

DATABASES

Databases can help you to manage your mailing lists and organize your mailings more efficiently. Organizations with more than 100 names on their mailing list or that track detailed information about their supporters are good candidates for a database. Databases can be as simple as names and addresses listed in a spreadsheet document such as in Excel, or as complicated as having your own personally designed program. **If you do not have much experience with databases you should definitely consider hiring a consultant to help you to decide on and design an appropriate database application.**

DATABASES CAN HELP YOU TO:

1. Manage your mailing lists by:

- ✓ Streamlining your mailings by automatically printing labels or printing right onto postcards or envelopes.
- ✓ Targeting your mailings by issue, demographics, electoral districts, counties, zip codes, previous actions taken, or desired frequency of receiving alerts.
- ✓ Breaking up your longer lists into sub-groups for easy management.

2. Track activities for funders or internal management.

- ✓ Document the number and types of events you do.
- ✓ Track expenses, volunteer activities, and history of participation for volunteers.

CHOOSING AND DEVELOPING A DATABASE:

What do you need from a database?

A good rule of thumb when deciding on a database is simpler=cheaper; more complex=more expensive.

- ✓ If you have simple needs such as mailing labels or simple sorting abilities you can use a spreadsheet like Excel (comes standard with Microsoft Office), Quattro Pro, Corel or Lotus 123. Spreadsheets can organize your data by field (e.g., first name, last name, street address, state, zip and phone) and sort your data by these fields (e.g. alphabetically by last name or by zip). By combining your data with the mail-merge program in applications like Microsoft Word, you can easily create mailing labels.
- ✓ Spreadsheets are only practical if you are storing small amounts of information per person such as their phone number and address. There are also simple database programs such as My Mail List or MS Outlook that are easy to use with small mailing lists.
- ✓ If you have more complex database needs, such as storing a lot of information per person, more elaborate sorting abilities, or running reports, you may need to get a specialized database program.

Database Software

You have two options when choosing a database application:

1. Pre-Fabricated

- ✓ Download cheap/free software from the Internet. There are many simple programs available. Two options are E-Base, available at www.techrocks.org, and www.organizersdb.org. The latter is particularly good for groups new to databases.
- ✓ Purchase a pre-made software package. Pre-made database applications are well thought out and “debugged,” but often cannot be customized to fit your unique needs. However, there are some programs, such as Microsoft Access, that can be customized.

2. Custom

- ✓ You can hire a consultant to make a custom database designed specifically for your group's needs. Consultants can be expensive, but can help you to map out your technology needs, current technology infrastructure and capacity, and help you to make the best use of the latest technology. Consultants can provide you with one-on-one assistance to develop technology that best suits your organizations goals and budget. They can provide custom databases, websites and other programs, technology planning and upgrading, suggestions on buying appropriate hardware and software, and general technology problem solving. Sources for consultants for non-profits are listed below:
- ✓ TechRocks (www.techrocks.org)
- ✓ The Fund for the City of NY (www.fcny.org)
- ✓ TechSoup (www.techsoup.org)
- ✓ NPower (www.npower.org)