

SETTING UP A NONPROFIT OFFICE TOOLKIT



Setting up a Nonprofit Office Toolkit

Welcome to the Setting up a Nonprofit Office Toolkit! This practical toolkit will provide you with resources and tips for conducting an office move as well as setting up your nonprofit office.

In developing this kit, I compiled resources and tips that I use when moving my nonprofit to a new office.

This toolkit will cover the steps to setting up a nonprofit office including:

- 1. The Office Search**
 - a. Where to Find Space**
 - b. Things to Know About Office Space**
 - i. Rentable Sq. vs. Usable Sq.
 - ii. Class A, B, C Space
 - iii. Full Service
- 2. Lease Negotiations**
 - a. Working with a Real Estate Attorney**
- 3. Coordinating the move**
 - a. Working with Moving Companies**
 - b. Copy Machine and Phone System Move**
- 4. Office Logistics**
 - a. Furniture**
 - b. Computers and Equipment**
 - i. Basic IT Components
 - ii. Hardware and Software Selection
 - iii. Software I Use
- 5. Celebrate**

Following these steps and utilizing these resources should help you through a smooth office move.

I am passionate about your nonprofit's operations!

Sincerely,

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1. The Office Search

When I was first assigned the task of finding a new office space for my nonprofit--I didn't know where to begin. I didn't know about commercial real estate brokers so I started driving around calling numbers listed on buildings. Over time I learned there many resources out there to help nonprofits find the right space.

Where to Find Space

Below are some strategies that have worked well for me in the past.

- Contact a commercial real estate broker. Brokers are great because they receive a detailed listing service and can show you spaces that match your specific requirements, like number of private offices, total square feet, and location. Brokers do receive a commission but that commission is paid solely by the building owner/landlord--you don't have to pay a penny for their services. I have really benefited from my broker's as well as his help during lease negotiations.
- Contact the multi-tenant office spaces for nonprofits listed on the Nonprofit Centers Network to see what available space they had. <http://www.nonprofitcenters.org/>. You can do a search by state on their website. The centers listed on this site are great because many of them provide a shared conference room and other amenities that renting an office space on your own doesn't have.
- See if your local city has a nonprofit specific office space searching resource, for example in the San Francisco Bay Area, the Northern California Community Loan Fund (NCCLF) www.ncclf.org has a space matching service e-mail. Also, in San Diego the consulting firm Nonprofit Management Solutions provides a seeking space posting service through their www.npworks.org website. Consequently, in many cities Foundations lease portions of their office to start-up or small nonprofits, or there are coworking spaces available <http://blog.coworking.info/>.
- Follow traditional methods of contacting spaces listed on www.Craigslist.org and call phone numbers listed on available space signs on buildings.

Things to Know About Office Space

Below is some helpful information to know when looking at office space. Keep these things in mind because they do affect the price of the space!

- Rentable Sq. vs. Usable Sq.: Usable sq. feet is the actual sq. feet of the space, compared to rentable sq. feet includes a percentage of the common areas--hallway, lobby, elevator. Most offices space prices are listed by rentable sq. feet.

- Class A, B, C space: This is fairly self explanatory, Class A office spaces are brand new buildings, have all the amenities, and cost the most. Class B spaces are a little older, have less amenities, and cost less. Class C spaces are even older or run down, have less amenities than Class B, and tend to be affordable.
- Full Service: Includes utilities; however this is deceiving because if you sign a long-term lease in a full service building, you will still have to pay a percentage of the building's operating costs. This percentage is based on what percentage of the building that you occupy, so you still end up paying for utilities, just in a different way.

2. Lease Negotiations

Once you have found your ideal space, then you must negotiate and secure a price with the landlord. My motto is, "never settle for the price listed." Survey the area, see what spaces are renting for near the potential new office, then you will know if the asking price is above or below market rate. Also, interview other tenants in the building to see if the landlord is pleasant. A bad landlord can create an enormous amount of stress in the office; I know this from personal experience it is a pain to deal with a bad landlord. Furthermore, it is important to involve someone in this lease process who is a good negotiator. Some landlords may be willing to give nonprofits space below market rate because they can write off the difference. In one instance, I not only negotiated a space below market rate, I also received a \$50,000 grant from the landlord. The landlord was very motivated to get us into the space!! In many instances, spaces in less desirable areas or near construction zones are the most affordable.

Working with a Commercial Real Estate Attorney

You always want to have your lease reviewed by a Commercial Real Estate Attorney, even if your landlord says it is a standard lease. Your landlord could add things into the lease that aren't standard like make you responsible for all the maintenance improvements in the space. I use Kate Neiswender as my Commercial Real Estate Attorney. <http://www.ilawyerdirectory.com> She was recommended to me by my personnel attorney and she's quick and affordable for nonprofits.

3. Coordinating the Move

Once you have negotiated the price and signed the lease, there is a lot of planning to do before moving into your new office. I scheduled multiple walk throughs of the space with various vendors to help me plan these out these steps before the move. These vendors included:

1. Moving Company
2. Phone/DSL Internet wiring company
3. Painting Company
4. Carpeting Company
5. Volunteer Interior Designer/Furniture layout consultant

There are nonprofits across the country like Rebuilding Together <http://www.rebuildingtogether.org/> that provide volunteer designers or donated office improvements. I put an advertisement on www.Craigslist.org for a volunteer designer or design student to help with the new layout of the space, I also looked for a muralist too. There are many options for planning the design as well as beautifying your new space. In one instance, I was able to get many large poster frames donated to add art in the space.

Working with Moving Companies

Plan at least 2 to 3 months in advance to meet with your moving company at your old and new site to plan the move. Moving companies are not cheap and will cost at least a couple thousand dollars depending on the furniture you have. Always ask if they have a nonprofit discount. Another option is renting a truck or Uhaul for the move. If you plan to involve the Uhaul way, then involve your constituents in all aspects of the move and plan a moving day or a painting day. Or post the move day on a local volunteer resource center website like www.volunteermatch.org as a way to get extra help for that day.

Copy Machine and Phone System Move

If you have leased copy machine or phone system, check with your provider because the warranty for those machines may be void if you move it on your own to the new office site. There is usually a fee for your phone or copy machine vendor to move the equipment, however it will end up costing your organization more money if the copy machine or phone system breaks during the move and your organization has pay for all future maintenance costs.

4. Office Logistics

Once you conduct all the pre-planning for the move, now its time to take care of all the logistics and details of the move. These logistics include what furniture and equipment you chose for the new office. Once you figure out all these logistics then you can make the big move.

Furniture

Make a wish list of what furniture you want for the office and share it with various nonprofit listservs, on your website, and through the resources listed below. Many of your donors may have furniture they are trying to get rid of too.

Nonprofits can get free furniture through several locations including:

- www.Ireuse.com This is a California specific free furniture site for nonprofits. I have furnished several offices using them!!
- www.isf.org Also, California specific--discounted Furniture and other items for Nonprofits. I filled out a small application and was able to purchase furniture at a huge discount for my organization, like desks for \$20-\$30 etc.
- <http://www.FreeCycle.org> They have a series of e-mail lists where people post what free stuff they have and you can also search for items on their website.
- <http://www.Craigslist.org>

Computers and Equipment

A move is perfect time to get new or refurbished computer equipment. First, plan to replace the most outdated equipment. It is amazing how better computer equipment relates to improved office productivity. Second, verify that your office has all the basic IT components listed below.

Basic IT Components:

- Computer
- Some type of Internet connection
- Printer
- Fax
- Phone (or VOIP-phone through the internet)

Additional IT Components for larger organizations:

- Server
- Hub to give network capabilities and a router or switch.

Last, select and set up your new hardware and software before you move into the new office.

Hardware and Software Selection

<http://www.techsoup.org/hsc/> Tech Soup's Healthy and Secure Computing program has developed computer and technology standards for small to mid-sized nonprofits. Their free booklet is available through their website.

It is important that nonprofits keep an inventory of technology products and a log of what goes wrong with each product as well as what is done to fix the problem. The technology inventory should include: Vendor/manufacture name, Model Name, Type of Operating system, Processor, RAM, Hard disk, Monitor, Network type, User Name, Date of purchase, and Item function.

Nonprofits can receive donated Nonprofit Software from www.Techsoup.org. www.Idealware.org provides free nonprofit software reviews. Also, the Tech Foundation has a donation software program where nonprofits can receive deeply discounted hardware and software for their organizations. I especially like ordering discounted items through CDW which you can log-in through the Tech Foundation.

Many nonprofits want to know what software I recommend they use in their nonprofits; however I don't feel comfortable recommending certain software. I will share what I use in my nonprofit and what works for me, under the caveat that each organization is different and has different needs and requirements for software. Each nonprofit should create a process for evaluating and selecting the right software vendor for your organization.

Software I Use:

- Finance/Accounting: There is other financial management software out there, however I prefer Quickbooks.
- (Online) Database: I track my constituents and donors, send out mass e-mails to them, do event registration through Democracy in Action.
- E-mail: I use the free version of Eudora, and it seems to have less spam and viruses than some of the other e-mail programs I have used.
- Calendar/Project Management: I track my funding deadlines and other nonprofit operations to do items and milestones through Basecamp.
- Documents: I use both Microsoft Office and Open Office. Open Office is free and has the ability to convert documents into PDFs.
- Browser: I can have multiple browser windows open at the same time through Mozilla Firefox's tab method.
- Anti-Spy ware: I use Spybot Search and Destroy, and Adaware all free.
- I talk for free through my computer using Skype.
- Anti-virus: I use Symantec.

The entire website design process has changed in the past couple of years to now there are programs where nonprofit staff can easily update its website online. These systems are called Content Management Systems. Every nonprofit has different requirements for what they want to include on their website. Nonprofits should consult with an "expert" to assist with creating or improving its website because there are so many choices out there. There are now new free open source website programs to choose from like Drupal, Plone, and Joomla. Companies like Radical Designs <http://www.radicaldesigns.org>, PicNet www.picnet.net and Float Left <http://www.floatleft.org> provide content management system website creation for nonprofit organizations. However, nonprofits should find the best nonprofit website designer that works for them.

Nonprofits can post their technology and/or website request on several nonprofit techies listservs and receive many responses from technology consultants who can help. Some of these listservs are nten-discuss@groups.nten.org or npo-techies@lists.compasspoint.org Aspiration <http://www.aspirationtech.org> holds Penguin Day conferences across the USA to help non-profits demystify open source software and see what is available.

5. Celebrate!

Now your nonprofit has successfully moved into its new nonprofit office, now its time to schedule an open house party to celebrate! Invite your donors, supporters, constituents, and friends to this festive occasion to enjoy your new space and continue to support your organization. You may want to do a donation pitch at the event too!

About the Author

Heather has served as Operations Manager, Consultant, Speaker and Trainer to nonprofit organizations in California and Illinois for over 6 years. She earned her Masters of Management in Nonprofit Administration from North Park University in Chicago, Illinois. Heather is currently pursuing her PhD in Leadership at the University of San Diego. Heather is creator and author of the Nonprofit Management and Operations blog and was interviewed by the national women's blogging website —Blogger; quoted as being a, “Nonprofit Operations Guru.” Heather is currently blogging about Nonprofit Leadership at her Nonprofit Leadership 601 blog.

Disclaimer

Heather is not getting paid by the particular companies or consultants to provide recommendations. The resources listed in the toolkit Heather has found helpful in starting a nonprofit organization. This information is provided strictly for educational purposes.

Many of these resources will be helpful to you and others may not be helpful. Feedback is always appreciated, so any suggestions or comments on how to make this toolkit more helpful to future clients would be much appreciated.

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Are you ready to move away from your cramped space or your founder's dining room and find a new office for your nonprofit? This toolkit provides resources and steps to guide you during your nonprofit's office move. The toolkit is broken into five key steps to take before, during and after your move process. These steps include: the office search, lease negotiations, coordinating the move, office logistics, and celebrating your new space!!

The toolkit also provides links to free items for your nonprofit's new office, including: free furniture, free software, and much more!!



Heather is passionate about your nonprofit's operations!! She has served as an Assistant Director, Operations Manager, Consultant, Speaker and Trainer to nonprofit organizations in California and Illinois for over 6 years. She earned her Masters of Management in Nonprofit Administration from North Park University in Chicago, Illinois and is currently pursuing her PhD in Leadership at the University of San Diego. Heather is creator and author of the Nonprofit Management and Operations blog and was interviewed by the national women's Blogging website—Blogger which quoted her as being a "Nonprofit Operations Guru." Heather currently blogs about Nonprofit Leadership at her Nonprofit Leadership 601 on Blogspot.com.

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