Plan IT Program Guide

January 2024

Contents

Welcome to the Plan IT Project

About 501 Commons

A nonprofit needs solid technology, sound planning, and robust administrative systems to efficiently provide your services to the community. As a nonprofit professional, you strive to engage board members, support your staff, and attract sustainable funding. Your mission is to create a better world. Ours is to help you succeed.

501 Commons was founded in 1989 as the Executive Service Corps of Washington and has been engaging skills-based volunteers in consulting projects with nonprofits and schools for 25 years. In 2011, we changed our name to 501 Commons to better reflect our expanding services including our role as Washington State's nonprofit management support organization.

Our management consulting services include board development, strategic planning, HR, financial management, communications, and a wide range of other topics. We offer leadership coaches and executive advisors. We provide ongoing financial services and human resources services to over 100 organizations. In 2012, we acquired the technology services of NPower Northwest and now provide ongoing tech support to over 90 organizations as well as database development and technology planning and projects.

Volunteerism is an integral part of 501 Commons. Through our service corps program skilled professionals volunteer their expertise and experience allowing nonprofits to tap into the skills of professionals. The Service Corps consists of over 500 volunteers with a wide range of professional backgrounds in government, business, health care, education, and the nonprofit sector.

Visit the Nonprofit Resource Directory for tools, templates, best practices, "Best of the Web" links, and listings of consultants and service providers recommended by nonprofits. Our free information and referral program (206-682-6704) can help you find resources, track down answers or get in touch with an expert.

Nonprofits are changing the world.
Our job is to help them succeed.

Thank You to Our Sponsors

The Plan IT program is made possible by the support of generous sponsors who recognize the importance of nonprofits leveraging technology to help them succeed in their mission.

501 Commons Plan IT Team

The Plan IT project is operated by 501 Commons staff, including:

- Kai Dailey (Program Manager)
- Jim Pullen (Program Sponsor)
- Aaron Bale (Technical Advisor)

Technology Volunteer Program Manager

KAI DAILEY
kai@501commons.org
206-682-6704 X117

About Plan IT

The Plan IT process is modeled after several 501 Commons' action-learning programs that have proven to be effective. The action-learning model, where organizations participate in a hands-on planning process, facilitates learning and growth for the organization through collaboration with consultants.

Plan IT is a technology planning program that results in a nonprofit organization creating a short-term, tactical action plan that will stabilize or mature their systems and make greater use of technology. Program participants will be matched with a consultant team that will coordinate a series of meetings to help the organization assess their current use of technology, identify key issues, and develop a plan for improvement.

The consultant team will consist of two service corps consultants with combined experience in technology, business planning, facilitation and nonprofits. This pair will work together to support their Plan IT participating organization throughout the project. They will plan and facilitate meetings, take notes, develop reports, and guide the organization through the planning process.

The Three Steps of the Planning Process

1. **Technology Assessment**: The organization forms a Technology Leadership Team (TLT) and completes a self-assessment of their current technology systems. The TLT discusses their strengths and challenges with the consultants.

2. **Key Issues Report (KIR):** The consultants and the TLT work together to identify key issues that limit an organization's ability to use technology to improve or expand services and/or make the organization more efficient and secure. A KIR is developed to record the discussion and to help identify the issues that will be the focus of the Plan IT Plan.

3. **Action Plan (AP):** The TLT and consultants further analyze the three key issues, define organizational goals, and develop an action plan that details the steps the organization will take in the next 12-18 months.

Impact of the Plan IT Program

Upon completion of Plan IT, the organization will have:

- A better understanding of the current technology infrastructure and tools used by the organization
- Prioritized three key issues and developed a plan for improvement
- Put in place a system to monitor, measure, and update the plan
- Learned (depending on the project type) about technology tools and resources, cybersecurity, and compliance.
- Gained experience in a powerful process for operational planning

Example Plan IT Schedule

This list of key events and example dates are provided to show the typical cadence for a six-month project. Actual project dates will be determined during the Project Launch meeting. All calendar events will take place by video meeting unless otherwise noted; planning meetings will be scheduled based on availability of TLT and consultants; milestones represent due dates for each document and will also be posted to Microsoft Teams. The data range will be adjusted based on the scope and project size.

TOPIC	DUE/POSTED	TIME
Milestone: Assessment received from client organization		
Consultant Orientation	Jan 17	9am-11am
Project Launch	Jan 24	9am-12pm
Meeting 1: Assessment Review	Jan 28–Feb 1 (2 hours)	
Meeting 2: Explore Key Issues	Feb 4–15 (2-3 hours)	
Milestone: KIR Draft (consultants) **KIR feedback** (501 Commons)	Feb 15 First draft Feb 22 Feedback complete	
Meeting 3: Key Issues Review	March 4-8 45 minutes	
Milestone: KIR Final (consultants – ED signs off)	March 8	
Meeting 4: Action Planning	March 11–29 2-3 hours	
Milestone: Action Plan Draft (consultants) **Action Plan feedback** (501 Commons)	March 29 April 5	
Mid-Point Check In	April 4th	10am-11am
Meeting 5: Action Plan Review	April 8–19 1 hour	
Milestone: Action Plan Final (consultants) **Action Plan feedback** (501 Commons) **Action Plan confirmed** (organization – ED must sign off)	April 19 April 26 May 3	
Project Evaluations	May 10	
Project Wrap Up	May 16th 1-2 hours	11am-1pm

Getting Started

Appoint Your Organization's Technology Leadership Team (TLT)

Organizations need to designate a minimum of two people to participate throughout the project. We encourage you to have three people, which may include a board member or a volunteer, who will help you implement your plan. The team members need to be:

- Authorized to make organizational decisions
- Knowledgeable about the organization's technology systems
- Knowledgeable about the organization's goals and potential to use technology to achieve those goals

The team needs to remain engaged throughout the Plan IT process. If a staff person leaves, be sure to appoint a new team member right away.

Designate one person to be the lead and serve as the primary point of contact with your consultants and 501 Commons staff.

Time Commitment

Each member of the Technology Leadership Team will spend 6-8 hours per month on this project. This includes attending the launch, completing the assessment, attending six planning meetings and one mid-point check in reviewing reports and providing timely feedback to consultants.

Please note: The Technology Leadership Team will receive the assessment prior to the Project Launch and is responsible for having it completed and submitted **five days before the Project Launch meeting**. Your consultants will be available to help answer questions about the assessment at the launch.

Meetings with your consultants are scheduled when mutually convenient. You may need to consider consultants' business or personal travel and availability as you begin to schedule meetings. Please plan to schedule all of your planning meetings at the Project Launch**.** This will allow you to meet project deadlines. Please note that while we encourage organizations to meet with their consultants in person as often as possible, virtual meetings are a great alternative to help stay on schedule.

Project Launch

All members of the Technology Leadership Team and the consultant team will attend the Project Launch where they will:

- Meet everyone on your team
- Learn more about the project
- Review the Key Issues Report process you will complete next
- Be introduced to Microsoft Teams, the collaboration software used in the project
- Discuss any questions related to the assessment

Using Microsoft Teams to Stay Connected

You will use an online program called **Microsoft Teams** during the Plan IT project. Microsoft Teams makes it easier for teams to coordinate and allows 501 Commons to manage and support the project. Microsoft Teams is like an electronic file cabinet that contains the project materials, sample reports, reports and plans you create, as well as all the email sent by the team or 501 Commons during the project. Notifications about project emails are sent to your regular email account. 501 Commons will provide training for Microsoft Teams.

Technology Leadership Team's Responsibilities

The following are the responsibilities of the organization's Technology Leadership Team (TLT):

- Attend all project events
    - Project Launch (all members of TLT)
    - A mid-point check in to review progress, discuss challenges and learning (at least 2 TLT members represented)
    - Six planning meetings from January – May
- Complete the Technology Assessment
    - Upload the assessment to Teams **five days before the Project Launch meeting**
    - Meet with consultants to discuss the assessment results
- Determine key issues to focus on for the Key Issues Report (KIR) and Action Plan
    - Provide input and review the KIR and Action Plan
- Designate at least one member of the TLT to complete the project evaluation
- Ensure that the organization is prepared to implement the Plan IT Plan in the 12-18 months following the project

501 Commons will reach out *approximately 6 and 12 months* after the end of the project to check in on progress and offer support or information and referrals as needed.

Consultant Role & Responsibilities

Each organization will work with two consultants throughout the Plan IT process. The consultant team's role is to facilitate the planning process and help their organization discuss and understand their technology challenges and opportunities.

Consultants will help clients identify key issues and develop a plan for using technology to improve or expand services and/or make the organization more efficient and secure. The plan will lay out the steps the organization needs to take. Consultants must make sure the action steps in the plan are manageable, so the organization is likely to accomplish the plan.

Please note that the consultants may have a good understanding of some areas of technology, cybersecurity, and compliance but in this process, they are helping facilitate and support the planning process, not serving as technology or cybersecurity experts. Consultants should stay mindful of the organization's culture, purpose, and resource constraints throughout the project. Consultants should help the organization identify and understand options, but organizations should avoid relying solely on their consultant's knowledge when making decisions about technology, cybersecurity, or data privacy. All decisions are made by the organization.

The following are the responsibilities of the consultant team:

- Attend all project events
  - Consultant Orientation session
  - Project Launch
  - A mid-point check in to review progress, discuss challenges, and learning
  - Six planning meetings over the duration of the project
- Plan the Assessment Review Meeting – facilitate the discussion and take notes
- Help the organization learn to use Microsoft Teams (if needed), including setting up a bookmark or favorite to provide a shortcut to the online site
- Schedule, plan, and facilitate all planning meetings; take notes and prepare the draft and final versions of the KIR and Action Plan
  - Upload the draft KIR and Action Plan to Microsoft Teams
  - Incorporate edits and comments after 501 Commons' review
  - Get the Executive Director's approval of the final reports, and post clean, formatted versions of the final to Microsoft Teams
- Complete the Lessons Learned self-evaluation

Part 1: Technology Assessment

The assessment is designed to give organizations a shared understanding of their current technology, cybersecurity, or compliance (depending on the project type) and to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

The Technology Assessment will be made available to nonprofits through email and also on Teams upon confirmation of signed project contract. Here is a brief overview of the assessment process:

- One TLT member with knowledge of the organization's current technology will lead completion of the assessment
- This Technology Lead is encouraged to engage as many people from the organization as necessary
- The Technology Lead should upload the assessment to Microsoft Teams upon completion
- The Consultants are available to help answer any questions about the assessment

Planning Meeting 1: Assessment Review

Once the Assessment is completed, the Consultants will meet with the organization to discuss results, noting strengths and potential improvement areas. The consultant team will facilitate the discussion and write up the notes. After the Assessment Review meeting, the consultant team will upload meeting notes to Microsoft Teams.

Part 2: Key Issues Report (KIR)

Key issues are the underlying issues that limit an organization's ability to use technology to improve or expand services and/or make the organization more efficient. In the case of cybersecurity and compliance assessments, key issues represent gaps in knowledge, skills, technology, or processes that limit an organization's ability to secure internet enabled technologies and meet data privacy responsibilities. When defining a key issue, it is important not to identify a task or product, such as a new website, but rather to focus on the underlying problem.

Examples of key issues are:

- The organization communicates primarily with young people but is not using social media.
- The organization has multiple databases but has a difficult time reporting to funders.
- The organization's network is unstable and crashes impacting productivity.
- The organization experiences security incidents due to staff engaging with phishing emails.
- The organization uses multiple cloud platforms but has a difficult time implementing a consistent cybersecurity security approach across platforms.

The purpose of the KIR is to surface the principal limitations the organization is experiencing, and to determine which of those issues the organization wishes to address. The consultants will plan and facilitate the meetings, take notes, and prepare a draft and final versions of the KIR for review by the organization. Consultants will upload both the draft and final KIR to Microsoft Teams for review by 501 Commons. 501 Commons may suggest changes to the document and suggest new ways to approach the issues.

Planning Meeting 2: Explore Key Issues

Questions of the following sort may be useful for the consultants in meeting with the TLT at this meeting.

- How would you describe where your organization is today in its use of technology? What changes would you like to see? What would it take for that to happen?
- What are the problems which are not being solved?
- How do you make decisions about technology? Who is involved? What is the process?
- How do you consider how technology can be used when planning projects and services?
- Is technology addressed each year in the budgeting process?

Based on the TLT's responses and the discussion at this meeting, the consultants will draft a KIR. Use the template for the KIR available on Microsoft Teams. This format is designed to help you carefully think through the issues.

After the consultants have uploaded the draft Key Issues Report to Microsoft Teams, 501 Commons will review the report.

Planning Meeting 3: Key Issues Report Review

After 501 Commons' has shared its feedback, the consultants will facilitate another meeting with the TLT to integrate the feedback from both 501 Commons and the TLT. Consultants will edit the report and post the final Key Issues Report on Microsoft Teams. The Executive Director is asked to review the report and notify 501 Commons through email or a message on Microsoft Teams that they accept the KIR.

View KIR Sample 1
-OR-
View KIR Sample 2

Part 3: Action Plan (AP)

The Action Plan follows the completion of the Key Issues Report. The purpose of the plan is to describe current conditions, define organizational goals, and detail the actions the organization will take to achieve those goals. The purpose of reiterating the current status, goals and key issues is to consolidate in a single document the analysis and recommendations for improvement. *This document should be of a quality to present to the board or to funders.*

View Action Plan Sample 1
-OR-
View Action Plan Sample 2

The consultants will schedule and facilitate the meetings, take notes, and take the lead in writing and updating the plan, making sure the final document has a professional appearance, is internally consistent and detailed enough to guide the organization through implementation.

A template for the Action Plan is available on Microsoft Teams. Follow the template provided, including the formatting. The plan includes:

1. An executive summary, including a description of the Plan IT process (this section can be used to brief board members or as part of a request for support from a donor or funder)
2. An introduction with background about the organization
3. Results of the assessment from the Assessment Summary
4. Description of the key issues
5. A list of goals taken from the KIR
6. Action plans for each goal, including milestones and steps to achieve the goal
7. A plan for monitoring the plan, including reporting indicators and stories the organization hopes to tell that demonstrate the plan's impact.

Consultants should draft sections 2 and 3 of the plan as soon as the Key Issues Report is completed. Sections 1 and 2 should include narrative explanations of the assessment process, not just lists. Similarly, there should be a narrative explanation of the goals that captures the discussions in planning meetings.

Planning Meeting 4: Develop Action Plan

In Meeting 4, the team will confirm the goals and determine milestones and action steps to achieve the goals (section 4). As the plan is built, identify potential barriers to achieving the goals. Focus on those barriers that can be directly influenced and identify the resources needed to address the barriers. When forming milestones and action steps, if a step in the plan tries to accomplish too much, it will discourage action by the organization. By focusing on many small, specific tasks it will be easier for the organization to make steady progress towards accomplishing their goals.

For each action step in the plan identify the position within the organization that is accountable for completion of the step and the due date for completion. Use the initials of the position not the individual's initials. *Waiting until the plan is complete before assigning responsibilities and due dates does not work well because the people responsible may have conflicts or be otherwise unavailable.* Including them in setting the plan is a better way to get a plan which can work.

Consultants should review each section of the plan to ensure it is complete before submitting to 501 Commons. We will review the draft and submit feedback approximately one week after receipt. Consultants should then facilitate a meeting to discuss both the client and 501 Commons' feedback with the TLT.

Planning Meeting 5: Review Action Plan

- Discuss TLT and 501 Commons feedback
- Identify potential edits to the plan
- Finish any remaining elements of the plan
- Determine who is accountable for updating and implementing the plan, and maintaining the organization's focus on the plan
- Define how you will monitor progress and determine whether you are improving the challenges determined during key issues meeting.
    - *Note:* Building this evaluation into the Action Plan is important and will help the organization improve over time.

Planning Meeting 6: Final Debrief

In the final review, discuss how the TLT will communicate the plan internally, and ensure they are prepared to monitor the milestones and impact measures. Consultants and TLT will review feedback from 501 Commons and make any necessary changes. When the plan is final, the Executive Director is asked to post a message to Teams accepting the plan.

Impact: What will be different as a result of the Action Plan?

At the end of the Plan IT planning process the organization will have a plan (depending on the project type) for using technology to improve or expand services and/or make the organization more efficient; for improving and monitoring cybersecurity; for meeting compliance and data privacy responsibilities. The Action Plan will lay out the steps the organization needs to take to achieve these results.

The TLT must be sure to discuss the cost, time, and skill levels needed to accomplish tasks documented in the plan with their consultant team. It is important that after meeting 6, the TLT has a good idea on how to move forward on their Action Plan once the consultants have completed their service. It is the organization's responsibility to keep the plan updated and implement the action steps in the 12-18 months following the project.

Accountability for Implementing the Action Plan

The Action Plan will only work to add capacity to the organization if the organization "works its plan." This means keeping the document updated and visible in the organization and incorporating the work into daily activities.

The organization will designate one person who is accountable for ensuring that the organization implements the plan. This means revising the plan as circumstances change and modifying the due dates and accountabilities as needed.

Project Location

All project events will be held via video meeting unless otherwise determined by consultants and TLT. We are happy to make the Pacific Tower meeting rooms available for in-person meetings, if preferred. Please let the Program Manager know at least a week in advance to ensure meeting space availability.

Pacific Tower

Pacific Tower is the large brick building on the north end of Beacon Hill overlooking downtown Seattle: 1200 12th Avenue South, Seattle WA 98144.

The main entrance is on the south side of the building (1st floor). There is also an entrance into the basement level from the north parking lot. Additional directions are located on PacTower.org/directions.

Metro bus routes 36 and 60 stop right at the tower. There is free street parking on the streets surrounding the campus.

Pacific Tower is home to numerous nonprofits as well as Pacific Medical Clinic.

Parking

****Please do not park in the Pacific Medical Center garage off 14th Ave.****

Visitor parking is available in the West Garage or in the north lot.

Review Pacific Tower's website for parking rates.

West Garage
You can enter the West Garage from 12th Avenue, or from 14th Avenue past the flag pole. Visitor parking is available on levels P2 and P6. From either entrance, pull up to the gate arm, and pull a ticket. When leaving, visitors enter their ticket and pay by credit or debit card. **No cash is accepted**. Please press the button on the ticket dispenser if you encounter issues entering or leaving the garage.

North Lot
Alternatively, you can park in the north surface lot (**card or cash**.) You can enter the basement level of the building from the entrance off of the north lot or walk up the garage stairs to the south main entrance.