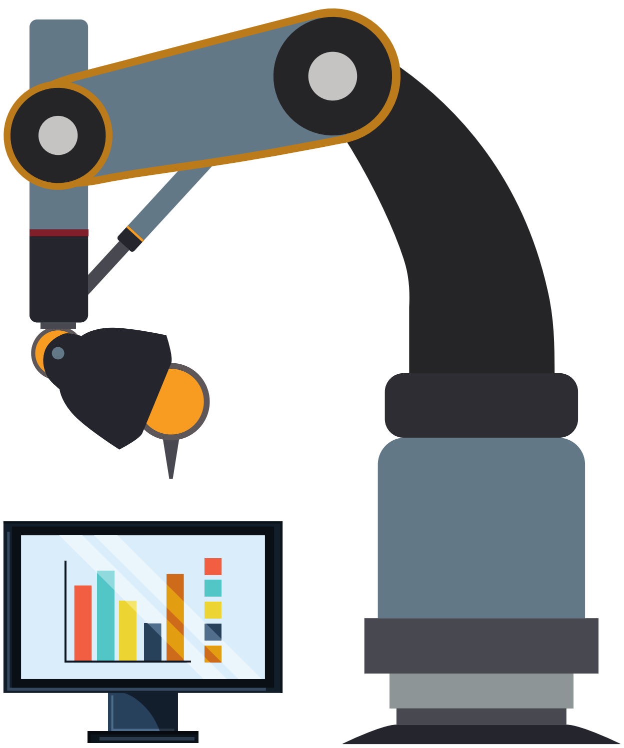
The (Mini) Buyer's Guide to Choosing Software for Nonprofits



THIS GUIDE WILL COVER:

- Benefits of a CRM
- Determining Your Software Needs & Priorities
- 5 Tips For Needs Assessment
- 10 Key Features to Look For in Nonprofit CRM Software
- Needs Assessment

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thedatabank TECHNOLOGY FOR CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

You've decided to look into Constituent Relationship Management (CRM) software for your organization, but where do you start? With so many different options in the market and things to consider, choosing the right CRM software for your organization can feel overwhelming. The good news is, with a little planning before you jump into the world of sales conversations, proposals, and decision-making, you can minimize your stress and end up with a solution that best fits your organization's needs.

This mini-guide was designed to give you an overview of how you can navigate the process of determining which software best fits your organization's needs and goals, at a price you can afford. At the end of the mini-guide, you'll find a complimentary Needs Assessment questionnaire.

WHAT IS CRM SOFTWARE?

A CRM system allows your nonprofit to store all of your constituent data in a single database, giving you a true 360 degree view of your constituents.

WHAT IS SAAS? (SOFTWARE AS A SERVICE)

Software as a Service (SaaS) is the name for software that is hosted in the cloud, by a service provider. Most of this guide revolves around things to consider when choosing a CRM that is sold as SaaS.

BENEFITS OF A CRM

There are many benefits of investing in a CRM for your organization (especially if you are coming from something more fragmented - like Excel spreadsheets):

• **Saves time and increases efficiency -** You only have to enter information once and it is accessible by all who have access to your system - no more data silos!

• **Website integration -** This is provided by most nonprofit CRM vendors and allows information from your donation, event, and other online forms to flow seamlessly into your CRM.

• **Build Capacity -** The ability to streamline workflows, have tools and reports to decrease cumbersome processes of past systems, and be able to spend more time and energy on your mission increases your capacity to do more.

• **Data security -** Because most nonprofit CRMs are backed up at a secure data facility, you no longer have to worry about losing all of your data in the event of a computer crash.

• **Increased mobility -** Unlike a database that is stored on your computer, a cloud-based CRM is ideal for the wireless world we live in. Have all of your data right at your fingertips whether you are at your desk in the office, at home, or on the road.

• **Training and support -** Not only will you have the benefit of an expert showing you how to use all of the great features of your new system, or answering your questions when you are stuck, also consider the time that will be saved by having new employees' technology training off your plate.

• **Infrastructure -** Think of the sort of technology currently used in your office and the people who use it. Do you have all Macs? Do you have your own servers? Do you have any IT staff? The answers to these questions can help you rule out some options right away.

• **Timeline -** Is there a milestone or event that imposes a natural deadline? On the flip side, is there a time that would not be ideal to change systems (e.g. during your year-end campaign)?

• **Decision process -** Who will do the research? Who needs to be involved in the decision process, and most importantly - who needs to sign off on it? Start formulating your plan for getting buy-in from the necessary people in your organization.

5 TIPS FOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Now that you have a better understanding of your organization's current situation, it's time to start thinking about what you would like to see in your new system. There will likely be a lot of opinions about this, so it's important to keep everything organized and communication open. Here are some ways to ensure a smooth process:

1. **Involve all stakeholders and end users**
   Getting input from the start will help ensure broad satisfaction and enthusiastic adoption of your new software.

2. **Document your needs**
   Try using a document like the one at the end of this guide. Having things written out helps you keep from losing focus on your main database needs, and also easily share with others to get their input and make sure your needs align.

3. **Start from the end result/goal and work backward**
   If your end goal is to better reach organizations and individuals doing work on a particular issue, you'll want to gather/store information on the work being done, and find people related to that work. Thinking in terms of your software needs, you would next define who needs access to the information, what format it needs to come out in, what needs to be measured, etc.

4. **Ask good questions**
   An example of a good question to ask is "what will be different or better about our organization as a result of implementing a CRM system?"

5. **Categorize features**
   List your features as "must have", "nice to have, but not a deal-breaker", and "fantasy". This will help you later when comparing products and features.

DETERMINING YOUR SOFTWARE NEEDS & PRIORITIES

Before you start looking at specific nonprofit CRM products and features, you must understand three things:

1. Your organization's goals
2. Your current tools and assets
3. The parameters within which you must work

YOUR GOALS

Think beyond the usual answers like "raise more money" or "deepen relationships with our supporters." Do you have goals that are unique to your organization? Maybe you spend too much time entering data into multiple places. Or perhaps you want to see what other involvement some of your donors have had with your organization over time. Try to think of your goals in terms of priorities and plan for the future.

Investing in new CRM software is generally a long-term investment, so you want to make sure the software that you choose will help you accomplish your goals down the road, as well as today.

YOUR CURRENT TOOLS AND ASSETS

Your current lists and spreadsheets will likely be a major starting point for your new CRM. Take inventory of all your databases, spreadsheets, email contact files, and even paper sign-in sheets you plan to move into a new system. Your inventory should include:

- file name
- format
- number of records
- owner
- purpose
- other relevant details

Estimate how many unique records (people or organizations) you have, which may require some merging and purging before you can answer.

Finally, take note of any other programs or software you use for bulk email, action alerts, or to manage donors, volunteers, events, etc. Which of these programs should remain stand-alone and which would you consider integrating into your CRM?

THE PARAMETERS WITHIN WHICH YOU MUST WORK

While you may have your sights set on a CRM with many fancy bells and whistles, that may not be realistic for your organization. Different companies serve different niche markets and it's important to find one that fits not only your organization's needs, but also its constraints. Let's take a look at what those constraints might be:

• **Cost -** While the cost of a new CRM system can seem intimidating, the best way to think of it is as an investment. Keep in mind you are investing in the future of your organization and part of that includes thinking about how your organization will grow with help from this new CRM. Also, consider how much you spend in staff time on your current software.

10 KEY FEATURES TO LOOK FOR IN NONPROFIT CRM SOFTWARE

While first and foremost your software needs should stem from your organization's unique goals, there are some key features that every organization should look for when comparing their CRM options. Keep in mind, this is a generic list that should be used only as a starting point.

- **Support -** Adequate technical support, training, and manuals are available. Be sure to look at whether these are included or if there are extra costs for any of these.
- **Mobile -** Constituents can use the tools on mobile devices (e.g. online donations). This is of growing importance.
- **Access -** You can get to the software when and where you need to, whether it is cloud-based or on a network.
- **Customization -** The software is configured and personalized for you, and you aren't stuck with a cookie-cutter product.
- **Contact History -** It tracks online and offline interactions with constituents.
- **Import/Export -** It's easy to move your data in and out in a standard file format.
- **Relationships -** You can see how constituents are related to the organization, and to each other.
- **Upgrades -** The software is kept up to date, and upgrades are provided preferably at no charge and requiring little to no effort from you.
- **Integration -** The database is integrated with or includes tools for email, web (online forms), and possibly social media.
- **Ease of Use -** The software feels intuitive and efficient. You must balance this against sophistication of features.

THANK YOU FOR READING OUR BUYER'S GUIDE!

To learn more about thedatabank's CRM software, visit www.thedatabank.com

ABOUT THEDATABANK

thedatabank, gbc was founded in 1998, through the vision of its two founders, Chris Hanson and Mark Paquette. thedatabank provides high performance, customizable CRM software solutions to nonprofit and government organizations around the United States. thedatabank strives to be a technology partner and resource for all nonprofits.

TECHNOLOGY FOR CHANGE™

Database and Communication Technology Needs Assessment

This Needs Assessment will help you better understand your organization's needs and priorities in a CRM.

Why are you considering new software and what are your main priorities in a database and communications system?

What tasks will you use the software for?

What is your current software, and what do you like and dislike about it?

How many total records do you manage? (All sources of data you collect)

What kinds of constituents does your organization have a relationship with?

What is your budget and timeline for a new database and communication system?

What is the technical skill level of your users? Are they using your current database?

If not, why?

Are they adequately trained and supported?

Do you have any special requirements?

In looking for a software solution, please rate the following in terms of importance to your organization (1 being not important, 5 being extremely important):

Ease of Use:	1 2 3 4 5
All in One System:	1 2 3 4 5
Free Training and Support:	1 2 3 4 5
The company you purchase from:	1 2 3 4 5
Total Cost of Ownership (this includes software, software upgrades, hardware, customization, training, support, and internal conversion costs):	1 2 3 4 5