

JOINT COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR THE SOCIAL WELFARE SECTOR

Revised Information Technology Strategy for the Social Welfare Sector

BACKGROUND

The Information Technology Strategy for the Social Welfare Sector (the IT Strategy) has been drawn up in consultation with the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) and launched in March 2001 after seeking the support of the Social Welfare Advisory Committee and Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services. The IT Strategy aims to enable non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to -

- (a) strengthen their management, communication and service delivery; and
- (b) assist welfare service recipients and disadvantaged individuals to use information technology (IT) by making IT accessible and ensuring that they have the skills to use it.

2. After implementing the IT Strategy for about two years, the Joint Committee on Information Technology for the Social Welfare Sector (JCIT) has advised at its meeting held on 1 August 2003 to consolidate the outcome and experience of the funded IT initiatives and explore the future direction.

REVISED IT STRATEGY

3. Upon consolidation of feedback collected through a series of focus group discussion, questionnaire survey and seminar, it was agreed that the current IT strategy set out in 2001 remains a pertinent guide for NGOs to exploit IT to underpin their corporate governance and business development in the areas of infrastructure, communications, accessibility, application systems and humanware. JCIT endorsed the revised IT Strategy at its meeting held on 6 October 2004, of which the major directions are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

Infrastructure

4. For procurement of personal computers (PCs) for agencies to improve work efficiency and internal administration, NGOs should consider flexible redeployment of their own resources. The Lotteries Fund (LF) grant can be considered for situations where the enhancement of IT infrastructure is an essential and integral part of an IT project. This is subject to the assessment on the support-worthiness of the project. In addition, the capacity of existing IT infrastructure and their availability will be assessed to recommend the support-level of funding.

Communication

5. The continuous and expanding use of email and Internet websites for communication is encouraged. The recommendation on setting up a portal site to facilitate NGOs and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) to have more cost-effective means of sharing and exchanging documents and information is worth pursuing. As this new initiative involves streamlining of workflow and re-engineering of business processes for both NGOs and SWD, it is necessary to conduct a feasibility study to propose business as well as technical options and assess the cost effectiveness of the preferred options. The study is proposed to be conducted in early 2006 after consolidating experience from the implementation of the Core Application Development Project (CAP) on Human Resource Management (HRM) and Financial Management (FM).

Accessibility

6. To underpin the Government's Digital 21 Strategy, support for IT initiatives on bridging the digital divide for elders, disabled persons and disadvantaged individuals should continue, subject to the availability of resources and support-worthiness of the proposals. NGOs are encouraged to consider incorporating interactive features to facilitate communication with service customers and the public, and accessibility functions like Alt text and text-to-speech. A Digital Solidarity Fund set up under the co-ordination of HKCSS provides an alternative source of funding, which NGOs can tap for IT projects relating to bridging the digital divide.

Application Systems

7. NGOs are suggested to put more emphasis on developing IT applications to enable service delivery. The use of web-based technology to facilitate future sharing of IT applications is encouraged. In addition, IT applications which can be opened for shared-use would be accorded with priority. Such applications could lower the upfront cost on IT investment and

avoid reinventing the wheels. Common applications can be developed on modular basis so as to allow flexible adoption of a combination of modules to reduce maintenance cost. NGOs should also be given the flexibility of choosing off-the-shelf package with minor customisation, if necessary, to suit their individual business needs.

8. The future IT applications should be developed with open technology and technical options to support future integration. In the long run, the data structures and codes of common IT applications could be shared among NGOs to enable them to develop their individual IT applications. Such convergence to common formats will facilitate and reduce complication on system integration and data migration should there be such opportunities in future.

Humanware

9. Most of the NGOs have deployed social workers and administrative staff to oversee IT management and development in their agencies. At the corporate level, the agency administrators are suggested to consider laying down policy statements to provide vision, mission and value on humanware development, and the ways in which they can be achieved, e.g. by sponsoring staff to attend IT training programme and fostering a learning culture. As the Information Technology Resource Centre (ITRC) formed within HKCSS has been playing an important role on promoting IT humanware, ITRC will consider assisting in the following areas-

- (a) to continue organising IT training programmes to meet the needs of NGOs; and
- (b) to set out guidelines and/or reference models to assist NGOs of different organisational sizes or stages of IT development to work out their own HR policy on IT.

10. The IT Advisors Scheme being supported by IT professional bodies on voluntary basis and piloted by SWD has proved to be useful to NGOs in conceiving and implementing their IT projects, and in general IT management. In view of ITRC's established network with NGOs and various IT professional bodies, SWD and ITRC could explore jointly more optimal and effective ways to strengthen the Scheme. SWD will continue to manage the Scheme and mobilise more volunteers to serve as IT advisors.

11. NGOs are suggested to develop IT strategy suitable to their agencies and at their own pace. The ITRC will consider developing templates to assist NGOs in laying down their organisational IT strategy. SWD will incorporate

the use of IT for enhancing organisational efficiency in the Advanced Management Program for Chief Executive Officers and Senior Managers of NGOs. Future training opportunities in this area may be arranged as and when appropriate.

FUNDING OF IT PROJECTS

12. LF would continue to be one of the funding sources to support IT development. Other sources of funding, such as agencies' internal resources, donations, charitable funds and Digital Solidarity Fund should be tapped where appropriate. Generally, LF is granted on non-recurrent and project-by-project basis and the payment is made in accordance with the deliverables of a project. The requirement for post-implementation evaluations to assess the cost-effectiveness of the funded IT projects and whether their objectives are achieved will continue to be enforced.

Social Welfare Department
October 2004