

What basic tech infrastructure looks like at the grassroots

London Festival of Learning



superhighways
harnessing **technology** for **community** benefit

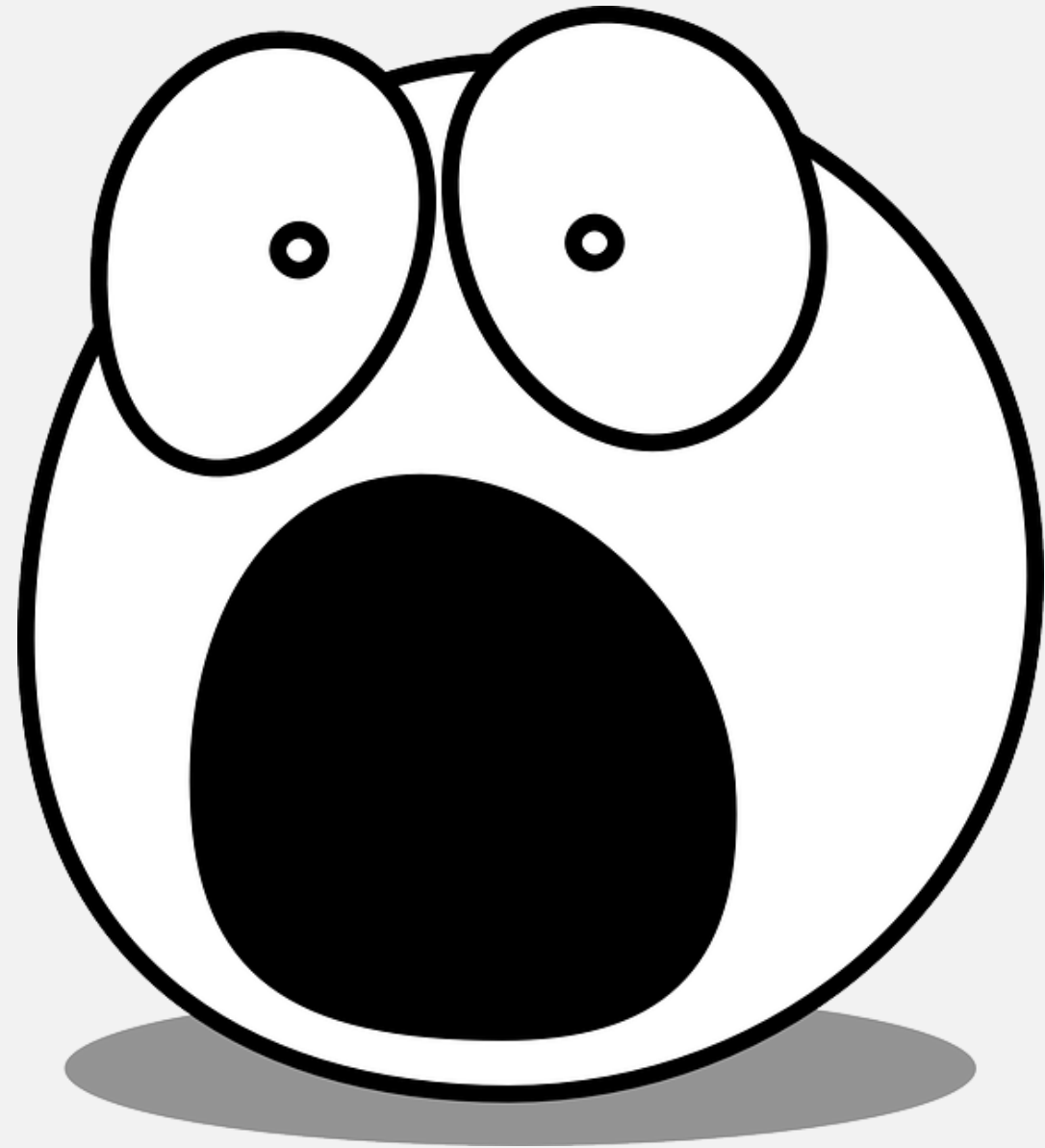


What does Superhighways do?

Superhighways helps small charities and community groups gain essential digital and data skills backed by the right tech to achieve their goals.



When tech
goes wrong
*how do you
feel?*



Let's find out...

Go to

www.menti.com

Enter the code

5481 7540

<https://www.menti.com/al5hmjumxizj>



Or use QR code



Small charities and community groups will have the **digital skills** and **tech infrastructure** they need to run their organisation and amplify their impact





What devices, software and online tools we can use.
And how can they all fit together into a simple system?



Digital Foundations

Five year partnership programme:

- ✓ Refugee Council
- ✓ HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network
- ✓ Voice Online Communities CIC



Realities of poverty: data support programme

Similar audience – better use of data to raise the voice of communities and influence change.



What does a typical grassroots group look like?

- ✓ Under £100k funding (circa 35%)
- ✓ Founder with a passion – often with lived experience and day jobs!
- ✓ Reliance on ever changing volunteer teams
- ✓ Look to friends, family or volunteers for tech support
- ✓ May or may not have office space / business addresses
- ✓ In huge demand from their communities (multi tasking even during training) often complex / urgent issues
- ✓ Little time to devote to getting tech right



What groups told us they needed



1. Planning and choosing appropriate tools
2. Basic technology systems to run a group
3. Data security and best practice
4. Visibility, reach and connecting to people
5. Supporting your communities
6. Resources including how to get funding
7. Adapting to change and sustainability





Grassroots realities – let's take a quick look



How people feel about using tech?

I worry about getting stuck

Things keep changing, hard to keep up

Embarrassed if problems keep others waiting

It can be very frustrating!

Sometimes I Google how to do something and it could be written in Greek!

Prefer to avoid tech and connect with people in real life or on the phone!

Panic rises if it doesn't work and you've no idea how to solve it

Feel traumatised' & 'nervous' about social media

Confident but still a lot to learn

Happy when using things regularly

Can be a lot of fun!



You are a small charity who loses its website!

The website was about 10 years old, and the original developer / techie left a while ago.

You can only update some website content. No one has any details about the site hosting...



Typical challenges

Not knowing...!



- ✓ Where your domain is registered (nor fully understanding what it actually is!)
- ✓ Who owns/rents their domain
- ✓ Who paid for the hosting & when this renews
- ✓ Does the hosting include our emails!
- ✓ How the website software should be updated
- ✓ If there are any site backups





Asmerom Wold
Community Reconnection
at [Bring Your Own Tech Day 2024](#)



When you rely on other people to do it for you don't control it, if you want to update something, if you want to change something, you call them and they are not available, so that was frustrating....

When we transferred the website, the emails had to be transferred as well, so that was to Outlook, it seemed very technical to transfer.

The language I learned, honestly, so we migrated the emails in just a couple of meetings, with Paul's help.

Community Reconnection [see full story here](#)



Solutions and top tips

**It's important to
record or have...**



- ☐ Where the website is hosted
- ☐ Login details to the domain registrar
- ☐ Which Credit Card was used
- ☐ Billing email address
- ☐ A permanent member of the organisation registering the account
- ☐ Multi Factor Authentication (MFA) on the site administrator log in





We could no longer use our website, which really made things difficult for us.

The main lesson I learned was that if you can't solve a problem, find an expert and rely on their expertise, rather than making endless mistakes.

Richmond EAL [see full story here](#)



You are a small charity just starting out, providing support to victims of honour-based violence, abuse and forced marriage.

Most core data is stored in a mix of personal cloud accounts and on a key volunteer's personal laptop.

You know this needs to change...



Typical challenges

Using...



- ✓ Personal accounts
- ✓ Personal devices
- ✓ No central online cloud storage
- ✓ Limited or no cyber / data protection best practice
- ✓ Unencrypted mobile devices
- ✓ Devices that are no longer receiving security updates (you are not in control!)



Solutions and top tips

**It's important to
use...**



- ❑ A cloud productivity/data sharing Suite
eg: M365, Google Workspace, Zoho,
Dropbox, Box
- ❑ All accounts with access use
organisational emails, not personal
- ❑ Individual logs in (rather than shared)
- ❑ Windows Pro for Bitlocker encryption
- ❑ Separate work profile for shared
personal devices
- ❑ All members of the team should have
basic Cybersecurity awareness:
 - Password Best practice
 - Using MFA
 - Phishing awareness



You are a very small new CIC wanting to start using MS forms for data collection.

You're on a learning curve using a new tool and frustratingly you can't find the responses!

Unpicking this highlights you have multiple paid accounts with different email addresses (Microsoft & Gmail). It's a bit of a mess!



Typical challenges

Rationalising or merging accounts is hard.

You may not have...



- ✓ Checked the settings when you set up
- ✓ Logged into a browser with the right account (and now have no access)
- ✓ Been aware that you could access non profit discounted business accounts (subject to eligibility at the time or later if you change structures)
- ✓ Thought about how to share results and collaborate with other members of the team



Solutions and top tips

It's important to...



- ☐ Rationalise accounts
- ☐ Take advantage of charity discounts (where eligible), switching when possible
- ☐ Pay for a core cloud solution rather than using a multitude of free accounts with limitations
- ☐ Think about how each solution will work as you grow



You are a small charity established 15 years ago.

You have managed to exist via short term project funding and good will of lots of people.

Your laptops are very old and slow and affect your work.

You don't realise they may also be vulnerable to cyber attack.



Typical challenges

You may not be able to...



- ✓ Access funding to replace devices
- ✓ Access your data & emails stored locally on older machines
- ✓ Upgrade to Windows 11 (Windows 10 end of life October 2025 countdown has begun!)
- ✓ Keep calm! Your PCs/laptop is now so slow it is frustrating to use (and you're tempted to revert to a personal one)





We are very tight on funds and only have enough to pay for our projects and administrator.

Our office equipment seems to have decided to come to the end of its life. We currently have a Dell Screen and HP Processor which has just about collapsed and a small printer which also is not working well... PC not responding!!

I was wondering if you know anywhere or companies that might be able to provide some second-hand IT equipment – we need to run Microsoft products – Excel, Word, Canva , Adobe etc.

We can't really wait for funding applications as it will be months before we get a reply .



Solutions and top tips

It's important to...



- ☐ Create a tech/digital budget and plan to replace devices
- ☐ Take advantage of charity hardware discounts (where eligible)
- ☐ Include tech/digital costs in funding bids
- ☐ Pay for a core cloud solution so not dependent on local data
- ☐ Check if an upgrade e.g. memory (£25) is affordable for a potential big difference
- ☐ See if you can repurpose older Windows machines as Chromebooks to access cloud solutions



You are a small community group running your organisation on a phone and tablet, often on the go.

Transferring data from mobile devices to share with others is hard.



Typical challenges

You may not be able to...



- ✓ Save your work as storage space is limited
- ✓ Share files e.g. images with others
- ✓ Collaborate on docs easily
- ✓ Participate in learning where full application functionality necessary
- ✓ Secure your device so well





Dr Hailu Hagos
Wheat Mentor Support Trust
at [Bring Your Own Tech Day 2024](#)



Tom Lam
Chinese Information And Advice Centre
at [Bring Your Own Tech Day 2025](#)

Solutions and top tips

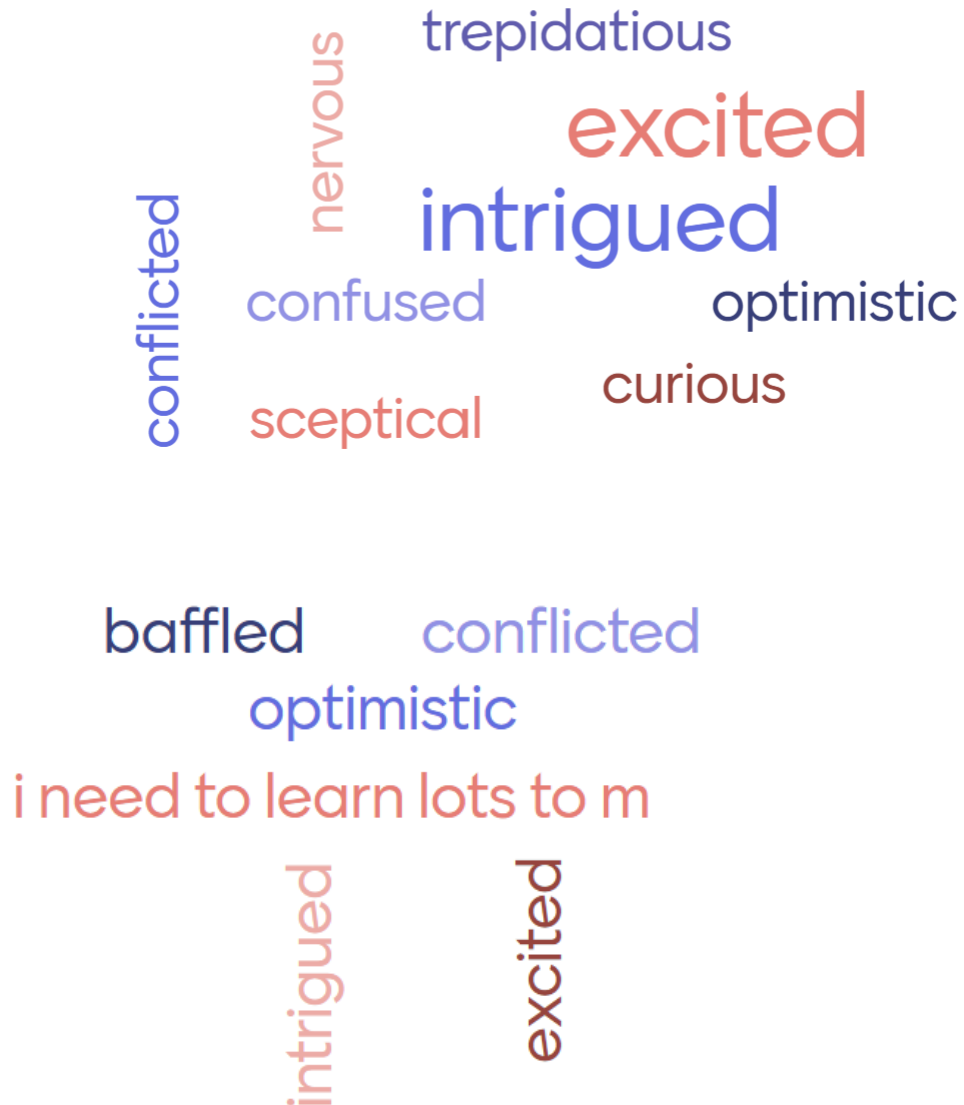
It's important to...



- ☐ Check mobile devices are still getting security updates
- ☐ Enable security features e.g. device pin/biometrics
- ☐ Install apps and sync across devices
- ☐ Use 'share' / upload options where possible
- ☐ Delete downloaded files to minimise data breaches / free up storage
- ☐ Be wary of insecure free wifi
- ☐ Consider using organisational phones



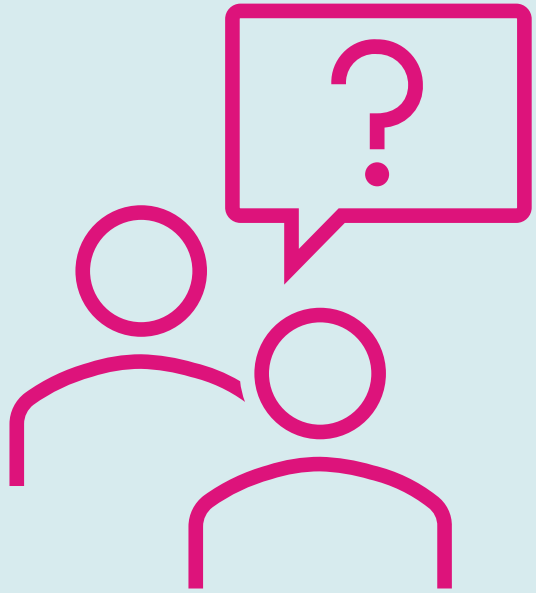
Which **1 word** describes how you **'feel'** about AI?



What about AI?

- ✓ A current distraction?
- ✓ Even more important to get the basics right first
- ✓ Data privacy and governance key
- ✓ Productivity gains to be had
- ✓ But need to use safely
- ✓ A part to play in shaping ethical use?
- ✓ Still need a good basic tech infrastructure to under pin use!





What's missing?

What else do you see?

What's a surprise to you?

[See also: early insights blog from CDS survey 2025](#)



Key things to get right

Better early tech choices

1. Secure your devices: whether organisation or personal
2. Use organisational accounts to safeguard data & minimise data loss
3. Register a domain for your organisation and use for your website and emails
4. Set up a shared file storage / productivity suite solution that can grow with you
5. Access donated / discounted products where eligible
6. Include digital, data & tech costs in funding bids
7. Invest in learning / gaining confidence in how to get the best out of tech
8. Document, document, document!





How we are helping





“

When my husband died, I lost my sort of Technical Support, who understood all the technology.

The training classes became a community, a little group of people who were willing to help each other. They made me feel empowered.

Your website is not just a technical thing; it's the window of your organisation and it's supposed to show what you really believe in.

”

Voice is a free website builder for all charity, community, not-for-profit, and voluntary groups in the UK.

[View example sites](#) or [Apply](#) for a free website and see for yourself.

[Apply for a free website](#)

[Voice](#) is a free website builder you can use.
[Apply today.](#)



Build my community website in 7 weeks: new training

- ✓ Weekly
- ✓ Free of charge
- ✓ No technical skills needed
- ✓ 2 hours per week



Training

Focused on specific technology, applications, online software or big decisions e.g.

Beginners guide to Email Octopus

Cyber security for everyone

Basic tech options for your group

Introduction to Ai for small charities



One-to-one advice

Book with one of our friendly team for 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Organisations can book more than once.



“

It's really helpful to be able to duck in for bits of advice if you get stuck.

You learn so much in the training session and then when you come to apply it, you're ok with two thirds of it and then you get stuck, its incredibly valuable then to be able to put your hand up and say 'help', which I have been able to do very often.

I think it's important to have that ongoing support there otherwise you get so far and its frustrating if you simply can't get over a hump

”

Our useful resources

Tech / digital
infrastructure
checklist

Cyber security
basics for
everyone

Demystifying
domains

Creating a
digital / tech
budget

Funding your
digital and tech
infrastructure

Speed up your
sluggish laptop

Website
planning
template

Developing
websites using
Voice

Favourite apps
for data
collection and
storytelling

Choosing and
implementing a
database or
CRM

Introduction to
AI for small
charities





Basic Tech Guide – coming soon!

Check and share...

- ✓ [Training brochure 2025](#)
- ✓ [Current bookable training](#)
- ✓ [All latest resources](#)
- ✓ [Impact stories from our work](#)
- ✓ [Small Charity Data Journeys research report](#)
- ✓ [Sign up for e-news for updates](#)


Superhighways Training Programme

Empower your organisation with new expertise



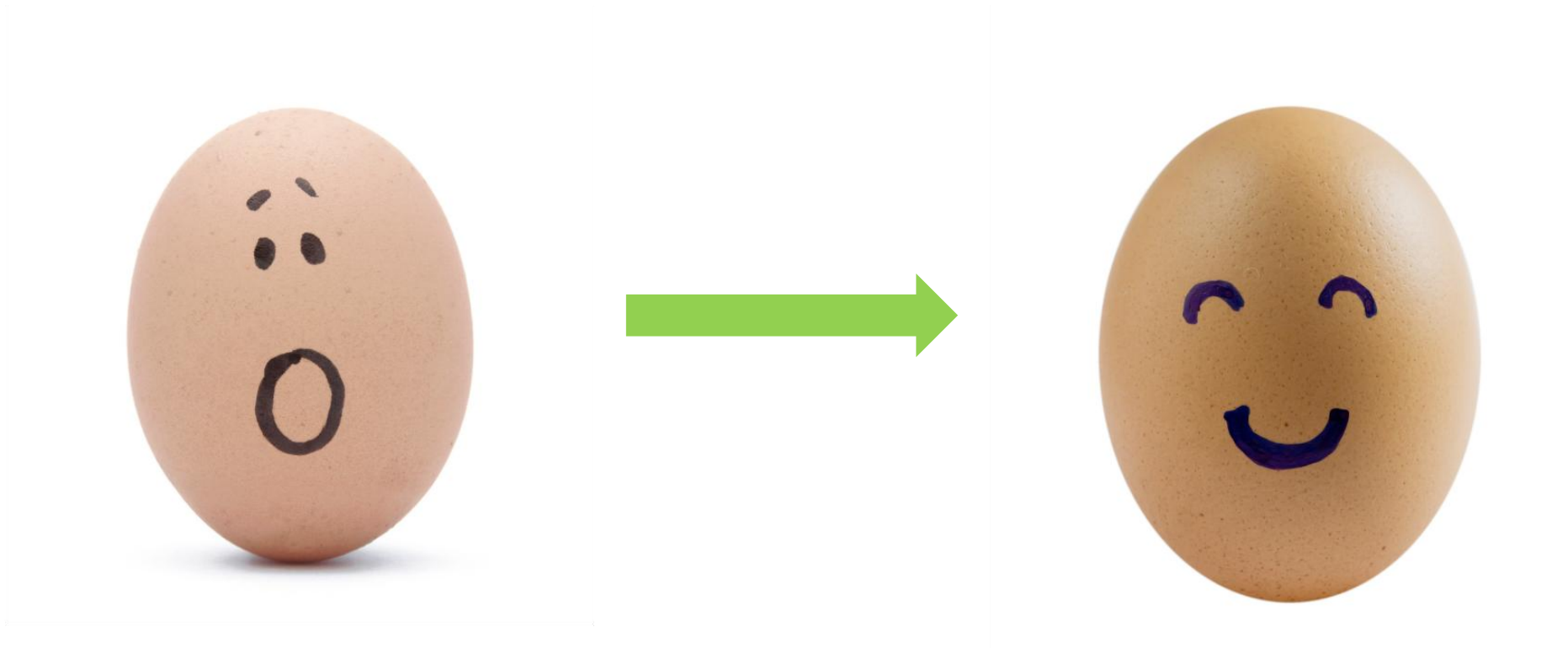
A dynamic and comprehensive training programme designed to help London charities be more effective, raise their profile and demonstrate their impact using data and digital technology.

 <https://superhighways.org.uk/>

 info@superhighways.org.uk

 **superhighways**
harnessing technology for community benefit

How else can you help?



5 calls to action for funders

1

Create capacity (time, people, training). Charities need to work on their organisational development and strategy has become more urgent due to the cost of living crisis

2

Develop inclusive digital funding practices. Funders need to make funding and support accessible to those from marginalised groups- and support inclusive best practice.

3

Invest in skills development. Charities want funding for training and access to expert guidance. Consider digital skills programmes which encourage charities to collaborate.

4

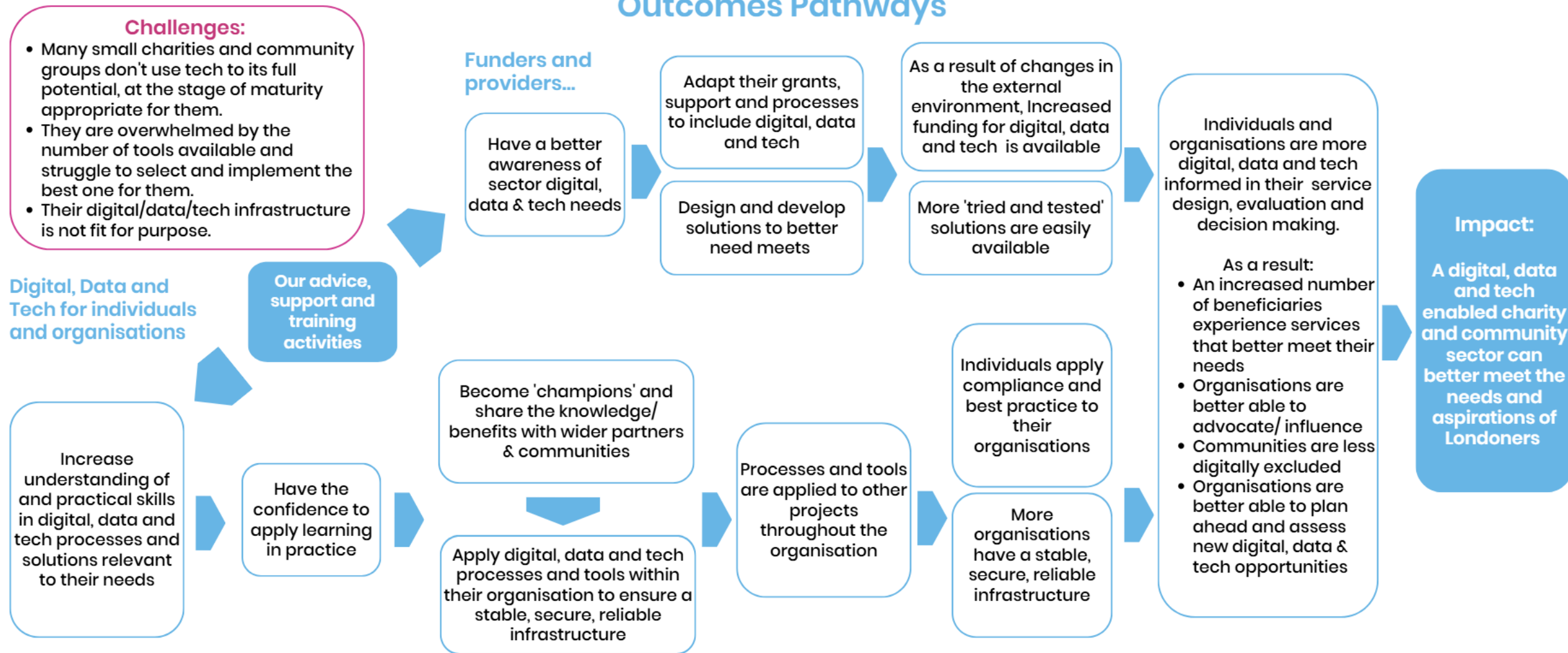
Offer dedicated support and funding for small charities, with the aim of closing the growing digital divide between small and large charities.

5

Recognise that digital costs are vital core costs. Charities want funding for technology, systems and licence costs to help them be more efficient and increase their impact.

Superhighways' Theory of Change Summary

Outcomes Pathways



Our approach:



**Relationship
centred**



**Capability-
minded**



**Committed
to value**



**Enthusiastically
curious**



**Community
spirited**

Thanks for listening & stay in touch

Kate White, Paul Firby, Sorrel Parsons
info@superhighways.org.uk

www.superhighways.org.uk

