

## Needs Statement

<p>“Imagine a world where the power of technology is unleashed on the difficult issues of poverty, homelessness and children in need.” (Bunnel, 2)</p>
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Nonprofit organizations devote time and money to being a resource to the community. They are the "cornerstone of our civil society, that network of voluntary associations, individual volunteers, institutional relationships, and social contacts that makes our democracy viable, vibrant, and accountable" (Challenges for Nonprofits and Philanthropy, 2004). According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS), there are 1,515,495 registered charities in the United States, 80.1% of which have an annual budget of less than \$100,000. These smaller nonprofits are often unknown on a national level, but are vital to their local communities. Grassroots.org provides crucial capacity-building support to these nonprofit organizations in an area that is often overlooked, but increasingly important to all organizations: building and maintaining a Web presence.

For these small community organizations, adopting an effective online presence is a vital capacity-building step for a number of reasons. The most obvious being that in this day and age “even the smallest nonprofit is expected to maintain a website” (University of San Francisco, 1). Without a website, at best, a nonprofit is invisible to potential clients and funders; at worst, it may be seen as illegitimate or nonexistent. Indeed, from a funding perspective, the importance of having an online presence is only becoming more important with each passing year: "with online donations up 37% in 2006" according to The Chronicle of Philanthropy, "it is clear that the Web, if not yet the main point for charitable donation, is playing an increasingly more important role" (Read Write Web, 2008). The importance of online giving can be documented across the entire nonprofit sector, but it is particularly pertinent to small nonprofits who often “don’t have a huge fundraising apparatus or staff.” As articulated by Nancy Aossey, president and chief executive of Los Angeles-based relief agency International Medical Corps, “in the world of fundraising, the Internet is the great equalizer”.

While fundraising is incredibly important to nonprofit organizations, client service and program outreach are the cornerstone of each nonprofit's efforts to execute its mission. In this arena of the nonprofit world, creating and maintaining an online presence is of the utmost importance. Not only can a website help clients "to better communicate with, and expand" their member base, it can also increase organization and client morale. Rufus Arkoi, founder Grassroots.org member organization ROZA Promotions explains "getting our website has been huge. It helps our clients, and us, to feel proud of our organization...[by increasing] ownership and sense of belonging, and our web presence helps us to fulfill our mission".

Thus, it is clear that building and maintaining a web presence not only helps nonprofit organizations to increase their financial capacity, it can also help them achieve measurable mission-driven results. However, for a variety of reasons, many small nonprofit groups are unable to make the investment to get online in the first place. Indeed it seems that the very qualities that make small nonprofit organizations so vital and effective—a personal commitment to the mission and programs of the organization—can inhibit nonprofits when it comes to making the crucial capacity-building investment in a web presence. Operating on meager budgets with huge goals, small nonprofits must frequently decide between investing in services or investing in the technology that can fuel their growth.

Nancy Parrish of the National Women's Airforce Service Pilots of WWII Museum in Waco, Texas explains, "We knew we needed a Website in order to attract and communicate with donors, but we were faced with the difficult decision to redirect funds toward that purpose." As reported in the Nonprofit Times, "with limited dollars, nonprofits have to be extremely careful about money spent on technology" (NP Times, 2007). Concerns are not limited to the initial investment of building a website; as Beavette Loney from Grassroots.org member Kingdom Living reports "without dedicated technology staff members, the process of identifying and contracting a web design firm was extremely daunting. We feared that we might be taken

advantage of, and, quite frankly, we simply didn't feel we'd ever have the time to sit down and figure it out.” As a representative of Grassroots.org's 1,000+ members, Beavette's experience reflects a common experience: in a member survey conducted in September 2008, 75% of Grassroots.org members have an annual technology budget of less than \$500. In addition, more than half of Grassroots.org members do not employ a single technical staff member, and 95% have less than four paid employees total. With so few staff members, and even fewer dollars devoted to technology, it is not surprising that so many of our nonprofit members would never have been able to build and maintain a web presence without our free nonprofit services.

Grassroots.org's comprehensive technology program addresses these problems by aggregating the needs of these organizations and providing powerful technology solutions to small nonprofit organizations. Grassroots.org provides these nonprofit organizations in the US and Canada with the power and flexibility of state-of-the-art tools, installed and configured for free. Organizations receive hosted, managed toolboxes with in-demand open source applications. Grassroots.org also possesses the training and support resources designed to allow even the most non-technical end-user to manage a sophisticated Internet presence. Grassroots.org's services eliminate the confusion that nonprofit employees experience when diving into capacity building through the Web for the first time. Our support staff provides members with the knowledge to take advantage of our tools in a language nonprofits understand, through dedicated customer service, weekly online webinars, and a members-only information portal.

“Working with Grassroots.org has been a delightful experience. Like many other members, our organization realized the importance of building a web presence, but we were intimidated by both the cost and process itself. The level of service we received exceeded our expectations and we could not imagine where our organization would be without Grassroots.org” (Karen Simone, American Board of Applied Toxicology).

Convio's Founder and Chief Strategy Officer, Vinay Bhagat is "passionate about the impact that technology can have on nonprofits, and believe that smaller nonprofits in particular stand to gain significant efficiencies through its effective implementation. Technology can help them level the playing field with much larger organizations, many of whom can learn from their smaller peers" (Convio.com, 2008)

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