

# Technology Affinity Group Strategic Plan

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Version 1.0

November, 2008

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Board of Directors

# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
Background.....	3
Plan Structure .....	4
Core Values.....	4
Purpose .....	5
Vision .....	5
Strategies .....	6
Annual Conference .....	6
Membership Activity .....	8
Trust/Collaboration .....	10
Appendix .....	14
Key Success Loop Models .....	14
TAG Key Success Loops .....	14

## Introduction

The strategic importance of information and communications technology (ICT) to the success and viability of organizations is higher now than at any other time in history. It is hard for most to imagine how we would operate without the technical tools that we use, and now take for granted, every day. With this continual rise in importance of ICT has come an increase in the demand for highly qualified and well informed ICT staff. The Technology Affinity Group is a growing and increasingly vital information source for professionals in non-profit organizations who are charged with managing the information and communications technology function.

The purpose of this document is to outline the Technology Affinity Group's (TAG) future direction. There are many opportunities we can pursue and directions we can take – so many that it is easy to lose focus. This plan attempts to communicate the TAG Board's current thinking on TAG and our aspired future in the coming five years.

Utilizing input from the TAG membership and working with the Executive Director, the Board will develop an annual workplan that is consistent with and supportive of this strategic plan based upon available/projected resources. Progress against the annual plan will be reviewed by the Board to evaluate organizational progress and drive planning in subsequent years.

## Background

TAG's origin was an informal gathering of foundation technology staff at a Council on Foundations' Annual Conference in 1996. At this meeting, technology professionals recognized the value of sharing information regarding the technical operations and management of foundations.

TAG existed informally for a few years. Since the late 1990's, TAG has operated as a program of the Tides Foundation. TAG was managed solely by volunteers and the activities of the organization focused primarily on sharing information via the website and meeting informally in conjunction with Council on Foundations' meetings.

As more and more foundations began hiring technology staff, demand for TAG's services grew. In 2000, The Tides Foundation hired a part-time consultant to manage the charitable activities and by 2003, there was enough interest in technology to host an Annual Conference. During this same time frame, TAG began soliciting membership dues to offset the cost of its operating activities.

Although the charitable activities have been consistent the past several years, participation in the activities has continued to grow. Since the primary focus of The Tides Foundation is grantmaking, The Tides Foundation suggested it would be more appropriate for TAG's charitable activities to operate as a separate 501 (c) (3) organization. On January 1, 2007 TAG received official notification that it had been designated a 501 (c) (3), 509 (a) (2) public charity with an effective date of June 7, 2006.

In anticipation of becoming its own organization, the full board began initial strategic planning discussions during its annual meeting on November 9, 2005. These discussions have continued

both in person and remotely as volunteer board member time has allowed. The result of these discussions is the document you are reading.

## Plan Structure

This plan is organized as follows:

**Core Values.** The basis for our plan rests in our core values. These core values represent who we are as an organization; they are our “identity.” Core values are deeply held; they are such that we would not consider making any important decision without considering them.

**Purpose.** Building on the core values, we have a purpose. The purpose (often referred to as the mission statement) is congruent with the core values and articulates why we exist as an organization.

**Vision.** Our vision represents what kind of organization we want to create. It attempts to articulate what the leadership sees the organization becoming in the coming years. The vision is guided by, and consistent with, our purpose and core values.

**Strategies.** Our strategies represent how we intend to create the organization we see in our vision. These strategies were developed with a careful analysis of how we believe our organization operates – the “system” we are working on – and the specific success factors we believe will help us achieve our vision. Ideas for specific actions we intend to pursue are also articulated here.

**Support materials.** In the appendix, we include the supporting model that was used to generate this plan.

The elements in this plan build upon each other. Our purpose is true to our core values, our vision is supportive of our purpose, and our strategies are designed to achieve our vision. This planning structure was chosen to ensure that the choices we make are ones that tie our actions to our core values and purpose.

## Core Values

The following core values were identified as part of the planning process.

**Information Technology (I.T.) Role.** The application of Information Technology is transformative to non-profit organizations.

**Professional Connections.** Information Technology professionals are much more effective and efficient when they share knowledge and experience with each other.

**Strong Relationships.** Strong relationships and trust provide a solid support structure and safe space for deep sharing.

**Inclusive.** Technology is critical to achieving the mission of philanthropic organizations large and small. Knowledge on Information and Communications Technology in a philanthropic context should be accessible to all non-profits.

## **Purpose**

The statement of purpose represents why we exist as an organization. The articulation of an organizational purpose is usually referred to as a mission statement.

*TAG is a membership organization of foundations that promotes the understanding of how information and communications technology can help its members further their philanthropic goals.*

## **Vision**

Our vision helps us “see” the future of the organization. It is what the TAG Board is trying to create, via the strategies and actions in the next section.

*TAG is an active community of professionals responsible for information and communications technology in the philanthropic sector. The community provides the highest quality resources and learning opportunities in an open and trusted environment.*

## Strategies

We have a compelling vision to work toward and are confident that it is supportive of our core values and purpose. Now we turn to our specific strategies that will help us move toward this vision as a membership organization. The strategies will be multiyear and will be prioritized against a multiyear timeline. More near term priorities will drive the annual TAG workplan.

To support movement toward our vision, we have identified a number of key success factors that we believe should receive our collective focus in the coming years (see Appendix for information on key success factors and the associated key success loops).

**Annual Conference.** TAG holds an annual conference that is designed to bring the TAG community together to learn and share knowledge. As our premier learning and connecting opportunity, we must ensure that the event is of the highest quality to meet member needs.

**Membership Activity.** As an organization that is driven by the membership, having highly active members is critical. We must focus on ensuring that members remain active in the community.

**Trust/Collaboration.** For real learning and peer connections to be successful, we must have a keen focus on building trusting interactions and attend to the methods and tools used for collaboration.

These key success factors relate to other factors as part of our “system.” Based on an analysis of our organization and how we believe it works (see Appendix), we have identified the following goals and actions that will receive our focus.

### Annual Conference

The following goals and actions have been identified to help us address the annual conference opportunities key success factor.

#### *Improve the quality of conference content*

While peer connections are an important part of the conference experience, the quality of the content of the conference is critical to the success and the experience of the attendees. To improve the quality of conference content, we will focus on the following:

1. **Improve the quality and diversity of the agenda committee.** The success of the conference starts with the agenda committee and the process used. We will continue to improve the processes that the agenda committee uses to organize and vet proposals and will look beyond TAG member volunteers (including possibly paid professionals as committee members and presenters) when building the agenda committee.
2. **Cast the net wide to increase the number of presentation proposals.** Increasing the number of presentations proposed for a given conference will give the agenda committee more flexibility in choosing the most appropriate sessions to match the theme and needs of the membership. In addition to a call for sessions, we will look to contact specific members/organizations for proposal ideas.

3. **Reimbursement of travel expenses for presenters.** The high cost of travel can be a detriment for quality presenters from smaller organizations. We will review our policies related to reimbursement of travel expenses for presenters.
4. **Presenter coaching.** Successful conferences require presentations that have consistent quality in terms of format and delivery. We will provide coaching to annual conference presenters to ensure that the best practices in information presentation are understood and incorporated by the presenters.
5. **Presentation guidelines and standards.** Like coaching, guidelines and standards for presentations will be developed and shared to drive up the quality of the presentations.

### *Increase conference attendance*

Like fax machines, peer connections are much more powerful and valuable when there are more peers with whom one can connect. To increase conference attendance, we will focus on the following:

1. **Enhance the TAG web site related to the conference.** To provide better and easier to consume information, we will develop separate web pages just for the conference. The pages will have an improved design focused on providing potential and registered attendees with the information they need.
2. **Improve connections to conference information.** We will work to ensure that links from other for-profit and non-profit sites point to the TAG annual conference.
3. **Improve conference communication.** We will look to alternative communication channels, such as post cards, to raise awareness about the conference. In addition, we will send out information on the conference earlier in the year.
4. **Connection opportunities.** The overall conference agenda will be designed to provide increased ability for attendees to connect to peers. This includes expanding the receptions at the start and end of the conference.
5. **Manage attendance.** Attendance will be managed to ensure the correct balance of members and vendors. Our intention is to allow attendees the opportunity to develop close relationships with foundation peers.

### *Control conference costs*

Many TAG members are from smaller organizations with more limited budgets for professional development. To control conference costs, we will focus on the following:

1. **Look for underwriters.** We will actively pursue underwriting from foundations and possibly vendors to offset conference costs.
2. **Review fee levels.** We will review fee levels for appropriateness and consider alternatives to the current conference fees such as charging different rates for single day attendance.
3. **Maintain TAG conference value.** The TAG conference is relatively inexpensive compared to alternatives. We will maintain the value of the TAG conference by looking for alternatives that can lower the costs of registration while still maintaining high quality and ease of use for attendees.

### *Improve conference experience*

The content is critical to the success of a conference but if the logistics are not done well, experience can suffer. To improve the conference experience, we will focus on the following:

1. **Ease of access.** We will look to restrict the annual conference only to bigger cities that are easy for attendees to get in and out of. We will balance this ease of access against attendee costs for ground transportation and hotels.
2. **Improve logistics function.** Coordinating logistics for a conference is quite challenging and time consuming. We will explore the costs and benefits of using an outside vendor to perform logistics planning and execution.
3. **Improve conference materials.** We will work to provide printouts and downloads of presentations for conference attendees at the beginning of the conference. It also includes looking at alternative methods of capturing sessions such as audio recordings. We will also look at best practices from other successful conferences and incorporate those into the TAG conference.
4. **Improve attendee feedback.** We will design and implement improved methods for gathering attendee feedback during and after the conference.

### *Membership Activity*

The following goals and actions have been identified to help us address membership activity as a key success factor.

### *Increase the participation of TAG members*

As a member driven organization, TAG's value is largely determined by how active the members are in sharing information and learning. To increase the participation of TAG members, we will focus on the following:

1. **Set benchmarks and measure progress.** We will determine the current level of participation compared to national averages for like membership organizations and set benchmarks against which we can evaluate our progress.
2. **Increase local/regional opportunities.** We will expand TAG regional meetings for members.
3. **Expand member involvement.** We will work to include more I.T. staff beyond the leadership from larger foundations in active TAG membership. This will bring more specialized skills to the table thereby increasing the value of the membership. This includes deeper involvement from more member organization staff and incentives to increase involvement. For example, this might include marketing more deeply into member organizations, having monthly topics that apply to members beyond the leadership, and possible discount structures for multiple attendees from the same organization at the annual conferences.
4. **Increase annual conference marketing.** We will increase our marketing efforts around the annual conference to include things like phone call outreach.
5. **Evaluate conference pricing.** We will look at conference pricing, such as pricing for multiple members from the same organization.

### *Increase TAG organization membership*

Diversity and depth of members increases the likelihood of common organizational structures and cultures as well as technical platforms implemented. More member peers will provide more connection points for all members. To increase TAG organization membership, we will focus on the following:

- 1. Market to foundations with Technology staff.** Larger foundations (\$250M and larger) are more likely to have Information and Communications Technology staff than smaller organizations and therefore may have higher needs for TAG's offerings as well as resources with more specialized skills. We will increase our marketing efforts to foundations with assets greater than \$250 million, including increasing participation of more IT staff in these organizations. This will bring more expertise to the group that can be leveraged by both larger and smaller members.
- 2. Diversify outreach methods.** We will increase our outreach efforts through mailings and/or phone calls to the largest 50 private and community foundations and other audiences we are targeting.
- 3. Market to peer organizations.** We will market TAG through peer organizations such as the Foundation Financial Officers Group (FFOG) and the Fiscal And Administrative Officers Group for Community Foundations (FAOG).
- 4. Evaluate TAG fee structure.** We will evaluate the fee structure for TAG around factors such as organizational size, membership type (individual or organizational), and member types (affiliate, associate, etc.).
- 5. Relationship to like groups.** We will engage in discussions with Foundation Information System Managers (FISM), The Communications Network, and other like groups around potential collaborations.

### *Provide more strategic and higher quality services*

The sources for information on the basics of the technology itself are many and are usually of high quality. TAG provides an opportunity to understand technology issues in the context of a non-profit environment. The more strategic, relevant, and high quality we can make our resources, the more value we will provide to members. To provide more strategic and higher quality services, we will focus on the following:

- 1. Improve communication channel management.** We will proactively manage the listserv and/or post content to the website. We will monitor and actively adjust our methods based on what we see is happening in the various channels.
- 2. Evaluate alternative/additional resources.** We will evaluate the efficacy of additional professional IT information service providers such as Forrester.
- 3. Increase number of educational webinars.** Through possible partnerships with NTEN or other organizations, we will look to increase the number of educational webinars available to TAG members.
- 4. Increase peer connection opportunities.** As a key member benefit, we will explore ways to increase peer connection opportunities before, during, and after the annual conference. We will expand TAG regional meetings for members.

5. **Focus on grantmaker specific information.** We will increase TAG's presence as the "go to" information source for information on grantmaker specific tools and services – for example, commercial and privately developed grants management software. Community of practice around grantmaker specific tools and technologies.

### *Increase the member interactivity of the website*

Web users today expect more than to be passive consumers of content. Increasingly, the expectation is to contribute content and insights to add to the content others have shared. Given TAG's learning and connecting vision, it makes sense to enable all members to contribute to the content. To increase the member interactivity of the website, we will focus on the following:

1. **Redesign the website.** We will redesign the TAG website with a focus on ease of use and use of web 2.0 tools to enhance connecting to other members and contributing to the content.
2. **Increase site content.** We will work to increase the amount of relevant content and links to content on the website.
3. **Improve threaded conversations.** Given the importance of peer connecting as well as the need to provide useful knowledge artifacts, we will develop a forum tool to be used to capture conversations more effectively.
4. **Improve administrative systems.** We will focus on improving administrative systems, such as the ability to take dues online.

### *Trust/Collaboration*

The following goals and actions have been identified to help us address membership trust/collaboration key success factor.

### *Develop and publish membership guidelines*

As an organization that builds on trusting relationships, it is appropriate to have a statement of trust that all members understand and adopt. Such a statement could include guidelines such as how to interact, share information, and expectations on privacy and confidentiality. To develop and publish membership guidelines, we will focus on the following:

1. **Research similar organizations.** We will look to established protocols and guidelines for similar organizations and use this as a basis for TAG guidelines and protocols.
2. **Develop confidentiality and participation protocols.** We will develop TAG-specific participation protocols that outline what the expectations are around confidentiality and sharing of information. We will solicit feedback from the membership on the guidelines and protocols and develop a process and supporting system (e.g. wiki) to keep these relevant over time.
3. **Implement ongoing communications.** We will ensure that the new member "on boarding" process includes providing access to the guidelines. We will provide current members with easy access to the guidelines and will engage in an annual review.

### *Translate learning to real world situations*

A key value proposition for TAG is the ability to engage others in like organizations and circumstances. To translate learning to real world application, we will focus on the following:

1. **Post event calls.** We will provide opportunities for members to connect and share/apply learning from industry educational sessions to actual foundation work.
2. **Link to experts in the field.** We will identify and make known experts in the TAG community as noted resources on various topics.
3. **Improve information sharing on “who’s doing what.”** We will improve our information sharing regarding which members are doing what types of activities.

### *Provide peer connection opportunities*

Some of the deepest learning comes from peers who have already walked down a path or have access to resources who have walked down a particular path. To provide peer connection opportunities, we will focus on the following:

1. **Improve conference networking.** We will improve peer connection opportunities both during and between the annual conferences through birds of a feather sessions based on known expertise culled from the member database.
2. **Increase local/regional opportunities.** We will explore the possibility of TAG hosting regional meetings for members in addition to informal connection opportunities based on geography.
3. **Increase creative learning opportunities.** We will develop creative ways to bring out the best and the worst technology projects and the learning from them. We will develop this as a contest for the annual conference with the focus being on learning while having fun.
4. **Develop communities of practice.** We will build communities of practice that are of interest to TAG members based on their input and their online profiles.

### *Encourage joint collaborations around specific topics of interest*

Many member organizations face very similar technology and organizational challenges. Significant benefits such as cost sharing and risk reduction can come from joint collaboration projects with peer organizations. TAG’s role is one of encouraging and connecting. To encourage joint collaboration around specific areas of interest, we will focus on the following:

1. **Solicit membership input.** We will solicit membership input on areas of interest for learning and possible joint collaborations and share this information across the membership.
2. **Create strategic advisory groups.** Using the membership input, we will create strategic advisory groups around 10 key IT areas.
3. **Provide space for collaboration.** We will create team spaces for collaboration around and information sharing for the key IT areas.

### *Increase visibility and perceived value of TAG collaborations*

Members often are not aware of the good work that peers are doing. This information is critical to know to whom one should connect to learn more. To increase visibility and perceived value of TAG collaborations, we will focus on the following:

1. **Increase recognition.** We will look for ways to recognize member collaborative projects and work and highlight this in the TAG community. We will encourage members to write about collaborations and successful projects, develop a template for submission of collaborative projects, develop guidelines, and post samples.

### *Improve TAG's website and other channels*

The web is a key vehicle for members to gather information. TAG's website and other communication channels should be an "early stop" for members when looking for information on non-profit relevant technologies and on what others have done with these technologies. To improve TAG's website and other communication channels, we will focus on the following:

1. **Collaboration and interaction.** We will shift the focus of the TAG website from content publishing (few to many) to more member interaction (many to many).
2. **Improve social networking features.** We will include social networking tools and approaches in the TAG website such as discussion groups, adding links, and finding other members with like profiles.
3. **Improve search.** We will improve the search capability on the website to make content easier to find and consume.
4. **Improve profiles.** We will improve the profile capabilities on the website to make it easier to find others with like interests, implemented technologies, highlights of projects recently completed and upcoming during the year, etc. This includes organizational as well as individual profiles. We will expand the profile area to be more like Facebook or LinkedIn, making it more fun for members to enter their information.
5. **Leverage existing communication channels.** We will keep and improve current listserv communication channel. We will look for ways to make the information shared on the listserv available on the website.

### *Strengthen TAG's reputation*

To be a source of information to members, there must be trust that the organization is a qualified resource. For non-members, the organization must have a reputation of excellence to justify joining and paying fees. To strengthen TAG's reputation, we will focus on the following:

1. **Market to publications.** We will submit articles to non-profit publications such as the Chronicle of Philanthropy to raise awareness of what TAG members are doing and the successes they are having.
2. **Increase TAG organizational visibility.** We will encourage members to include their TAG membership in their bios.

3. **Increase TAG member visibility.** We will develop a process for members to let TAG know of public speaking engagements they might be having so that TAG can highlight these.
4. **Use TAG as organization to test ideas.** We will look to TAG itself to try on new technologies and approaches to work (demonstration through action).

#### *Increase TAG organizational transparency*

To be effective, the TAG Board must have the trust of the membership. One way to build and enhance trust is to increase transparency about Board thinking and activities.

1. **Publish Board activities.** We will publish information on the Board meetings to all members. This will include things such as Board membership, meeting agendas, and meeting minutes.
2. **Communicate the role of Board.** We will actively communicate the role of the TAG Board and board committees.
3. **Publish nominating process.** We will publish information on how members can become part of the Board.
4. **Openly sharing strategic direction.** The Board will openly share the strategic direction of the organization with the membership and solicit feedback on the direction from all members.

# Appendix

## Key Success Loop Models

Key Success Loops (KSLs) represent our current understanding about how the systems we are working on function. They are analysis and communication tools which facilitate team planning of how and where to impact a system. Key success loops are made up of variables (factors), some of which are considered key to success by the team doing the analysis (key success factors). These factors are linked to each other to demonstrate how we believe they impact each other (causality).

By careful analysis of the key success loops that a team feels are important, investment points can be identified. The goal is to get the growth engines moving in the right direction (reinforcing loops--signified by R) and/or to minimize or reverse the impact of the limiting engines (balancing loops--signified by B). Investment points form the basis for a strategic plan--what we will improve and what actions we intend to take to improve.

The following key success factors were identified in the planning process:

- Annual Conference
- Membership Activity
- Trust/Collaboration

These key success factors relate to other factors as part of our TAG "system." The key success factors were analyzed and key success loops were developed to make explicit our theory about how change might occur in our organization. These loops also provided focus for the board discussion and helped us determine where the highest leverage interventions might exist. The following diagram represents all of the loops combined into a single diagram.

## TAG Key Success Loops

