthcoming resource guide, [Idealware](#), [TechSoup](#), and the [Nonprofit Technology Network](#) (NTEN) all provide free and reliable technology training and resources for nonprofits. Consider creating a virtual resource library on your website or elsewhere that can point grantees to helpful online resources, and encourage idea-sharing among grantees doing similar work. A significant advantage to this approach is that it costs almost nothing to implement and provides a starting point for conversations with your grantees about their technology needs.
- **Provide tailored training for your grantees.** If you find that many of your grantees are dealing with the same technology issues—like we've found in this survey—a group training or joint technology consulting could help get all your grantees on even footing. If you don't have the expertise on hand to conduct a training yourself, there are many options available: you could send grantees links to free or low-cost third-party webinars or in-person classes, purchase seats for webinars or live workshops for your grantees, or invite experts to speak at informal Q&A sessions.
- **Allow grantees to request funds for technology improvements.** As was reinforced by our survey, most nonprofits that are struggling with one or more aspects of their technology are already aware of the problems, but simply lack the operating budget for technology projects. You should consider allowing grantees to include technology costs as a line item in grant proposals if you do not already do so. A \$5,000 capacity building grant to expand an agency's case management system will likely have significant impact on their ability to increase program performance, or minimally offer data insights into areas where improvements can be made. Technology is simply a cost of doing business in today's world, and should be thought of as a necessary program expense.



About This Report

Immigration Advocates Network

The Immigration Advocates Network (IAN) is a collaborative effort of leading immigrants' rights organizations designed to increase access to justice for low-income immigrants and strengthen the capacity of organizations serving them. IAN promotes more effective and efficient communication, collaboration, and services among immigration advocates and organizations by providing free, easily accessible and comprehensive online resources and tools. For more information, visit www.immigrationadvocates.org.

Idealware

Idealware is a nonprofit that provides thoroughly researched, impartial and accessible resources to help other nonprofits make smart technology decisions. For more information or to browse the archives of free resources, visit www.idealware.org.

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