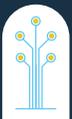
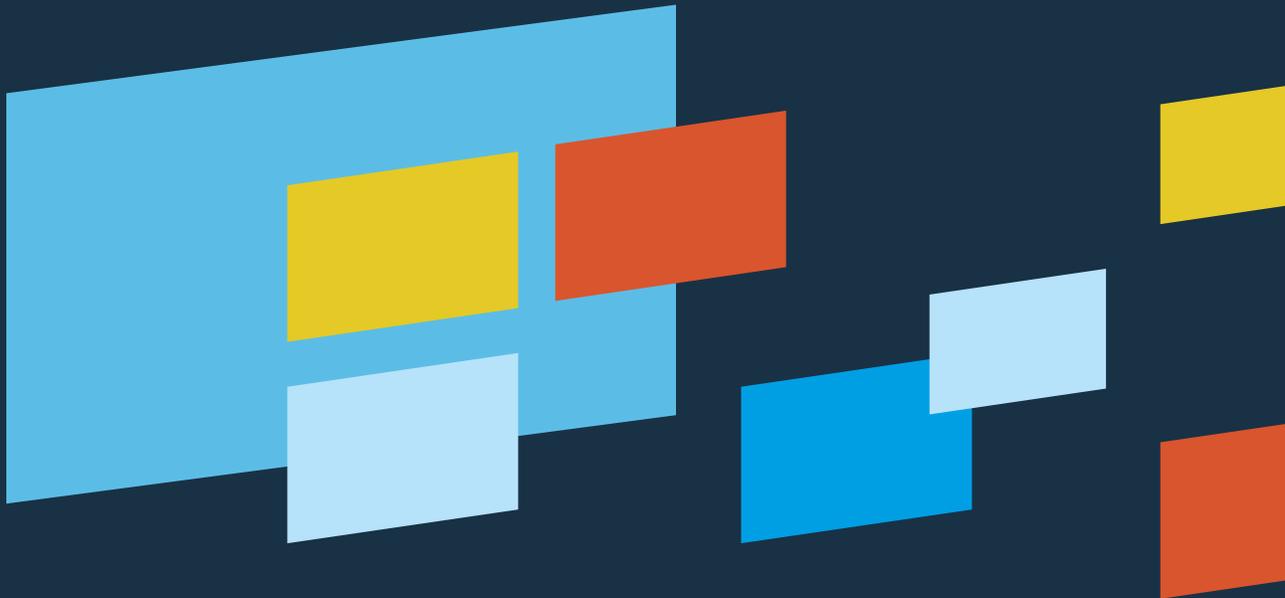




5 Things Not To Do With Your App Project

Your nonprofit is launching, expanding, or rebuilding its digital presence.

Congratulations! Now what?



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4 Things Not to Do with Your App Project

Your nonprofit is launching, expanding, or rebuilding its digital presence. Congratulations! Now what?

We've seen firsthand the many successes—and costly missteps—that nonprofits make when planning and executing an app project. Whether you're building, maintaining, or reimagining your Internet presence, avoiding these five common pitfalls will help you create a solution that drives impact, boosts engagement, and supports your mission.

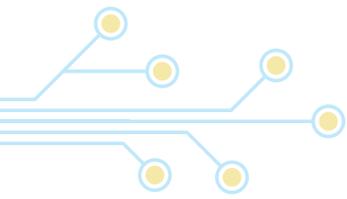
1. They Hire a Programmer Instead of Building a Strategic Team.

Many nonprofits eager to enhance their online presence start by hiring a programmer, hoping this one person can act as an all-in-one technical resource. The programmer comes on board and does what programmers do: they write code.

Initially, this arrangement might seem cost-effective and efficient. But soon, a deeper issue surfaces—most programmers, even highly skilled ones, aren't focused on broader strategic goals like generating revenue, boosting client retention, or fostering community engagement. This is because a programmer's expertise lies in solving technical challenges, not in creating a roadmap for long-term growth.

Additionally, programmers are often not equipped to manage projects, budgets, or stakeholder expectations. Nonprofits might delegate the entire project to a programmer, only to find the project off track or over budget because no one was steering the ship. Perhaps even more importantly, strategic decisions—like prioritizing features that drive donor engagement or planning for scalability—require oversight from someone who understands both the technical and business sides of the project.





By building a strategic team, **you can create an app that not only functions but drives meaningful growth for your nonprofit.**

A Well-Planned App Fuels Growth, Not Just Functionality

A thoughtfully planned app isn't just a digital tool—it's a strategic asset. With the right approach, it can help drive fundraising, increase memberships, boost donor engagement, and strengthen long-term sustainability.

Think beyond basic functionality. Without a strategic vision, your app risks becoming a functional tool rather than a powerful asset to fuel impact. For instance, features like one-click donations, member perks, push notifications, or real-time analytics must be thoughtfully planned from the beginning to align with your nonprofit's objectives. These elements cannot simply be bolted on later without risking inefficiencies, higher costs, or a disjointed user experience.

How Should You Proceed?

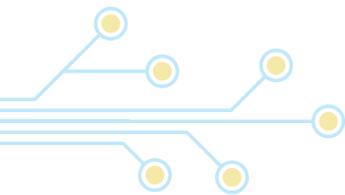
The answer is to assemble the right team of people, not rely on one technical person.

Start by identifying an internal resource who understands the project's goals and business requirements. This person will act as the project manager, ensuring the app aligns with your nonprofit's broader mission.

Next, bring in technical experts. You'll need a software architect who prioritizes strategic planning and system design over just writing code. This person can guide the development process, ensuring the app is built to scale and incorporates features that support growth. They'll also manage programmers or other technical contributors, ensuring the team stays on track and on budget.

If your budget doesn't allow for a full in-house team, consider outsourcing technical roles to a trusted partner while keeping project management internal. Remember, your team—whether internal or external—must operate cohesively with a shared vision for success. By building a strategic team, you can create an app that not only functions but drives meaningful growth for your nonprofit.





Without clear change management, your project becomes unstable, priorities shift, details get lost, and frustration builds.

2. They Second-Guess Their Choices and Tweak Requirements Without a Plan

It is common for nonprofits to revisit project decisions — particularly when new stakeholders, like a board president, bring fresh perspectives and ideas. However, making frequent, unplanned changes to requirements or business processes can derail even the most well-envisioned projects.

Here's what typically happens when high-priority business changes are brought to a product team:

- 1. They say “OK” and keep working as though nothing has changed.** This avoids conflict but creates chaos later as unplanned changes ripple through the project.
- 2. They say “That sounds good but...” and present a change order with additional costs or trade-offs.** While less appealing upfront, this approach ensures clarity and keeps the project aligned with its original goals.

To non-technical stakeholders, changes may appear minor. For example, adding international members to a previously US-only group may seem like a small change, but even small tweaks can have cascading effects, requiring updates to privacy standards, encryption protocols, and user interfaces. These changes divert resources intended for other critical features, leaving the project incomplete, rushed, or over budget.

Without clear change management, your project becomes unstable, priorities shift, details get lost, and frustration builds. By the end, you

may wish you had made different decisions earlier.

Strategic Change Management Protects Growth and Impact

Managing change strategically ensures your project remains focused and aligned with your nonprofit's goals. While it may feel frustrating to pause and assess the consequences of each and every change, doing so allows your team to always prioritize the features that best meet the overall goals of the organization.

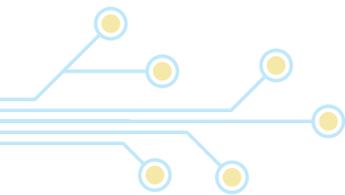
Strategic change management isn't about saying “no” to every request—it's about ensuring that every change adds value without compromising the project's timeline, budget, or mission.

How Should You Proceed?

- 1. Evaluate each change request rigorously.** Assess its impact on your project's goals, timeline, and budget before moving forward.
- 2. Communicate trade-offs to all stakeholders.** If a change impacts resources or delays other features, discuss the consequences with stakeholders so they can make informed decisions.
- 3. Stay focused on strategic outcomes.** Prioritize changes that directly support revenue growth, client retention, and client engagement.

By managing changes thoughtfully, your project remains adaptable without losing sight of its objectives.





By treating maintenance as an essential, ongoing investment—not an afterthought—you ensure your app keeps delivering value for years to come.

3. They Build the Product But Fail To Maintain It.

Building an app is just the beginning. Like a house, your app requires ongoing maintenance to remain functional, secure, and relevant. Software packages age, security standards evolve, and user expectations shift. Without a structured plan for continuous updates and improvements, your app—and your ability to serve your mission—will quickly fall behind.

Nonprofits often underestimate the cost and effort of maintenance in two critical ways:

- 1. They budget for the build, but not the upkeep.** Too often, organizations allocate resources to launch their app but fail to plan for its ongoing needs. When something goes wrong—or when new features are needed—they find themselves without the funds or team to address it.
- 2. They push for new features without maintaining the foundation.** Adding features without upgrading outdated technology is like building an extension on a crumbling house. Old frameworks become harder to work with, slower to update, and eventually impossible to sustain. The longer you delay maintenance, the more expensive and disruptive it becomes.

Maintenance Means Listening to Users, Too

Maintenance isn't just about fixing bugs or upgrading software—it's about listening to your users, too. Real-world usage will uncover new opportunities and challenges that weren't part of the original plan. Organizations that fail to collect and act on user feedback risk losing engagement, retention, and trust.

Responsive maintenance builds loyalty. By embedding feedback tools into your app, conducting regular user testing, and releasing updates based on real-world input, you demonstrate to your users how their voice matters. In a crowded digital landscape, where the “delete app” button is just a tap away, this kind of trust is invaluable.

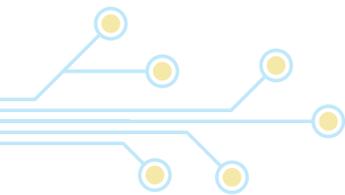
How Should You Proceed?

To ensure your app remains a strategic asset, not a liability, focus on these key steps:

- 1. Plan for the long term.** Work with your team to create a realistic, understandable maintenance plan that accounts for future growth, security updates, and ongoing improvements.
- 2. Differentiate between maintenance and new features.** Budget separately for fixing and upgrading existing functionality versus adding new capabilities.
- 3. Retain your key personnel.** The team that built your app knows it best. If you can't retain them, ensure their work is well-documented so new team members can get up to speed quickly.
- 4. Embed user feedback into your process.** Use tools and agile practices to continuously gather and act on user insights.

By treating maintenance as an essential, ongoing investment—not an afterthought—you ensure your app keeps delivering value for years to come.





The reality is that no matter how well you plan, **real users will engage with your product in unexpected ways. Their feedback will shape the direction of your app.**

4. They Build for Tomorrow Without Listening Today

It takes vision—and guts—to build digital products for your nonprofit. But too often, organizations focus on building for their envisioned future rather than addressing their users' immediate needs. This can lead to overengineering, wasted resources, and disengaged users.

The reality is that no matter how well you plan, real users will engage with your product in unexpected ways. Their feedback will shape the direction of your app, so it's critical to prioritize what they need right now and adapt as you go.

User Testing Is the Key to Building What Your Users Need

User testing is the process of gathering real feedback from your audience by observing how they interact with your app or prototypes. It's not merely a development step—it's a critical tool for ensuring your app delivers value, fosters engagement, and builds long-term loyalty.

Think of it this way: every feature represents an investment of time, money, and resources. Without user testing, you're making that investment based on assumptions, not evidence.

Testing early and often allows you to:

- Drive revenue by identifying features that streamline donations or purchases.
- Boost engagement by creating intuitive, user-friendly experiences.
- Retain clients by showing users that their feedback shapes your app's evolution.

Skipping user testing is risky. It leads to missed opportunities, unresolved pain points, and potential disengagement. In a

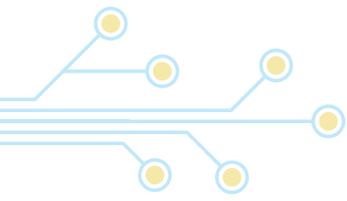
competitive digital landscape, understanding and responding to your users' needs is what sets your app apart.

How Should You Proceed?

- 1. Engage users early and regularly.** Test prototypes or designs with a subset of users (or external testers if you don't have users yet) to gather feedback before development begins.
- 2. Continue to engage users as you add features and updates.** User needs evolve, and so should your app. Build feedback mechanisms—like surveys, in-app prompts, or analytics—into your product to capture insights in real time. Use this data to prioritize future updates and show users that their input matters.
- 3. Build in small, high-priority steps.** Focus on the features your users need most right now, release them quickly, and use their feedback to guide your next steps.
- 4. Plan for scalability, not perfection.** Build your infrastructure for the users you expect in the next 3–6 months, not the grand system you think you'll need in five years. A skilled system architect will ensure your app can scale when needed.

User testing and ongoing engagement are often underestimated or cut from budgets, but skipping them is a costly mistake. By regularly gathering feedback and iterating based on user insights, you ensure your product stays relevant, impactful, and aligned with your nonprofit's mission.





Without governance, technology risks becoming a reactive, tactical tool rather than a strategic enabler.

5. They Fail to Set Up Organization-Wide Technology Governance

The previous points focus on common missteps nonprofits make when planning and executing a single app project. But there's a bigger picture: apps don't succeed in isolation. Even in the smallest nonprofits, an app is one part of a broader technology framework that must work together to advance your mission.

Being a successful deliverer of app projects isn't just about meeting deadlines or budgets for a single app. It requires organization-wide alignment on how technology is managed, prioritized, and integrated into your nonprofit's goals. Without clear governance, app projects can become siloed efforts, disconnected from broader organizational objectives and vulnerable to inefficiencies, miscommunication, and wasted resources.

Technology Governance Aligns Technology Decisions With Your Mission

Technology governance ensures that your organization:

- **Aligns technology decisions across all projects.** Every app or product should work together to directly support your nonprofit's mission.
- **Sets clear, organization-wide priorities.** Governance helps you decide which projects to tackle first and how to allocate resources effectively.

- **Facilitates cross-department collaboration.** By treating technology as a shared responsibility across teams, you break down silos and ensure alignment on objectives.

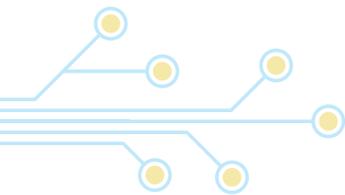
Without governance, technology risks becoming a reactive, tactical tool rather than a strategic enabler. Organizations that fail to establish governance often struggle with conflicting priorities, unclear decision-making processes, and technology investments that fail to deliver measurable results.

How Should You Proceed?

- **Establish a governance framework.** Form a cross-functional technology committee or team to oversee decisions, set priorities, and ensure alignment with your mission.
- **Develop a product roadmap.** Use governance to create a strategic roadmap that outlines short-term and long-term technology goals, ensuring your app evolves alongside your organization's needs.
- **Foster a culture of collaboration.** Encourage communication and partnership between departments, ensuring technology becomes a shared responsibility, not just an IT project.

By embracing technology governance, your nonprofit can move from reactive, siloed technical efforts to proactive, mission-driven innovation.





Final Thoughts

When nonprofits approach app projects in today's world, they can't afford to treat them as standalone technical endeavors. While technical expertise and on-budget delivery are essential, true success comes from building an organization that is an expert deliverer of apps and products aligned with its mission.

Technology needs to be viewed as a fundamental part of your organization—not just a

separate department. When technology acts as a true partner to your mission, it becomes a powerful driver of impact, engagement, and growth.

By avoiding these five common pitfalls and embracing a strategic, organization-wide approach, your nonprofit can create technology solutions that not only work but thrive.

Testimonials



Sandy Long,
COO
The Authors
Guild Inc

“Coat Rack is quite simply the best tech partner we've ever used.”

Coat Rack's tech management for the Authors Guild is seamless and invisible; it allows the Guild to focus on providing the best services, benefits, and resources for authors, knowing the technology behind our platforms is in good hands. They are quick and responsive to any and all questions, and adept at creating any customization we require. Their team is always great to collaborate with and are committed to building effective, user-friendly tools for our staff and members.

Coat Rack's software powers not only the Authors Guild website and member platform but also websites and domains for many of our members. A recommendation from the Authors Guild is a recommendation from thousands of satisfied writers.



Justine Zinkin,
CEO
Neighborhood
Trust Financial
Partners

**“Pick Coat Rack!
They will become an invaluable part of your team for the long-run!”**

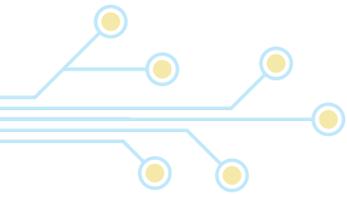
We rely on them for much more than just tactical support; we see them as trusted teammates.

They are fully invested in the solution we are building. They are strategic thinkers, creative and innovative, combining their brilliant technical skills with a comprehensive view of our desired end-state. Their technical expertise is complemented by an unparalleled commitment to the end-user experience.

They are problem-solvers extraordinaire who are invested fully in our results, which is crucial for us as a mission-driven organization. Do not hesitate to involve them in the broader scope of your project.

Engage them in the big picture and they will ensure you build something elegant and impactful.





Theo Vaughn,
Director
of Product
Services
Neighborhood
Trust Financial
Partners

“It is rare to find someone that genuinely cares about our team, our projects, and our clients. Our success is their mission!”

Coat Rack communicates – not just at a surface level, but with real and deep engagement that keeps us informed of their work, and enhances our performance through their knowledge sharing. Working with many vendors over the years, it’s rare to find a partner who genuinely cares about our team, our projects, and our clients. If you want a vendor that you hand a project to and walk away, you will be impressed with Coat Rack. However, If you want a vendor who collaborates with you and prioritizes teamwork and communication, all while building well designed and thought-out projects, Coat Rack is the one. They will always be our vendor of choice, and should be yours.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. We hope it’s given you valuable insights into planning and executing successful app projects for your nonprofit.

If you’d like to explore how tailored technology solutions can help your organization achieve its mission, we’d love to chat. Schedule a free discovery call with us to discuss your goals and challenges—we’re here to help you make a meaningful impact.



Scan the QR code or visit coat-rack.io/discoverycall to get started.

You can also reach us directly at (435) 264-9323.

