

Information Systems Resources

Who is Right for the Job?

My assumption is that most non-profit organizations do not have the luxury of having an information systems (IS) professional within their organization. You will probably be wondering who can help you automate your outcomes measurement system. Even if you plan to hire a programmer to build or modify an existing system, there is considerable work to be done before the programmer will have a detailed understanding of your requirements sufficient to build the system.

Not all who have “information systems” or “information technology” (IT) in their titles are right for the job of defining requirements. If you are looking for an IS or IT professional to define requirements for you, look for someone with one of these backgrounds:

1. Systems Analyst. A systems analyst solves computer problems and matches technology solutions with organization requirements. It's their job to understand what the organization needs to do and how technology can best support those requirements.
2. Database Administrator. A database administrator or database manager is able to picture the organization, both its physical and functional aspects, and know how to model those aspects using a database management system. Someone who has actually built databases (as opposed to just doing data entry) is the best choice in this field.

If you do not have IS or IT professionals available, you may still have an internal resource who can help you define requirements. Any highly analytical field, such as financial analyst, organizational analyst or someone with strong process mapping skills, can probably define requirements. The key is to be able to use some written symbol to represent the physical and functional aspects of the organization and draw the connections between them. Then list the various outcomes you want to be measured and indicate where that data comes from within the organization.

Accounting professionals are also very useful substitutes for database administrators. All accounting automated systems are databases and most accountants have the ability to intuitively see the connections between the input of data and the output of data. Given a good enough orientation to the mission and its various inputs, outputs, outcomes and indicators, an accountant could probably define requirements for the system.

Once you have determined what data you need to input, what you need to get out of the system and where it comes from within the organization, turn to the potential users to help you define the input screens and output products like reports. If you can find an existing system that has screens, forms and reports that they like, these can be used as examples to help define your requirements.