How to Choose a Fundraising CRM Solution

7TH EDITION: NEWLY UPDATED FOR 2023

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

Making an investment in new technology is both an exciting and serious undertaking for any organisation. There are many elements to consider when selecting the right fundraising CRM solution for your non-profit.

This is why we have created How to Choose a Fundraising CRM Solution – a practical guide to walk you through the stages of assessing, selecting and adopting your new CRM system. Newly updated for 2023, the guide now also includes advice on preparing your team for the significant changes ahead.

Research carried out by Blackbaud found that two-thirds of non-profit organisations understand how technology can help them, and 56% say they invest in technology. However, only 35 % say they get the most out of their technology.

Furthermore, the research found that those organisations who do get the most out of their technology, are more successful, in that they are more collaborative, more digitally mature, and are gaining more supporters than they are losing. You can read more in the Status of UK Fundraising Report 2022.

Taking steps to invest in the fundraising CRM solution that your organisation needs, plus finding the right supplier to work to support you, is essential when making sure you get the most out of your chosen system.

Whether you are replacing an existing system that no longer meets your needs, investing in a CRM solution for the first time, or putting a new digital transformation strategy in place, this eBook will help you choose the right solution for your organisation's needs.

What is a Cloud-Based CRM?

What is a Cloud-Based CRM?

Before we get started, let's look in more detail at 'the Cloud'. When considering the various solutions on the market, you will come across the term 'cloud-based CRM' and may wonder what it means and why it should factor in your decision.

In its simplest form, the term 'cloud' refers to the internet. When something is referred to as 'cloud-based' it means that it is stored and accessible through an internet server, rather than your computer's hard drive or on your office's server. Particularly since the pandemic, cloud-based services have become part of our everyday lives– just think of Netflix, Dropbox or Zoom.

This guide is specifically tailored towards choosing a cloud-based CRM solution as you want to invest your time and money in a supporter management tool that offers you a long-term return on investment, and the reality is that locally hosted or "offline" solutions have a shelf life. For example, if your organisation is now moving towards a hybrid or remote working model post-pandemic, any software that is not cloud-based will be ineffective as your team won't be able to access the information they need remotely.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING CLOUD-BASED

#1 Access Anywhere

To access your cloud-based solution, all you need is a stable internet connection and a secure login. This means that your teams can quickly and easily retrieve the information they need, no matter where they are. Cloud-based solutions provide employees with the flexibility they want and assure managers that their team can access all of the data they need, as well as update constituent records on-the-go.

#2 Business Continuity

Cloud-based solutions offer comprehensive disaster recovery and backup options for all kinds of scenarios, so if anything were to happen, your organisation would have minimal downtime. If your solutions were stored directly on individual computers then anything from computer viruses, hardware deterioration, or even just human error could mean a loss of information or hours of an employee waiting for IT to resolve the issue. Cloud-based solutions back everything up via the internet, so your work remains safe and up to date no matter what.

#3 Scalability

Cloud-based solutions allow you to easily scale your requirements up or down, depending on your needs, without overhauling your IT infrastructure or buying additional hardware. The cloud functions on a “Pay as You Use” model, where you are only charged for the storage and specific services you require. Cloud service providers also handle maintenance and accessibility issues, including security. This gives your organisation greater flexibility and allows you to easily manage your resources and outgoing costs.

#4 Sustainable and Environmentally Friendly

Cloud-based technology runs through the internet, so you have no need to invest in using data centres or additional hardware which you then need to power 24/7. This means that you need less physical office space and that you are significantly reducing your carbon footprint.

> The ‘cloud’ is simply a metaphor for the internet. It originates from when the internet was drawn in manuals and graphics surrounded by a cloud shaped bubble. ”

SECTION 01

Preparing for your New CRM Solution

SECTION 1

Preparing for your New CRM Solution

When beginning the process of choosing a new CRM solution, it is essential to outline the key purpose behind the investment. If you are unclear about this from the start, then you will quickly find it difficult to bring internal stakeholders onboard and even harder to get sign-off at key stages.

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

Kickstart your process by asking the following questions:

Organisation

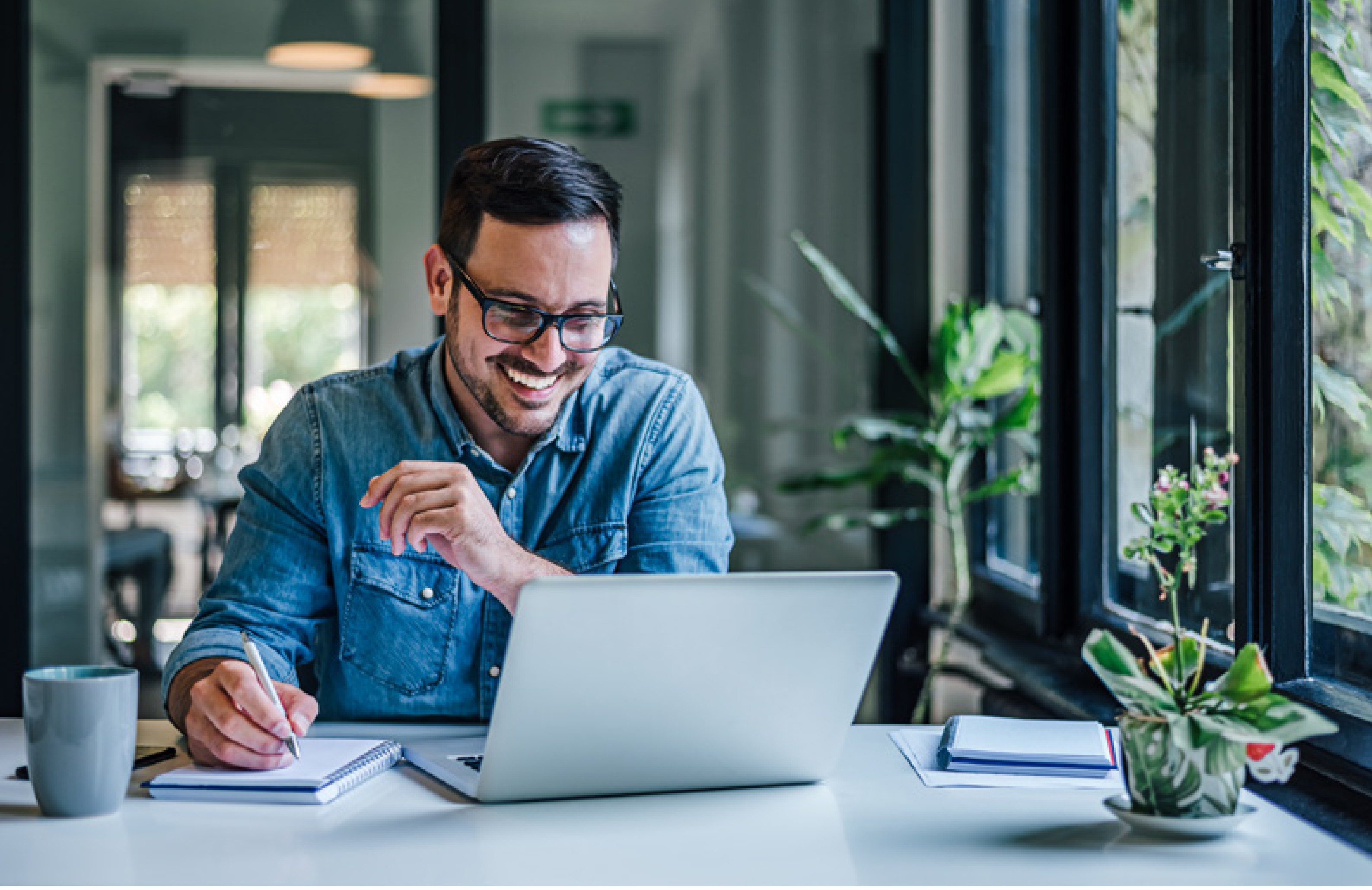
- What is your organisation's mission and the core purpose that drives all of your activities?
- What objectives does your organisation have in place for the next one to five years?
- How integral is effective data management to achieving your future objectives?

Pain Points

- Does your existing data management system meet both your current and future needs?
- Are there areas of your existing setup that hinder development or cause frustration?
- Do you have any gaps in your current data management process that you feel need to be addressed?

Opportunities

- Which of your existing pain points could having a new solution in place help to solve?
- Have you identified any areas or programmes which show potential for growth or improvement?
- Could a new solution streamline or update any of your existing processes?
- Do you have any existing ideas or projects that a new cloud-based solution would allow you to develop?



Identifying the answers to the above questions will enable you to build a comprehensive internal business case, plus it will give you key objectives to refer back to when you are choosing a vendor. Procuring a new solution can sometimes be a lengthy and complex process, so it is important to have a strong foundation of reasons of why you're taking on the project and what you want to achieve at the end of it to constantly refer to.

Choosing your Project Team

Choosing a new CRM will require the support of multiple people from across your organisation. You may still be in the early days of putting your project together, however, to ensure you don't have any clashing deadlines or projects, it's important to decide and reach out to potential parties who may be involved as soon as you can.

The key thing to remember when putting together your ideal Project Team is that everyone should offer a different skill or area of expertise, so together you have the necessary knowledge to make an informed decision.

Project Manager

Whilst some organisations may choose to hire an external project manager to come in and run the project, this is not essential. A Project Manager is someone who will be responsible for organising activities, managing resources and keeping the project on track and on-deadline, and often you can find the right person already within your wider organisation.

Key attributes for your internal project manager are:

- #1 Knowledge of your organisation and requirements
- #2 Strong organisational skills
- #3 Confidence to speak up, be heard and mediate group meetings
- #4 Enthusiasm

Don't forget, although this is a responsibility, this is also a career opportunity for someone within your team to expand their skills and experience, or to showcase existing skills, by managing a significant project.

The Team

Choosing a new cloud-based CRM system is more than just a technology project. Having the right solution in place will have a positive impact on your whole organisation, so you need a well-rounded project team who can provide the essential technical know-how, an understanding of wider organisation requirements, and who can also represent the needs of different teams, such as the fundraising or event requirements.

Ultimately, fundraising technology will support your organisation's fundraising strategy – so the fundraising team or department will play a key role in this project.

Key attributes for the project team are:

- #1 An understanding of your existing business processes
- #2 People skills! It's vital that your whole organisation is brought along for this important business change
- #3 Organisational skills. It's important that the project doesn't lose momentum or become secondary to other activities, so you want a team of people who can work in an agile and organised way
- #4 Data knowledge. This is key, as you need to understand the current data you have and how it can be managed in a more efficient way
- #5 CRM or technical skills are a bonus, but it's more important to have a team that recognise the gaps you may have and when you may need to seek an external voice for advice.

Don't forget to involve the key decision-makers and budget holders in your organisation right from the beginning of the project, so they are fully engaged and invested. They do not necessarily need to be involved in the main Project Team or day-to-day activities, but they do need to be regularly communicated with to make sure your sign-off processes are as seamless as possible.

How to Handle Change Management

In addition to building a project team and understanding what it is that the business requires from the new technology, it's also important to remember that the implementation of a new system will bring about lots of change for the team. To aim for success right from the start of the project, there must be thought about the change management involved.

Michael Reardon, Senior Principal, Customer Success Services at Blackbaud shares his tips on leading your team through change...
Put simply, change management is keeping an eye on the human side of a technology implementation. It is not about converting the data, or generating a new report, or refining those important queries—it is about understanding the anxiety and potential confusion of the change and supporting your team by chipping away at those reactions to set up your team for success.

Let your team know that the vision for the future of the organisation cannot be achieved if this problem is not addressed. Your team wants to do well in their roles and contribute to the organisation's success and if they are convinced that can't happen without this investment, you are off to a great start.

Change can be incredibly challenging and sometimes frustrating—so it is very normal for our teams to push back and ask: "why are we doing this?" At first, technology changes introduce a learning curve that will slow people down and people will want an understanding of why they must go through that curve and take valuable time to learn a new process. If that problem statement and future vision is widely communicated up front, staff will often see that change is needed...and if they agree for the need for the change (the why), they will be much more likely to be on board, even if it means going through that learning curve.

CHECKLIST

✓	1. *Objectives for the project set*
✓	2. *Gathered requirements of what the new solution needs to meet*
✓	3. *Selected your team*
✓	4. *Communicated plans to the whole organisation*
✓	5. *Established stakeholders and acquired initial approval*

SECTION

02

Selecting a Vendor

SECTION 2

Selecting a Vendor

You have now created the foundation for your CRM project as at this stage you have built your project team and set objectives and project goals. Well done! Getting started is often one of the hardest stages as it requires a lot of preparation and internal knowledge gathering. Now that you have a solid understanding of your requirements and what you want to achieve by choosing a CRM solution, you're ready to start evaluating vendors to find the best partner and software to invest in.

BASIC VENDOR EVALUATION PROCESS

1	2	3	4	5	6
Research vendors and check references	Notify vendor(s) of interest	Schedule discussion around requirements	Schedule demo with project team	Follow up to get project team feedback	Select a solution supplier

Questions to Ask Vendors

There are lots of areas to think about when approaching a vendor, and whilst some will be specific to your organisation, others will be much broader and give you an instant sense of whether they are worth further time and evaluation. To help you get started, here are some key questions to address with potential CRM solution vendors:

#1 *Is your solution cloud-based?*
If the answer is no, then this is an instant indicator that you need to speak with alternative vendors.

#2 *What is your typical implementation timeline?*
Whilst you may have some bespoke needs, many aspects of a CRM come "out of the box", so your vendor should have experience of how long it takes as standard for organisations to get up and running with their new solution - bearing in mind that many of your team will have to carry on with their day-to-day duties. You want to work with a vendor who sets realistic expectations from the start.

#3 *What is your track record of success with non-profits?*
Ask to see case studies or references of other organisations and find out how experienced the vendor is in implementing successful CRM projects on time and on budget.

#4 *What's the ROI?*
When it comes to the investment, the real value is going to be in the return. Your vendor should help shape this with you to better understand specific aspects where the solution will make a measurable impact on your organisation.

#5 *What about data security?*
You want to feel confident that your vendor offers extensive data security measures, start by asking them about their standard SLA (service level agreements), their data-back up schedules, and how they ensure logins are kept secure.

#6 *Will I have customer support and live training?*
Your package should include access to a reliable, proven support mechanism to assist you with anything from troubleshooting to answering questions about software releases.

#7 *What post-implementation service is available?*
Does the vendor have a Customer Success team to provide ongoing service after you go-live? They will ensure that what has been promised in the sales process is delivered and you are receiving your ROI. Is it complimentary or does that come at an extra cost?

#8 *How do you work within the social good sector?*
Your chosen partner should be able to share best practices related to fundraising and CRM management. They should let you know their position for updating the technology and their research and development dedicated to non-profit specific functionality and compliance.

#9 *What documentation exists around APIs?*
Your chosen partner should be able to share their developer portals, or API (Application Programming Interface) specific documentation, such as this https://developer.blackbaud.com/skyapi/

#10 *Does your organisation have ESG goals in place?*
ESG stands for Environmental, Social and Governance and in some cases it is simply referred to as sustainability. You should ask potential vendors if they have a sustainability development plan in place, or if their organisation is working towards minimising the negative impact of their operations and products.

#11 *What are the fundraising functionalities?*
You should understand the full suite of fundraising capabilities that are present in the CRM solution, and any that are available via trusted sector partners.

List of Requirements

When initiating conversations with potential vendors, it can be a good idea to share the list of requirements that your project team has documented to date. This gives you a starting point for asking consistent questions, helping you to compare the different options available. However, it by no means should be seen as a final list of what you hope to gain from a new solution. Vendors should have a strong level of expertise and be able to highlight the additional capabilities of CRM solutions, even questioning some of your needs and raising new considerations. If a potential vendor doesn't ask you additional questions or try to dig deeper into ways they can support your organisation, instead only agreeing to accommodate your basic needs, then this can be a red flag.

A requirements list is hard to bring to life, so as part of this process, it is really important to interact with the vendor as much as possible before seeing any demos. Feeling confident when discussing requirements with a vendor is important as an implementation process can take months – sometime longer – and you need to know that they are receptive to your suggestions and concerns.

Making the final decision

You have now shared your list of documented requirements with vendors, had initial conversations and seen demos from potential partners. You have enough information at this stage to compare potential partners and make your decision on who you think is the best fit for your organisation.

Once you have a preferred vendor in mind, it is important to make sure that you have a good understanding of their process and timelines. You should also make sure you have engaged your internal stakeholders and key decision-makers before signing any contracts or entering formal agreements, ensuring that you have all the necessary sign-off. Hopefully, you have kept them updated throughout the process, meaning they are already engaged and raring to go!

At this stage, it is likely that you will have received some form of proposal from your chosen vendor, including a breakdown of costs, along with the following documentation:

Scope of Work

Once you have discussed the detail with your vendor around what will be delivered with this project, including any data conversion, and training requirements, this document will be created to outline the key implementation deliverables of your project. It is important that this is read, and any questions are raised before entering into a contract. Often you make additional requests or state new requirements at the scope of work stage, as once you have signed a contract it will either be outside of the agreement or incur additional surprise costs.

Terms and Conditions

These will be the SLAs (service level agreements) and other agreements you are entering into, such as cloud hosting, GDPR provisions, and support arrangements that need to be reviewed by your internal legal, procurement or data protection teams. It is important that these are reviewed in good time before you intend to sign as you don't want to feel pressured, and you do want to have the opportunity to raise any questions.

Contract

This will typically outline all the costs, items being purchased, along with any contract terms. Typically, this will be delivered with the Scope of Work and should be thoroughly reviewed before signing.

CHECKLIST

✓	1. *Objectives for the project set*
✓	2. *Gathered requirements of what the new solution needs to meet*
✓	3. *Selected your team*
✓	4. *Communicated plans to the whole organisation*
✓	5. *Acquired approval from your board*
✓	6. *Researched vendors*
✓	7. *Notified vendors of interest*
✓	8. *Discussed requirements with vendors*
✓	9. *Viewed demos and discussed feedback internally*
✓	10. *Selected a solution supplier*
✓	11. *Reviewed contract documentation*
✓	12. *Final sign off on your new solution*

SECTION

03

Navigating Go-Live and Beyond

SECTION 3

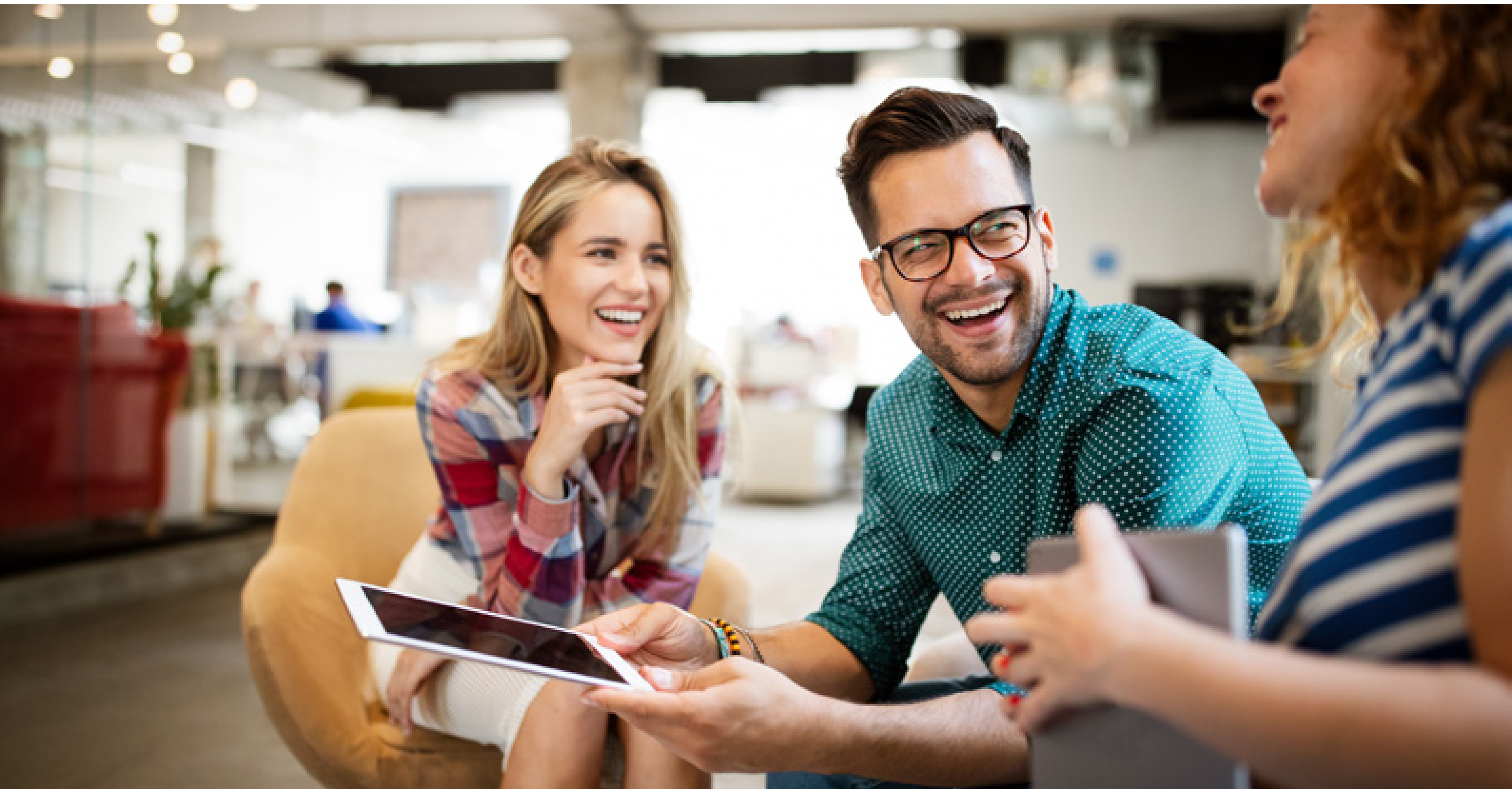
Navigating Go-Live and Beyond

Think back to the start of this process – the pain points you wanted to solve, the areas of growth that you identified, and the teams you could empower – as going-live is just the beginning of your new CRM journey! You want to keep in mind what you want to achieve after go-live and your new solution, and new vendor, can help you to establish a strong return on investment and realise your data's full potential.

FIRST: CONGRATULATIONS!

Your solution is now live! Take a moment to thank your project team and any stakeholders as this is a great achievement, and everyone should feel recognised and celebrated.

Now that your solution is up and running, it's a good idea to keep track of your original objectives for the project, then you can work with your vendor to understand if and how you are achieving them. Any reliable vendor will want to understand this too and will help you to build a picture of what success looks like. If you can introduce this right at the beginning, you will be able to work together to understand how you are achieving your goals.



Ongoing Support

The best CRM solution providers will have Customer Success teams, or dedicated Account Management teams, who are invested in helping you get the most from your system for as long as you are a customer.

Whoever is assigned to look after your organisation, you want to ensure you have up to date contact details and feel there is an open and direct line of communication between you. You want to always feel able to reach out and ask those 'how do I' questions. There may be more than one best contact at your vendor, such as a finance contact or a technical support contact. Get a sense of this structure upfront and feel comfortable that you know who to contact once you have gone live.

It is also important to find out what your vendor offers in terms of telephone support, chat support, and community support – your team will work in different ways, so it's important that your vendor can cover all bases and has a clear support programme outlined. Plus, why spend time on the phone if you can get your question solved in 30 seconds on instant chat!

Helping You to Succeed

In new research carried out by Blackbaud Europe, 43% of charities told us they do not measure the impact of any supporter experience activity they do, and 38% said they wouldn't know where to start to begin measuring. Any CRM solution can only be effective if the team using it are empowered to get the most out of it. Technology should be there to enhance the work you are doing – so when choosing a vendor to work with, make sure you select one that will be your long-term partner.

Dan Keyworth, Vice President, Customer Success Modernisation & Managing Director, International Markets Group Customer Success, Blackbaud shares his thoughts…

Drawing on my many years of experience in the non-profit sector, I understand how important it is to work hand-in-hand with fundraising technology partners to achieve your goals. Our Customer Success team at Blackbaud has been recruited directly from the charitable sector, so we have real experience of what it takes to succeed.

Partnering with a vendor that has a Customer Success function means that your organisation will have a dedicated representative to help you get the most value from your chosen solution, and to steward your overall experience. As well as helping to onboard new users and ensuring they understand how to best leverage the support, training and resources available, a good customer success team will help your organisation to drive increased usage of the solution, share best practice and examples from other users, as well as being responsive to all requests and concerns.

When choosing to work with a new vendor, you should be clear on what ongoing support will be available to you. Post-implementation support is critical and should be part of your subscription, not an additional fee.

If you choose a vendor that provides the customer success function, you are selecting a true partner that will enable you to achieve more.

For more information on the implementation process, you can read our free guide **'How to Implement a CRM Solution'** [here]().

CHECKLIST

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✓	9. *Viewed demos and discussed feedback internally*
✓	10. *Selected a solution supplier*
✓	11. *Reviewed contract documentation*
✓	12. *Final sign off on your new solution*
✓	13. *Go back and track your objectives*
✓	14. *Work with vendor to make a plan for success*
✓	15. *Contact your customer support team*

Contact us

If you have any questions on CRM solutions, would like to find out more about Blackbaud, or are at the beginning of the solution evaluation process and would simply find it useful to chat with a professional consultant, please contact us at solutions@blackbaud.co.uk

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