

Helping the Helpers: How Microsoft is Empowering NGOs Amid COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis heightens the vulnerability of marginalized communities. And the ripple effects of the pandemic would surely be felt long after the current state of emergency is over. Every effort must be made to minimize the immediate as well as its long-term socio-economic impact on the weaker sections of the society. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are at the frontlines of such efforts.

In their quest to deliver value amidst such unprecedented disruption, NGOs are faced with difficulties of their own. Traditionally, they used to drive impact through in-person and on-ground interactions. However, now the call for social distancing is making it difficult for them to run programs, reach out to beneficiaries and coordinate among staff. Additionally, COVID-19 has a significant impact on their financial systems, security protocols and communication strategies.

To get through these difficult times, technology can provide critical support to the NGOs. Remote working is one of the most effective ways in which the staff members can continue to deliver value even in the backdrop of intensifying commotion. While working remotely may be a new experience for many of them, it need not be a stressful transition.

Here, the sector can take a cue from the education industry. An increasing number of schools in India and all over the world are migrating their classes online due to COVID-19. NGO employees can also benefit from the [experiences of Lily Zheng](#), my China-based colleague. She narrates her learnings from remote working while weathering the COVID-19 outbreak.

Here at Microsoft, we're committed to delivering relevant, affordable, and innovative cloud solutions to help nonprofits tackle the world's greatest challenges. Our nonprofit solutions are purpose-built to assist these entities in streamlining operations better and enhancing the productivity of their programs. We aim to bridge the existing digital divide in the NGO sector and amplify the impact of their efforts. With this goal, we have designed our offerings on a three-pronged principle:

We offer the latest best-in-class cloud technology to enable NGOs to run and grow their operations securely.

Through our *Microsoft Partner* ecosystem around the world, we're fueling scale and the ability for every nonprofit to move to the cloud.

- Dynamics 365 Nonprofit Accelerator

One of the solutions created from such partnerships, [Dynamics 365 Nonprofit Accelerator](#), helps nonprofits improve end-to-end mission delivery and insights by powering core processes like program delivery, constituent management, fundraising, volunteer management, impact measurement, and more. The system leverages the Common Data Model for Nonprofits.

- Office365 Business Essentials and E1

[The Office365 Business Essentials and E1](#) for nonprofits enables volunteers to accomplish more with features such as file sharing, real-time co-authoring, and online meetings. It also provides for collaboration through mobile connectivity. We are currently offering Office 365 E1 for 6 months for nonprofit volunteers.

- Microsoft 365

[Microsoft 365](#) is an integrated solution that combines the productivity of Office 365 with advanced security and device management capabilities. NGOs can access the solution for free for up to 10 users. They can purchase additional licenses at discounted rates.

We also offer donations and discounts to the NGOs on a range of Microsoft platforms.

Our collaboration solutions enable NGOs to improve efficiency and impact.

- Crisis Communication App

Earlier this month, our team developed the [Crisis Communication App](#) to help customers coordinate by information sharing and team collaboration in response to evolving conditions in times of crisis. The rapid response application enables users to quickly get updates on internal company news, answers to frequently asked questions, and get access to critical information like links and emergency contacts.

- Microsoft Teams

[Microsoft Teams](#) is another incredibly powerful tool for online collaboration and unified communications. Since the outbreak of the epidemic earlier this year, we are offering free access to the platform to everyone. The 'freemium' version of Microsoft Teams is valid through January 2021. It includes video meetings for up to 250 participants and Live Events for up to 10,000, recording and screen sharing, along with real-time collaboration tools such as audio and video chatting.

We promote the digitalization of the sector through NGO-specific digital skills training.

- The Digital Skill Center for Nonprofits

[The Digital Skill Center for Nonprofits](#) by TechSoup is a one-stop learning path platform full of product training and skill-building content. The on-demand courses enable staff members of nonprofits to improve their digital fluency. The training helps them to use technology as a tool to fuel organizational efficiencies and impact.

- Teams for Nonprofits course

[The Teams for Nonprofits](#) course is currently available for free for members of nonprofits enterprises working remotely. Additionally, this webinar on [Online Remote Meeting](#) provides a useful overview of creating meetings on Microsoft Teams.

[Suggested: Insert a relevant image here]

The COVID-19 pandemic is the tipping point for integrating technology in the processes and operations of NGOs. Over the long term, technology-assisted development programs can drive greater reach and impact of efforts.

[Check this site](#) to see the eligibility criterion for availing nonprofit offers by Microsoft.
