CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

A Briefing Paper for Foundations

January 2022

TECHIMPACT®

WHY DID WE WRITE THIS RESOURCE?

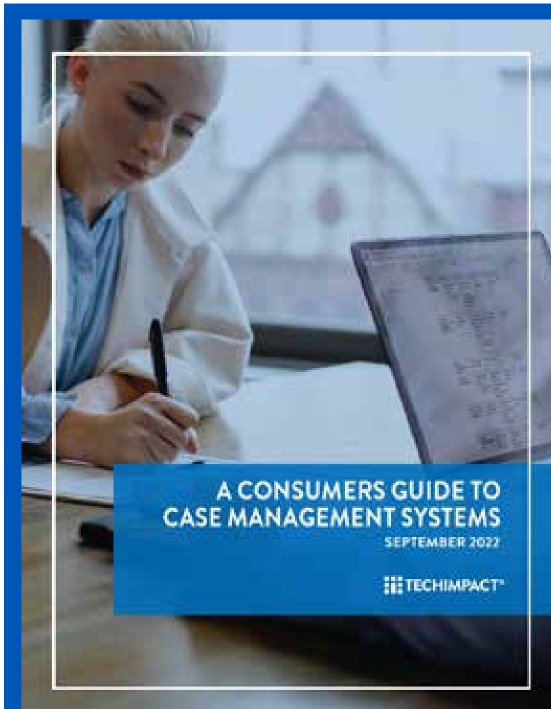
Last year, Tech Impact published the 2022 edition of its popular *Consumers Guide to Case Management Systems* to help human services organizations and other nonprofits better understand the software market and their own particular needs.

This briefing paper is a high-level summary of that publication designed to educate funders about the software their grantees use and encourage more and better funding for nonprofit technology.

We believe funders should understand the technology that is available to the nonprofits they support, what it costs, and what's realistic to expect from grantees in terms of tracking and reporting capability.

They also need to be familiar with process grantees should be undertaking to choose and implement case management systems, and the levels of funding required to succeed at that process and avoid wasting money on systems that are sub-par or not a good fit. Most importantly, we believe funders need to understand that case management technology is intricately linked to program effectiveness and impact evaluation.

On the last page of this resource, you'll find suggestions for how you, as a funder, can act on this research to help your grantees in this area.



Download the free 2022 edition of *A Consumers Guide to Case Management Systems for Nonprofits* at https://offers.techimpact.org/reports/2022casemanagement

WHAT DOES A NONPROFIT CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM DO?

All case management systems serve essentially the same role: to shepherd clients—whether the organization serves homeless people, students, or even rescue animals—through the series of steps and services their programs provide.

At a basic level, these systems track the following:

- Information organizations need to serve constituents: e.g., age, address, job history, educational progress, or childcare situation.
- Communications between staff and constituents.
- Individualized plans, and progress toward those plans.
- Reporting capabilities for information they've collected.
- Quantitative data (goods and services provided, attendance) and qualitative evaluation (case notes, assessments, and outcomes).

Case management systems cover a wide array of specialized needs, and are often used alongside separate financial or general Constituent Relationship Management (CRM) systems. Some organizations may seek a single system that provides case management functionality while also managing volunteers, engaging donors, billing for services, and handling all constituent relationship management functions. But as organizations grow in size and scope, the need for specialized systems for each distinct function tends to increase.

> "Without a case management system, nonprofits are ill-equipped to serve their clients. This software supports better outcomes and more robust evaluation."

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The benefits of a case management system are many, both within and outside the organization.

A case management system eliminates the need for clients to provide the same information over and over, saving them not just time and frustration but potentially the repeated trauma of sharing details about a harmful incident or event they've experienced for which they are seeking help.

For the people who work directly with those clients, a case management system can facilitate outreach and make it easier to assess the current situation by making relevant information immediately available—for example, case history, current living situation, and more.

It can also make it easier to document activities and communications and identify planned actions, often with case notes.

Case management systems also can help multiple direct-service providers collaborate to help a client by providing messaging, task management, or referral systems that work either internally or among people in different organizations. Managers can generate reports to help evaluate how different employees seek to efficiently produce successful outcomes. Board members can use data from these systems to convey the impact of their organizations' work.

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WHAT SYSTEMS DO WE RECOMMEND?

A system that works well for one organization won't necessarily work well for all organizations. What's the best way for a nonprofit to narrow down the options and find a good fit for its needs?

The following scenarios identify a few common nonprofit organization priorities along with systems that may meet those needs.

These are intended as suggestions to get the selection process started, not as the only solutions for each scenario. We encourage organizations to take the totality of the system into consideration before choosing any solution.

Organizations that want to comply with the U.S. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and work with a vendor that will sign a Business Associate Agreement.

- Apricot 360 from Social Solutions
- CharityTracker from Simon Solutions
- Exponent Case Management (BAA with Salesforce)
- NewOrg Management System
- Sumac by Silent Partner Software

Organizations that need a robust intake workflow for non-tech savvy staffers.

- Apricot 360 from Social Solutions
- Exponent Case Management for Salesforce

Small organizations with a few dedicated employees and volunteers, for whom price is critical.

- Notehouse Plus
- CharityTracker Basic

Organizations that want one system to manage clients, volunteers, and/or donors rather than multiple solutions.

- Exponent Case Management for Salesforce
- NewOrg Management System
- Sumac by Silent Partner Software

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF A GRANTEE IS PROPOSING A SMART INVESTMENT?

When grantees apply for funding to support their efforts to choose and implement a case management system, how can you be sure it's a good investment?

The following indicators can show that an organization has done its due diligence and help you determine whether they are ready for your support.

- They have someone capable of steering the process, either on staff or a consultant who knows the market and can help define their needs.

- They have defined their needs—for a large, mission-critical piece of software, this might take months of work.

- They have narrowed down a shortlist of systems—three-to-five software options is a good, manageable choice.

- They've evaluated the software by trying out each system or participating in vendor demos, comparing them against each other in real world scenarios and not just a hypothetical list of features.

- They have a plan for implementing the system, including migrating data and training staff to ensure better rates of user adoption.

- They have considered the full cost of ownership, including purchase, ongoing subscription fees, customization, and additional licenses.

As with any significant purchase, the goal is to maximize the ROI while minimizing the pain and risk. Funders have many ways to help nonprofits through this process—learn more on page 9.

HOW DID WE SELECT THE SYSTEMS?

We began by compiling a longlist of systems. Then we reached out to their vendors and asked them to complete a brief gating survey to provide general information about their software, customer bases, and recent and planned changes. Ten vendors completed the survey.

While our longlist is a thorough list of case management systems, it's not intended to be exhaustive—any of those systems may be considered a viable solution for an organization's particular needs. Our *Consumers Guide* is meant to be a starting point in their selection process, not a map to the best solution.

Note also that our focus is nonprofit organizations, but a case management system that is primarily in use by a customer base outside the nonprofit sector may still be perfectly suitable for a particular nonprofit's work.

Choosing which systems to include in a publication of this size can be challenging, but it's not feasible for us to review every system on the market. Establishing gating criteria means making choices about what systems must do to qualify for inclusion. For this edition of the guide, we used the following gating criteria as a way to assess the health and longevity of a system as well as the vendor's intent to continue to support and introduce new features to keep up with market and user demand:

- Systems that have been actively maintained with recent updates.
- Systems whose vendor has a clear and publicly available roadmap for specific future feature enhancements.
- Systems that serve a significant nonprofit customer base.

While systems can vary widely in cost—with not all vendors publishing pricing information to the public—we confined our evaluation to systems within the price range of small to midsize nonprofit organizations. Please refer to the full *Consumers Guide* for pricing details, where available.

The following systems met our gating criteria for evaluation in this edition of the Consumers Guide to Case Management Systems:

- Apricot 360 from Social Solutions (Bonterra)
- CharityTracker from Simon Solutions
- Exponent Case Management
- NewOrg Management System
- Notehouse
- Sumac Case Management by Silent Partner Software

HOW DID WE EVALUATE SYSTEMS?

For past editions of this resource, we conducted more than a dozen interviews with staff members at human service organizations, nonprofit technology professionals and consultants, and academics in the fields of nonprofit management and performance management to learn about the features and functionality most organizations need from a case management system. From those interviews we identified 91 review criteria used to evaluate the systems.

For this edition, we began with that list and worked with subject matter experts—both internal and external to Tech Impact—to revise the review criteria to reflect how nonprofits use these systems in 2022, focusing on the key areas of differentiation among them.

With this list of criteria in mind, we met with each of the six vendors chosen for inclusion for a 90 to 120 minute video call during which they showed us how their systems met or failed to meet the requirements. We also discussed the origin and evolution of their systems as well as pricing.

Vendors were given the opportunity to fact-check their written summaries to flag errors and ensure there were no inaccuracies, but not have final approval over their own reviews.

While we ultimately evaluated the systems against nearly 100 requirements criteria, we considered just a handful of them as “key features” that differentiate the systems depending upon an organization’s needs:

- Client Data Tracking
- Relationships and Householding tracking
- Case Workflow
- Results Tracking
- Communications
- Volunteers and Events
- Billing
- EMR
- Reporting and Querying
- Data Hygiene
- Mobile
- Security and Access Management
- Customization and Integration
- Support and Training

HOW CAN YOUR FOUNDATION ACT ON THIS RESEARCH?

We created this briefing paper and the resource on which it is based to help funders like you better work with your grantees in this space. Here are a few ways you can act on this research.

- Share the *Consumers Guide* with grantees or other nonprofits in the human services field.
- Fund infrastructural technology projects like management systems rather than focusing exclusively on "cutting edge" projects tied to trends.
- Consider ways to support other/better options for nonprofits rather than an ever-shrinking market of big corporate solutions.
- Work with grantees to facilitate less-onerous reporting requirements that align with their case management capabilities and other reporting needs.
- Give scholarships or reimbursement for technology workshops, webinars, and online courses to educate users about how to better make use of technology.
- Share educational resources on your website and social media.

More Resources for Funders and Grantees

Investment in infrastructure technology is a critical part of service delivery in the digital era—and yet, it's often overlooked in favor of investment in programs or innovative projects.

Changing this dynamic requires effort both from funders and from nonprofits. Tech Impact and the Technology Association of Grantmakers teamed up to create a series of resources to guide you in this work.

Find them, along with other educational resources for funders and their grantees, in our Technology Learning Center:

https://offers.techimpact.org/reports/infrastructure

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Tech Impact’s mission is to leverage technology to advance social impact. We deliver workforce development programs that foster individual growth, economic mobility and a more diverse IT talent pool; and capacity building services that lead to stronger nonprofits delivering greater social impact.

We partner with funders to provide technology services and training to their grantees and organizations in their communities. We believe when nonprofit leaders gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence to make smart technology decisions, their organizations become more effective—and communities thrive.

Visit www.techimpact.org, or contact us at info@techimpact.org to learn more about our work and how we can partner to strengthen nonprofits.

About Our Sponsor

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