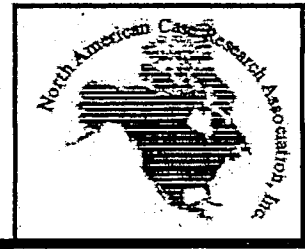


TechMission: Jesus, Justice, and Technology



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TechMission is a Christian not-for-profit social service organization.

Our values are Jesus, Justice, and Technology.

Our mission is to support Christian organizations in using technology to transform vulnerable communities.

www.TechMission.org

On a Sunday in early January, 2009, Andrew Sears, founder and executive director of TechMission, thought about the choices he had to make and how they could impact TechMission's future growth. Programs, people, and funding were the three elements that had to come together to further TechMission's objective of serving the disadvantaged by means of information technology. Growth could not change the faith-based, community focus that formed the bedrock of the organization. It was likely that the not-for-profit social services playing field would be very different with Barack Obama as president and the related change in government from Republican to Democratic. Complicating things, the overall economic climate was the worst that the U.S. had seen in over fifty years. Sears commented:

My goal six months ago was to grow revenues from the \$1 million level to a \$10 million level. Under ideal conditions, this could have taken two years. If the United States goes into the next Great Depression, that time frame may have to be revised. . . . We need to scale our organization to the \$10+ million level to gain access to many of the large secular national foundations. We have to scale our organization, which means that we have to become more professional and business-like, but without compromising our core value of justice, which requires that we remain close to the community and its values. We have been very innovative technologically in providing programs—now we have to be equally innovative on the fundraising side.

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SEARS' MOTIVATION

When he was asked about the motivation behind the founding and nurturing of his organization, Sears replied with the following Biblical quote:

... The king said ... "You have my Father's blessing; ... For when I was hungry, you gave me food; when thirsty, you gave me drink; when I was a stranger you took me into your home, when naked you clothed me; when I was ill you came to my help, when in prison you visited me." Then the righteous will reply, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and fed you, or thirsty and gave you drink, or naked and clothed you? When did we see you ill or in prison and come to visit you?" And he will answer "I tell you this: anything you did for one of my brothers here, however humble, you did for me." Matthew 25:34-41.¹

Religious faith had always been part of his life and Sears went on to explain his personal story, which he viewed as important to understanding what TechMission was all about. He had seen both ups and downs in his life. Growing up in Kansas City as the son of an inner city Baptist minister, he had been disowned by his parents at seventeen. At issue were both his personal behavior and his refusal to attend Liberty University, Jerry Falwell's Bible-oriented college in Virginia. Sears struck out on his own and attended the University of Missouri. Majoring in Computer Science, he received straight As and graduated as valedictorian of his class. Much of his motivation in college was the desire to avoid the fate of many of his friends back home, who he saw doing drugs or going to jail. Once out of that environment, he became strongly committed to doing something worthwhile with his life. A mentor had once told him: "In life, you only get one chance" and education became his "one chance."

To further his education, Sears enrolled in a joint Master's degree program at MIT, studying policy, business and computer science. Pursuing his interest in technology, he co-founded what became a multi-million dollar research group at MIT as well as an Internet start-up. Although profitable, he felt the intellectual challenge of the computer business was unsatisfying and explored his more altruistic side by volunteering at an inner city computer center in Boston.

Making a difference is what drives me. I've done Internet start-ups, so I've got an entrepreneurial focus and vision. I used to make \$200 an hour consulting. ... But what I found when I was involved in Internet start-ups was that I was a different type of person than all the other people there. This was back in 1997 and I had three personal options of what I could do: one was to go the Bill Gates route. The other was to pursue something completely different like counseling, and the third was to do some sort of volunteer work. The personal part of it is that I grew up in the 'hood and I saw my friends' lives destroyed. Technology and faith became my tickets out and I know that together, they have power.

In 1996, while still at MIT, Sears faced several crises. His Internet company failed when the venture capitalists cut off its funding. A serious personal relationship dissolved, and his mother was dying of cancer. True to his upbringing, Andrew turned to prayer, seeking a more productive way to use his faith and his knowledge of technology. He described this new way as a "vision," kind of a high tech version of Saint Paul's vision on the road to Damascus.² Andrew saw that by applying his knowledge of information technology he could build an organization that would serve the poor and disadvantaged.

I view my role at TechMission as part entrepreneur and part venture capitalist. I previously consulted for St. Paul Venture Capital and Sprint's new Internet products division.

In the for-profit world, you basically have to assess the probability of a project having high return on investment. In the nonprofit world, you have to consider the probability of a project having a high social return on investment. Most venture capitalists have focus areas (like Internet technologies), and then within those focus areas they are aware of specific opportunity areas (like social networking). It is similar for us. Our focus area is anything that falls within our mission and values of Jesus, justice, and technology. Within that domain, we keep our finger on the pulse of nonprofit innovation to find specific opportunity areas, asking the question, "What are the new opportunities that are most likely to have a social ROI?" or, "Within our mission, what innovations are likely to help the poor the most?"

THE ORGANIZATION

TechMission began as part of a Black church ministry called Bruce Wall Ministries. It started as one community computer center based in a church. It then became part of the Association of Christian Community Computer Centers (AC4), an organization created to support any ministry that used technology to serve at-risk communities by providing access to training, resources and a Web-based community.³ In 2002, TechMission separated from Bruce Wall Ministries and incorporated as a separate not-for-profit. Following the AC4 concept, TechMission began its TechMission Boston Program, servicing the local community with after-school technology education classes for children and adult technology education programs. Two years later, with support from the Federal government through AmeriCorps,⁴ TechMission Boston expanded to Los Angeles. Presently called TechMission Corps, the program assists at computer centers and youth ministries, a total of twenty-six local organizations in Boston, Los Angeles, Denver, New York City, and Chicago. This urban focus came directly from Sears' background:

People have drawn the analogy that if you crossed Bill Gates with the rap artist Eminem, that's the domain I'm in. If you look at what Eminem is doing, he's a white person in the Black community and he represents a certain socio-economic—the bottom 20 percent—yet he has credibility in the Black community. I would say that's similar to what I am. I grew up in a neighborhood very similar to Eminem's. So when I went to college, I had to learn to 'talk white,' and I learned to talk white pretty well. I don't go back into my Ebonics stage very often unless I'm surrounded by really old friends, and then my wife starts looking at me strangely. But that's a part of the values and part of what makes this unique. If we can make this work, part of it is can we scale this up without selling out? I'm not talking about selling out in the typical way that people talk about selling out; what I mean is staying true to the community, the values, and the culture you came from.

In staying true to the community, Sears not only "talked the talk" but he "walked the walk." The TechMission organization occupied the two bottom floors of an old triple-decker (three story apartment house) in one of the poorer urban residential neighborhoods of Boston. Sears, his wife, and newborn son had the third floor apartment and lived 'above the shop' as part of the neighborhood. This was no plush corporate headquarters. Once a staff member unlocked the deadbolt on the entrance, visitors saw computer equipment, and the very diverse staff crammed elbow to elbow throughout a rabbit warren of rooms, with brochures, research binders, and computer support information squirreled in every available corner. Computer cabling and extension cords formed a tangled web of tripping points for the unwary. Certainly there was no

investment in high gloss facilities and image, just focused staff working in a bare bones environment.

TechMission defined its mission as "supporting Christian organizations in using technology to transform vulnerable communities." Sears sought to use technology as the driver to promote what he called social justice. Sears defined social justice as: "The fight to take our cities back from the strongholds of poverty, addiction, violence, abuse, injustice, and oppression" and believed that "Often, Christians are fighting a battle against injustice, but are using antiquated tools." Since TechMission was sponsored through a patchwork of inner city Christian organizations, churches, and local community centers, it had immediate contact with the issues of the community—poverty, drugs, and violence. Its technology education programs were vehicles to help at-risk populations (low income children and adults) resist the lure of the street and gain valuable economic skills. While sponsored by churches and faith-based organizations, the ultimate beneficiaries were those in need. Sears commented:

The key focus isn't the specific denomination, but rather concentrating on serving the poor, oppressed, marginalized, or whatever term you want to use. That's who we represent. I would say we are more to the moderate to progressive end of the denomination spectrum. We are Christian, but we serve everyone because our primary focus is on social services. TechMission is deeply committed to serving low-income communities. All of our programs and initiatives were created for the purpose of serving the community.

To transform communities, TechMission aimed to close the "digital divide," the gap separating those with access to and skills on computers from those without. It would bring the innovations of the technology world into the faith-based social services sector. Sears commented:

Technology has been a major enabler of transformation in religion, from the advent of writing to satellite communications. Today, technology and the Internet have the potential to connect resources to those in need, bringing major innovations to low-income communities. I believe that the social gospel is enabled by technology in that, for the first time in history the poor, working class, and indigenous communities have the tools to be able to spread an understanding of Christianity, reflecting their values on a global level. I think what we are doing is continuing this trend by putting online tools in the hands of those outside of traditional power structures.

Sears expanded on the technology strategy:

We follow a second-mover strategy using innovations in the overall not-for-profit sector and applying them to the Christian social services sector. We did this with AC4 by replicating CTCNet.⁶ With TechMission Corps we replicated other AmeriCorps programs. ChristianVolunteering.org replicates VolunteerMatch.org and UrbanMinistry.org replicates Idealist.org. In each of these cases, the secular market was reaching less than 10 percent of the Christian social services sector because each market had distinct needs.

THE PROGRAMS

TechMission used computer technology and the Internet to stretch limited resources in providing services to vulnerable communities, 'connecting people to the poor' (see **Exhibit 1** for Annual Report Letter). Currently, the initiatives were grouped into three areas: TechMission Corps, TechMission Online, and City Vision College. (see **Exhibit 2** for organizational structure.) Sears discussed how the organization expanded:

Generally, we take a vertical strategy where we consistently focus on the same general market (Christians serving the poor), and bring different innovations to this sector. I generally come up with most of the new ideas for initiatives because there are a very limited number of people who can function essentially as venture capitalist for the Jesus, Justice, and Technology sector. But staff is very involved in testing and providing feedback on the various initiatives. . . . We spend some time experimenting in (new) domains until it becomes clear to us what the major product focus is that fits with our values and resources.

In building the TechMission organization, Sears still retained the heart of a tech and business-savvy entrepreneur. While new opportunities were reviewed with the board and staff, finding those opportunities reflected Sears' knowledge and connections in the online world. He stayed on top of cutting edge Internet innovations and understood their impact ahead of most. One person commented that talking to Sears was like "being in slow motion when he is in fast forward, and he doesn't look back. He mentions online sites and innovations and assumes you are up to speed and maybe you have heard of one in three." The selection of opportunities also reflected his business knowledge. Sears evaluated the degree that a new program could leverage the existing organization, provide new resources or build to the future, all within the context of the mission, what he even called, "a complex balancing act."

TECHMISSION CORPS (TMC)

With AmeriCorps funding, TMC provided forty-four internship opportunities in urban ministry programs active throughout greater Boston, Los Angeles, Denver, New York, and Chicago. Program director Brittany Coulbert and her assistant Rachel Valencia focused on three service areas: after-school programs for at-risk children that utilized technology and provided a safe environment and encouraged academic, social, and spiritual development; teen programs to provide academic support, college readiness, technology training, and spiritual development; and computer classes for workforce development for youths and adults in at-risk communities. Sears commented on how TMC fit within the organization:

TechMission Corps is a program focused on providing AmeriCorps members primarily to Christian organizations serving at risk youth, which makes it a fit with our Jesus and justice values. The fit with the technology value is a little more complex. Our board has debated a lot on whether our third value is technology or innovation, and while we haven't resolved it, we know the two are closely related. One is the potential for innovation that having an AmeriCorps brings to TechMission. If you look at the most innovative nonprofits in the past fifteen years, a vastly disproportionate number of them are AmeriCorps programs.

There are a lot of reasons for this, but the main one is that AmeriCorps programs provide a strong leadership pipeline of new people and ideas that inject a lot of innovation into an organization.

In addition, as an innovative organization, we need to not only anticipate technology innovations, but also funding and business model innovations. AmeriCorps will be the most significant source of new funding for nonprofits for at least the next ten years and will also be one of the main sources of innovations in business models. Having an AmeriCorps program puts us in the center of innovation in the nonprofit sector. We

bring technology directly into our AmeriCorps program by making a major focus linking our online volunteer matching Web site and online training Web sites with TechMission Corps.

The last reason with TechMission Corps is that the priority of our values [is] in the order of Jesus, justice and then technology. We might allow for more flexibility around the technology value in order to equip faith-based organizations to bring significant social change to the poor. AmeriCorps is the most significant thing happening in this sector in the past ten to twenty years.

By late 2008, TechMission had expanded to forty-four AmeriCorps members spread throughout its five locations, and expected to continue to grow its Corps in future years (see **Exhibit 3** for organizational growth). It was currently the largest portion of the budget, accounting for 54.5 percent of the \$1.2 million 2009 Estimated Funds Needed (see **Exhibit 4** for TechMission programs and funding).

TECHMISSION ONLINE SERVICES

Leveraging the faith-based connections and technology orientation, online services was the umbrella for four endeavors including: ChristianVolunteering.org, UrbanMinistry.org, SafeFamilies.org and TechMission membership.

ChristianVolunteering.org, which began in 2006, provided online volunteer matching services for both individuals and organizations. Run by Lead Web Developer Ali McCracken and volunteer coordinators Rakiesha Chase and Paul Caputo, opportunities existed for volunteering locally, virtually (via computer), as a short-term missionary, or interning. The site's vision was: "To match hundreds of thousands of volunteers with urban ministries and short-term urban mission opportunities." Sears explained the current volunteering process and planned additions:

When a volunteer searches our directory, they will find the volunteer opportunities and profiles of local organizations. After they click a button to show that they are interested in the volunteer opportunity, both the organization and volunteer are sent an e-mail to match the volunteer. Our Facebook application will enable each local organization to have their profile and volunteer opportunities posted on student profiles on Facebook, increasing visibility among college students and eventually we hope to be able to map all these organizations through Google maps.

Word of mouth and partnerships within the Christian community had led to the Web site's current level of success, but Sears knew that additional marketing strategies would be needed to grow. He commented on the challenge:

Right now we have about 4,000, or less than 5 percent of faith-based volunteer opportunities on our Web site. Once we achieve critical mass for faith-based volunteers and volunteer opportunities, then the Web site will become self-perpetuating, attracting sufficient Web traffic to encourage both those who want to volunteer and those who need volunteers to use this site first. This will probably occur somewhere around 10,000 volunteer opportunities.

UrbanMinistry.org was a social networking and shared resources Web portal for organizations and individuals involved in faith-based social services. According to the 2007–2008 Annual Report, the site had 1 million unique visitors, provided a social network for 15,000 users and fifty bloggers, and had directories or maps for 3,500 ministries.⁷ Staffed by online publications editor Evan Donovan, aided by graphic designer

Anne Gilliam and Web developer Margaret Goodwin, the Web site provided a Web base for Christian organizations to exchange information and resources. UrbanMinistry.org had established links to facebook.com, LinkedIn.com and MySpace.com. Partnering with faith-based social services conferences, the site had an archive of more than 9,000 free audio sermons, videos, workshop Webcasts, podcasts, pieces of literature, and photos.

SafeFamilies.org was formed to assist parents in protecting children in at-risk communities from pornography and other dangers on the Internet. Bill Mooney-McCoy, director of Safe Families, made programs available that included free Internet filtering, rules and information on protecting children online, and guidelines for using social networking sites like MySpace.

TechMission Membership was formed to foster a greater sense of community and provide economies of scale and group benefits to individuals and organizations involved with TechMission. Managed by OnLine staff, more than 500 members were enrolled, including such organizations as World Vision, the Salvation Army, Association of Gospel Rescue Mission (AGRM), and Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) sites, among others.

CITY VISION COLLEGE

City Vision was acquired in 2008 from another not-for-profit that had changed its focus. An acquaintance of Andrew's contacted him about whether TechMission would be interested in acquiring the college since it no longer fit with their organization. It was an Internet-based, distance-learning school accredited through the Distance Education and Training Council, and affiliated through the Association for Biblical Higher Education. Its mission was "To provide practical online education to those involved in urban ministry." Directed by the Reverend Michael Liimatta with Dr. Fletcher Tink as academic dean and assisted by program assistant Rachael Jarboe, the college offered twenty courses and two degree tracks for more than 175 enrolled students. The college served as the most recent example of TechMission offering a previously unavailable service to a community in need. Sears commented on its fit and potential within TechMission:

When you look at significant business models in our sector that have high financial sustainability, online schools are at the top of that list. An online school for educating Christians to serve the poor is at the center of our three values of Jesus, justice, and technology, and it is highly sustainable.

Before the opportunity arose to acquire City Vision College, our strategic plan was to have an online school as our next program initiative. It can also provide an ongoing revenue source that enables us to fund programs that are not as self-sustaining like our Web sites.

With its low enrollment costs, Andrew Sears believed the College had tremendous potential to expand the reach of TechMission and further serve the public. Sears had budgeted 2009 course income at \$100,000, based on 200 enrolled students, but he knew that TechMission would have to work to expand the awareness for the college's programs. Sears commented on the challenges of City Vision:

Our target markets are those who are staff or volunteers in Christian social service organizations or urban ministries. This is about one-third Salvation Army and Rescue Mission

staff/volunteers, one-third other Christian social service organizations, and one-third staff/volunteer Black/Latino/urban churches.

We have to do both remedial education and on-going support of our students. We might lose 5 percent because their computer skills are not sufficient even with strong support. We have found that the bigger factor, however, is that most people in urban ministry are incredibly busy and won't leave their local communities where they are serving. So the benefit of being able to do it on their own time from a location outweighs the cost of the tech learning for them.

Adding new initiatives could be something of a trial and error process. A Web site acquired with City Vision College provided discussion forums for those addicted to pornography and ultimately proved unsustainable due to lack of resources and available funding. Conversely, experimenting with using Facebook involved looking at online groups, Facebook pages, Facebook causes, and creating a custom Facebook application. The experimentation indicated that Facebook had potential as a social network vehicle for TechMission and might be "at the intersection of personal identity and serving the poor." TechMission then worked to adapt a Facebook application to allow people to take a personality test and then be matched to a volunteer opportunity, and saw it as having the potential to match ChristianVolunteering.org and UrbanMinistry.org as an online endeavor.

NOT-FOR-PROFIT MARKETING AND FUNDRAISING

TechMission occupied a unique space in the not-for-profit world as an untraditional organization, but it faced a very traditional not-for-profit challenge: how to grow funding in a down market, where the next dollar of funding would be harder to secure than the last. *The Boston Globe* had reported:

While research shows that hefty gifts by wealthy benefactors to museums, hospitals, and universities continue during recessions, modest donations by middle-class contributors to smaller organizations, which often care for the most vulnerable populations, are more likely to dry up even as the demand for their services is spiking.⁸

From 2002 to 2007, with a combination of Federal funding and expanding technology initiatives to the Christian community, TechMission's funds generated⁹ grew nearly tenfold from \$136,000, to \$1.3 million. During the same period, combined headquarters and AmeriCorps staff had gone from four to fifty-four.

With more than a million dollars in its annual budget, a staff spread across five cities, and established relationships with thousands of churches and organizations, Sears had to decide how to best establish TechMission for long-term sustainability, which meant reaching its \$10 million growth target. In evaluating the situation, Sears recognized that three significant trends had intersected; growth in the not-for-profit and faith-based sector, increasing importance of information technology to not-for-profits, and the rising importance of funding for national service programs like AmeriCorps.

From 2006 to 2007, total not-for-profit giving increased by 3.9 percent to \$306.4 billion, with religious organizations comprising one-third of total giving.¹⁰ Despite Sears' concerns about the effects of the economic recession on giving, in December 2008, a study from The Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University showed religious giving to be somewhat more insulated during a recession. The report found that, "In

times of recession, the decline in giving to religion when adjusted for inflation has been -0.1 percent compared to an average growth in non-recession years of 2.8 percent¹¹ (see **Exhibit 5** for 40-year chart of giving to religion).

Vinay Bhagat, founder and chief strategy officer for Convio, a provider of relationship management software for not-for-profits, discussed the increased importance of IT for not-for-profits, particularly in times of economic recession:

Online tools continue to play a very important role in the success of not-for-profits, especially as many of them see negative growth via traditional channels . . . Organizations that are engaging donors through multiple channels are better positioned to weather the current economic storm and build lasting relationships. The fact that we are seeing more online donors, even though the sizes of the gifts are flat, could bode well for the future. Organizations must focus efforts on stewardship and engagement so that these individuals remain committed as we come out of the economic downturn.¹²

The importance of IT was further reinforced in the findings of a survey performed by Convio that showed not-for-profit Web traffic increasing in 2008 at an annual rate of 20 percent. Convio stated:

This growth is important since a charity's Web site is often the first touch point between an organization and individual. When used effectively, it can convey the importance of an organization's mission, help register new constituents, and generate desired actions such as making a donation or signing a petition.¹³

Additionally, the survey found that e-mail traffic had also increased, with file growth averaging 28 percent from 2007 to 2008. The importance of this was also elaborated on in the survey:

The number of e-mail addresses on file has a direct impact on an organization's ability to communicate with, cultivate, and solicit actions from constituents. Generally speaking, the larger an organization's communication reach, the more constituents who are available to help them reach their goals, whether that is raising more money, mobilizing more advocates, or simply increasing awareness.¹⁴

By late 2008, TechMission had developed relationships with numerous churches and other organizations connected through the Internet. The challenge was to leverage the resource, yet still keep it personal. Sears commented:

We have about 2,750 churches and organizations that have registered and posted organizational profiles and volunteer opportunities on our site. We have an e-mail list with about 60,000 individuals and organizations on it. We need to make this more relational and "high touch" rather than just being an online interaction with a Web site. The challenge is figuring out how to get it to scale and still make it "high touch." We are considering ways to have our AmeriCorps members do Webinars with a large number of churches to help recruit volunteers

In response to President Obama's call to national service in his inaugural speech, the Senate passed the Serve America Act in March 2009, which provided for volunteer service for virtually all ages, from middle school through retirees. The bill was focused on low-income communities and created five kinds of service corps: clean energy, education, financial literacy, veterans' service, and healthy futures preventative medicine. It would integrate service into learning, expand AmeriCorps and the Peace Corps, and invest in the not-for-profit sector through the establishment of the Social Investment Fund Network and the Social Entrepreneurship Agency for not-for-profits. Proposed funding of the Senate bill was estimated at \$5.7 billion over the next five years. The

Obama 2010 budget proposed funding service programs at over \$1.1 billion, an increase of \$210 million over the 2009 budget.¹⁵ Sears commented:

We jokingly say that our strategy is to survive until 2010 when a budget crafted by Obama goes into effect. That means 2009 will be a lean year, but in 2010 we can expect to see an increase in federal funding, so that's essentially our current strategy. . . . Obama's agenda has changed the funding landscape. He's committed to increasing AmeriCorps from 75,000 to 250,000 members and the significance of that growth can't be overstated. AmeriCorps has been around for fifteen to sixteen years and it grew to 75,000 members in fifteen years, which isn't bad growth for any company.

While Christian outreach was central to TechMission's mission, Sears recognized that in fundraising it created problems:

Often we find ourselves in the position of being viewed as too faith-based for secular funders and too focused on social issues for Christian funders. In the future, I know this will continue to be a challenge for us.

Since 2002, TechMission had received numerous Federal grants, as well as funding from corporations and individuals. While hopeful for additional funding from the government, Sears stated, "nearly every large Christian not-for-profit gets its largest source of funding from individuals." Therefore, 2010 funding targets were established with a greater reliance on individuals and churches as well as foundations, and despite the predicted economic downturn, Sears thought these targets were achievable, but challenges existed in developing an individual donor base. Sears commented:

A general rule of thumb is that it requires \$1.00 to secure \$1.00 from a new donor (acquisition), while it only takes \$0.20 to get \$1.00 from someone who has already given. Because of this, most individual donor campaigns require an investment of several hundreds of thousands of dollars over multiple years before the not-for-profit sees a significant return.

Sears thought he could use the Firstgiving.com model that worked so successfully for the Obama presidential campaign. It helped organizations raise funds based on contacts in the community, keeping it personal.

The way it works is that each person makes their own fundraising page and it essentially changes the fundraising from being centered on the organization to being centered on someone in the community. If you get a random volunteer to raise \$5,000, that's huge.

Firstgiving, established in the United States in 2003, provided an online means for organizations large and small to fundraise. For a modest fee, any organization could create and personalize an online fundraising page by utilizing Firstgiving templates and posting it on the Firstgiving Web site. The fundraiser then sent links to the page to their personal, professional, and any other networks.¹⁶ Links could be passed on from network to network, exponentially expanding the potential pool of fundraisers, putting "power in the hands of individuals," and particularly encouraging younger people to get involved.¹⁷ Small donations from each individual could accrue far faster and to far larger amounts than most organizations could achieve on their own.¹⁸ Sears summarized fundraising:

One of these programs is going to gain traction—it could be our version of Firstgiving or it could be our online school, which will be certified to accept public grants next year, and we are told that schools that get that certification double in size. That will move that program from running a deficit of about \$50,000, to a profit of about \$50,000, and

higher visibility. It is like Internet growth rates—if you get a larger base, then there is going to be a larger growth rate. Right now I see our growth path as AmeriCorps [government grants]—because of Obama—but getting some of the current programs to generate income would attract some major donors.

TECHMISSION'S FUTURE

TechMission had both an official six-person board of directors and others who served on advisory boards. While the board of directors was involved in some fundraising, its primary purpose was in maintaining the values of the organization and in finding personnel who fit both the vision and the culture. According to Sears:

They help open some doors. They aren't as strong [in fundraising] as we'd like. Our board development is lacking in the organization. This is partly due to the fact that the organization is moving so quickly that it's hard to keep up. . . . The other thing is a reflection of our values. Part of what we're trying to do uniquely is to scale up without losing touch with the community. You can see that given our facilities here and given our outcomes, we're unique. . . . In terms of our values, our board still primarily represents the community. I've heard from many people that we need more "corporate" types on our board and we're moving a little more in that direction, but we're doing it cautiously, and I think it has to do with what's unique about who we are.

When I talked to the board about bringing on someone from LinkedIn and making an offer to him, there was a lot of discussion that he comes from a different culture than everyone else. It's kind of like "do you bring in Bill Gates to be part of the board for Eminem's rap label Death Row Records and working with Dr. Dre,"—some white nerd because he has a lot of rich friends. There is going to be a culture clash with the rest of the community.

The issue of fitting the culture and vision of TechMission was not taken lightly. Sears felt that it was vital that key people had a high level of personal commitment to the mission.

I feel strongly that this is a requirement for TechMission. If an individual is less than enthusiastic for any part of "Jesus, Justice, and Technology," then that person cannot be a member of this team. I have had to ask two people to leave because they were not totally in sync with all aspects of our mission.

Sears had already projected 2009 financials (see **Exhibit 6** and **Exhibit 7** for Income Statement and Balance Sheet), but knew that future years' financials would be impacted by any additional programs TechMission might undertake. Sears had already started to increase volunteer involvement from college students across the United States. He commented:

We will recruit volunteers from more than 500 higher education institutions through online volunteer matching and develop formal partnerships with at least fifty colleges. We will have our staff and AmeriCorps members arrange for meetings with the schools, students, and TechMission to set up these partnerships. . . . For each of our school partners, we provide the backend search engine for volunteer opportunities and social media, which they integrate into their Web site. This enables our volunteer and social media database to appear as an integrated part of the school's Web site (similar to how Google provides searches on other Web sites that say "Search Powered by Google"). We will also

work with students to create Facebook groups to gather other students interested in service from their schools:

Sears felt that this was one of many opportunities for TechMission to identify and develop utilizing their organizational strengths, especially in technology. Computer usage had grown worldwide from 328 million in 2000 to 510 million in 2008,¹⁹ which meant that the need for computer skills and access in vulnerable communities could only increase, providing opportunities for new programs to serve those communities.

Sears believed that these new efforts would increase awareness for TechMission's programs, helping the organization to meet its goals. But he faced a catch-22—growing programs would put additional strain on existing funding. Any new or expanded program would require incremental financial support to succeed. However, adding or expanding programs would give TechMission greater visibility among social service organizations. Greater visibility would help the organization gain access to larger secular funding organizations, helping it towards the \$10 million objective.

People were another issue. Sears commented:

A big part of the problem is getting more people like me. I would have to pay a lot more and right now we're in an economic environment where we can't do that. I was moving in that direction and had hired a deputy director who could basically cover half the organization, freeing me to deal with funders and other things. However, with the budget crunch we didn't have the funding to cover her.

We still need to be able to hire high quality, full-time fundraising staff. Right now, as executive director, I have to divide my time between setting the direction of the organization, supervising staff/programs, and fundraising. It is a chicken and egg problem—I can't raise more funds until I get a highly qualified, full-time fundraising staff, and I can't afford to hire the fundraising staff until I can get unrestricted funds. It is likely that this will come from our online school, City Vision College, which could provide a source of unrestricted funds once it becomes profitable in a year or two.

Essentially, what we need is a lot of unrestricted funding, or a flood of funding so that we can hire the people we need. Right now we have ten interns. I could spend \$100,000 to hire someone who can do what I do in terms of development, or I can spend that for the ten interns. However, it actually will help us more in the long term to have the ten interns because that is where we get the 300 percent growth rate. If I didn't have those ten interns, we wouldn't have a 50 percent growth rate in our Web site traffic and number of volunteers matched.

PROGRAMS, PEOPLE, AND FUNDING

Sunday was the traditional "day of rest" and Sears tried to follow that Biblical dictate. However, he could not detach himself from at least thinking about TechMission, its many problems, and its future momentum. Thus, he decided to take the long way on his walk back home after church. As he slowly sauntered he tried to concentrate on priorities.

Overarching all other concerns was TechMission's mission of using information technology to serve the disadvantaged and help Christian organizations. Sears felt strongly that this mission was unalterable and it represented a practical theme for focusing the organization's activities.

A close friend had recently commented that perhaps TechMission was going in too many different directions at once and there might be a need for focus and prioritization. Sears was confident that there were not too many "directions." Sears saw a commonality across all of the activities; but, from a managerial viewpoint, they each had a different opportunity for growth and varying resource needs. Thus far, Sears had taken on every new opportunity to help those in need and was likely to continue to do so, but building a sustainable organization would require more than just growth. It would require programs, people, and funding.

TechMission would require more staff. In fact, just maintaining TechMission would require adding staff. Since the start of TechMission, Sears had been chief strategist, fundraiser, grant writer, and technology expert. While committed, Sears knew it could not continue. He also knew that TechMission could not afford to hire as many people as he would like, so he needed to consider various staffing possibilities. He needed a professional fundraising executive, a senior program director, and possibly several more IT professionals. How to find people with the right orientation and commitment?

Adding staff and programs would require additional funding. Money came to TechMission from several different sources. There was government support through AmeriCorps in addition to foundation grants, City Vision tuition, and now the possibility of raising funds from individuals online. Depending on the economy and organizational growth, obtaining his goal of \$10 million might take one year or ten. With a growing organization providing more social services, he would gain more notice from additional secular and faith-based donors. However, if he accepted additional secular funding, could he still maintain the values, culture and community contact that defined TechMission?

As he turned for home, Sears fell back on the faith that had always sustained him. He thought of the passage from the Biblical Book of Luke: "And so I say to you ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."²⁰

NOTES

1. Sandmel, Samuel. 1976. General Editor. *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*, Oxford Study Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
2. The story of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is one of the foundational stories of the Christian religion. In brief, Paul had been sent to persecute the Christians in Damascus. While on the road he saw a bright light and heard Jesus' voice. This vision led Paul to convert to Christianity and sent him out on his apostolic mission throughout the Roman Empire. Paul is considered by many to be the founder of the Christian church. (Ibid, see Acts, Chapter 9)
3. www.techmission.org
4. AmeriCorps is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, an independent federal agency whose mission is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering. These programs engage more than 2 million Americans of all ages and backgrounds in service each year. (www.americorps.org/about) AmeriCorps provided funding to service-based organizations through tax-supported grants.

5. www.techmission.org, Annual Report
6. A Community Technology Center offered public access to computers and the Internet as part of digital inclusion programs. Centers provided training that ranged from basic computing skills to digital media production as well as applied skills (i.e., online job searching). While some CTCs are freestanding operations, many others are located in public libraries, schools, social service agencies, neighborhood centers, and religious centers.
7. 2007–2008 TechMission Annual Report.
8. Pfeifer, Sacha. 2008. Steeling for Possible Dry Spell. *The Boston Globe*, Section C, page 1, March 26.
9. Funds generated include: revenues from operations, government grants and foundation funding.
10. <http://nonprofit.about.com/od/trendsissuesstatistics/a/giving2008.htm>
11. <http://www.ucc.org/stewardship/faith-and-tough-economic-times/religious.html>
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15. www.barackobama.com and Povich, Elaine S., Senate Passes Bill to Expand National Volunteer Service, www.bulleting.aarp.org.
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19. Barrett, David B. and Todd M. Johnson. January 2008. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. www.gordonconwell.edu.
20. Luke 11:9–10, Sandmel, Samuel, General Editor. 1976. *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha*, Oxford Study Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

Exhibit 1 2007–2008 Annual Report Letter

2007–2008 Connecting

What if we could connect everyone to the area of greatest need in the world that matches their skills and interest? If we could—that would change the world. That is what TechMission is trying to do—connecting people to the poor. The Internet is providing opportunities to bring people together as never before in history.

In the past year, we have seen our outcomes and resources we provided to ministries increase by more than 100 percent, while our budget increased by only 8 percent. We were able to do this because the Internet (with God's help) enables us to grow our resources exponentially. In the past year, we doubled the number of full-time interns we are providing to youth ministries, and our Web site traffic and number of volunteers matched increased by about 300 percent. We were also given an accredited online college of urban ministry from the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions this past year. We renamed this college to City Vision College, and have increased its enrollment by 50 percent since the past year. It seems that God and the Internet have enabled us to take advantage of some unique opportunities.

Our vision for the next ten years is to provide hundreds of millions of dollars worth of resources to ministries serving the poor by providing urban ministry resources and training to tens of millions of Web visitors, placing millions of volunteers, equipping tens of thousands of urban ministry students, and placing thousands of interns. By doing this, we can transform communities by connecting millions of people to the poor.

Andrew Sears, Executive Director of TechMission

www.techmission.com

Exhibit 2 Organizational Structure



Source: www.techmission.org

Exhibit 3 Organizational Growth

Year	Funds Generated*	Staff at HQ**	Staff at Site**
2002	\$136,354	4	0
2003	\$306,438	7	1
2004	\$597,881	8	7
2005	\$840,245	12	20
2006	\$1,015,524	16	20
2007	\$1,191,400	17	30
2008	\$1,217,745	19	35

N.B., TechMission operated within Bruce Wall Ministries from 2000 until July 2002

* Funds generated included funds from operations, government grants and private foundation funding.

**Staff numbers are for full-time equivalent staff and include AmeriCorps/VISTA staff.

Annual Report 2007–2008

Source: www.techmission.org

Exhibit 4 TechMission 2009 Programs and Estimated Funding

Program	2009 Est. Funds Needed	Percentage
TMC	\$663,625	54.5%
TM Online City	\$307,076	25.2%
Vision College	\$129,250	10.6%
Management and Development	\$117,794	9.7%

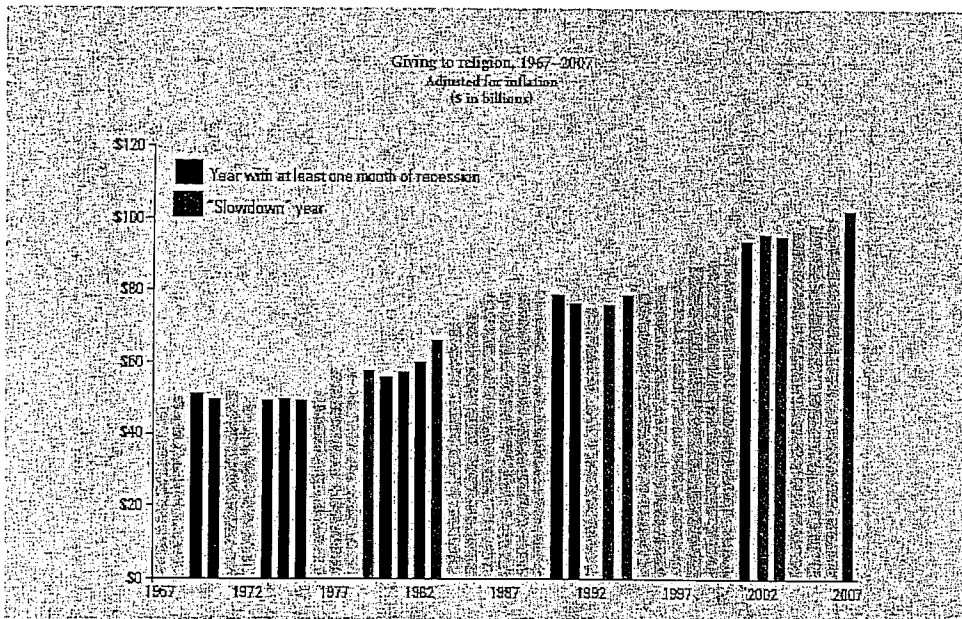
Sources of Funds

Sources	2009 Est. Funds Provided
Earned Income	\$134,544
Foundation—Other	\$104,813
Government Grants	\$618,851
Individual Donations	\$30,000
Course Income	\$100,000

Source: Andrew Sears

Exhibit 5

Giving to Religion 1967–2007



Giving fell in six of the eleven recession years—and it did not fall in any year that was not a recession year, including slowdown year, except 2003. The decline in 2003 might be a result of continued relief donations in 2002 after the September 11 attacks.

Source: Giving USA Foundation; written and researched at the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University. 2008. <http://www.ruotoassoc.com/Spotlight3-2008Final.pdf>

Average rates of change in giving to religion under various economic conditions 1967–2007

	Total	Recession	Non-recession	Recession in 8 months or more of year	Slowdown
Religion	2.0%	-0.1%	2.8%	1.4%	2.6%

Religion giving was relatively insulated from economic downturns, but it can be affected by recession. During slowdowns, there was little difference in giving than there is in non-recession years.

Source: Giving USA Foundation; written and researched at the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University. 2008. <http://www.ruotoassoc.com/Spotlight3-2008Final.pdf>

Exhibit 6 Profit and Loss										
2007 Actual—2009 Budget										
	Actual 2007	Budgeted 2008	Actual 2008	Budgeted 2009	TMC Budget 2009	City Vision 2009	Online Services 2009	Development 2009	Management 2009	
Income										
Consulting:			118,000							
TMC Sites	\$78,703	\$152,800		\$126,544	\$89,474	\$0	\$0	\$36,143	\$927	
Consulting: Partnerships		20,000	6,541	8,000	0	0	8,000	0	0	
Course Income		100,000	71,855	100,000	0	85,000	0	15,000	0	
Membership	1,739	5,000	1,025	2,000	0	0	2,000	0	0	
Foundations	118,000	252,409	69,188	104,813	33,000	11,813	60,000	0	0	
Government	946,470	751,000	820,487	618,851	504,000	0	230,766	0	0	
In Kind Donations	42,900		99,959							
Individual Donations	14,774	20,088	25,554	30,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	0	0	
Total Income	\$1,191,400	\$1,301,296	\$1,212,587	990,207	636,474	\$1,068,813	\$310,766	\$51,143	\$927	
Expenses										
Contractual	\$104,617	\$115,423	\$103,734	\$123,808	\$41,846	\$21,422	\$31,492	\$29,048	\$0	
Fringe Benefits	107,410	144,165	116,816	102,985	75,991	4,340	95,329	3,116	88	
Indirect Cost	85,666	65,901	58,557	65,724	24,529	20,598	20,598	0	65,724	
Other	67,794	77,971	84,646	88,424	29,983	28,136	28,017	1,470	819	
Personnel	657,947	865,125	730,809	634,245	484,811	47,500	185,303	16,667	0	
Supplies	43,793	21,800	14,430	10,624	3,742	2,646	3,759	457	20	
Travel	7,923	8,000	10,297	10,297	2,722	4,610	2,579	386	0	
Total Expenses	\$1,075,090	\$1,297,785	\$1,119,289	\$1,036,107	\$663,625	\$129,250	\$307,076	\$51,143	\$66,651	
Net Income	\$116,309	\$3,511	\$93,298	(\$45,899)	(\$27,151)	(\$22,438)	\$3,690	(\$0)	\$0	

Exhibit 7		Balance Sheet 2005–2008			
		Dec 31, 2005	Dec 31, 2006	Dec 31, 2007	Dec 31, 2008
Assets					
Current Assets					
Cash		\$31,948	\$125,365	\$190,070	\$148,455
Accounts Receivable		42,498	31,950	16,895	43,605
Prepaid Expenses		1,745	20,183	10,521	3,506
Total Current Assets		76,191	177,498	217,486	195,566
Fixed Assets		31,248	62,142	52,510	152,469
Other Assets		0	0	1,368	0
Total Assets		\$107,439	\$239,640	\$271,364	\$348,035
Liabilities and Equity					
Current Liabilities					
Accounts Payable		0	0	219	(5,833)
Other Current Liabilities		50,164	64,208	33,660	22,029
Total Liabilities		\$50,164	\$64,208	\$33,879	\$16,197
Equity					
Retained Earnings		57,275	175,432	121,176	238,540
Net Income		0	0	116,309	93,298
Total Equity		0	0	237,485	331,838
Total Liabilities and Equity		\$107,439	\$239,640	\$271,364	\$348,035
Source: Andrew Sears					