



TechBridge

Bringing a National Nonprofit up to Tech Speed *Points of Light Institute*



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up to Tech Speed
Points of Light Institute
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Andrew Drake, CTO
Points of Light Institute



The Challenge

When Points of Light Foundation and Hands On Network merged to form Points of Light Institute (POLI) in 2007, it became the largest volunteer network in the nation. This national nonprofit organization inspires, equips and mobilizes people to take action that changes the world. POLI has a global focus to redefine volunteerism and civic engagement for the 21st century, putting people at the center of community problem solving. It is organized to innovate, incubate and activate new ideas that help people act upon their power to make a difference. POLI operates three dynamic business units with a shared mission: HandsOn Network, MissionFish and the Civic Incubator. These three business units require a national force of employees and volunteers and comprise an enormous, far-reaching operation.

POLI is familiar with doing more with less. When Andrew Drake accepted the position of CTO at the beginning of 2009, his laptop was so old that the letters were worn off of the keyboard. With no standard software configuration in place, each workstation was loaded with a catch-all of different applications. Each employee was issued a Blackberry, but a lack of training meant that they weren’t used consistently. The physical structure of the Atlanta office – a beautiful restored warehouse with thick walls – made wireless networking practically impossible. Remote users continuously struggled with accessing POLI’s system, and the level of support they received depended on the skill of the IT support person who answered their call.

“We’re like the cobbler’s children – it’s hard to find funding for internal resources,” Drake explained. “Upgrades have been deferred to save money.”

Drake and other POLI executives agreed that it was time for the organization to do more with more – to evolve their current IT infrastructure into a tool to deliver on the mission, not impede it. However, POLI had developed so many workarounds to deal with all of the IT issues that it was hard to identify underlying problems, let alone solve them. Executives commissioned TechBridge to assess the existing IT infrastructure at the Washington, D.C. and Atlanta offices and provide a technology plan based on their findings.

The Solution

TechBridge began the tech assessment in April 2009 by interviewing managers and employees (including all remote users) and the current IT support provider. The TechBridge team then performed a detailed examination of network infrastructure, internet connectivity and telecom, remote access, email, security and much more. The team established an assessment scale that ranked each item according to need:

- Needs improvement (upgrade strongly recommended)
- Neutral (acceptable, but other methods could be explored)
- Best practice (accepted as standard in the tech community)

TechBridge recommended both minor and significant changes to consolidate and streamline infrastructure, as well as provide a basis for redundancy, reliability and efficiency. Solutions were thoroughly outlined, including hardware and software, timelines and material estimates to accomplish each:

- Reconfigure wireless networking in the Atlanta office
- Configure the Outlook email client to use Outlook Anywhere
- Deploy a better data backup and recovery solution
- Migrate and consolidate data from multiple networks
- Upgrade database and accounting systems
- Design and implement Microsoft SharePoint 2007
- Create standards and baselines for multiple business units
- Deploy Symantec Anti-Virus across the entire domain
- Build an IT budget for support, hardware replacement and projects



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Among the most critical needs was correcting the backup system. The current system didn’t meet POLI’s disaster recovery needs and could fail at any time. TechBridge suggested a tape backup solution with dedicated enterprise-level backup and recovery software. Less critical but key to better collaboration, TechBridge also suggested improving the existing intranet to serve as a single workspace for scheduling, document management and discussions. Setting the intranet as the default homepage in Internet Explorer would ensure use.

With a plan in place, POLI put out an RFP for a new IT provider, not realizing that TechBridge provided ongoing support. TechBridge, the organization’s current provider and another firm all bid on the work. TechBridge won the account.

“TechBridge was less expensive, but far more importantly, they really understand the different approach and culture of nonprofits, and they’re compatible with our values,” Drake said. “We liked that they brought in volunteers to carry out our assessment. That’s speaking our language.”

“TechBridge connects us to corporate partners and other nonprofit organizations too. When we upgraded our systems, we used memory donated to TechBridge from another organization that didn’t need it. They also brought in outside volunteer experts to implement our new system, including a wireless networking expert from Accenture.”

Another point in TechBridge’s favor: thorough knowledge of TechSoup, a software provider for non-profits. When POLI is ready to upgrade software, TechBridge’s know-how will enable a much smoother transition.

Best of all, the services TechBridge provides reach beyond typical support, according to Drake. “They act as our outsourced director of IT, helping us manage the big picture proactively. We can turn to TechBridge for guidance in strategy and budgeting throughout the year.”

The Impact

While still ongoing, the system overhaul has so far had a tremendous impact in these key functional areas:

- Delivering the mission in an efficient manner – the most important objective
- Increasing scalability of operations so POLI can continue to grow without growing pains
- Increasing productivity of remote users
- Decreasing end-user support requests
- Decommissioning antiquated systems
- Consolidating data
- Enabling collaboration

“When you work at a nonprofit, it’s hard work with long hours that pays in psychic rewards,” said Drake. “No one wants to spend hours trying to figure out why their computer doesn’t work. TechBridge solved our needs so we have the tools to help others solve theirs.”

About TechBridge

TechBridge is an Atlanta-based nonprofit with one mission - to help nonprofits use technology to do more and serve more people. We focus on technology, enabling nonprofits to focus on their mission. TechBridge has provided IT consulting, hosting and outsourcing services to hundreds of nonprofits, by connecting the needs of nonprofits with the skills, experience and financial resources of the technology community. www.techbridge.org

Contact

To find out more about TechBridge Managed Services email info@techbridge.org or visit www.techbridge.org

