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CTRL+CLICK CAST #120

Philanthropy Tech with Chantal Forster

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Preview: We are not about promoting technology for tech's sake. In fact, I think that's perhaps where organizations have made mistakes in the past or technologists have made mistakes in the past where we promote a tool over the people that use the tool. Essentially, TAG is about tech for social good. It's asking the question, how can technology be used strategically for organizations to realize their mission.

[Music]

Lea Alcantara: From [Bright Umbrella](#), this is CTRL+CLICK CAST! We inspect the web for you! Today we are going to talk about philanthropy tech with Chantal Forster. I'm your host, Lea Alcantara, and I'm joined by my fab co-host:

Emily Lewis: Emily Lewis!

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[Music ends]

Emily Lewis: One of our goals for this podcast is to inspire our listeners to use their skills in the web and tech to make positive change in their communities. We've talked about how design thinking can help address problems like workplace inequality and the pay gap, and even how data can help a city's tech community become more vibrant and diverse. Today we're going to talk about philanthropy tech, how technology can and is being used for the public good, especially in the nonprofit industry. To guide us in this discussion is Chantal Forster. Chantal is an IT consultant who has led community-driven technology initiatives for public and social sector clients for a decade. Currently, she is executive director of the [Technology Affinity Group](#) (TAG), which promotes the strategic use of technology in philanthropy. Welcome to the show, Chantal.

Chantal Forster: Hello. Hello from Chicago. It's great to be here.

Lea Alcantara: Thank you. Can you tell our listeners a bit more about yourself?

Chantal Forster: Sure. I am happy to. You know, I have spent my entire career in IT, but it's interesting, my entire educational background has been in the Humanities. So I've worked in the private sector, the public sector, and now the social sector as the executive director for the Technology Affinity Group, which is an association for IT leaders in foundations in the United States, North America and beyond.

Emily Lewis: And Chantal, you mentioned you've been working in technology your entire career, but how did you even get started in that, especially with an education based in the Humanities.



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Chantal Forster: You know, it's funny, my father actually is a computer scientist and my mother is an art historian, so I like to think I'm caught right in the middle.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Chantal Forster: My father actually taught me how to program in BASIC when I was about eight years old, so there was just an early comfort with technology, I mean, that actually inform STEM education, that that kind of early, early comfort and fluency can really inform your career choices.

Emily Lewis: Absolutely, I think that's a common thread amongst our guests and even ourselves. So for today's topic, let's start with the basics, and this is actually a completely brand new area for me. I feel excited to learn about this. What is philanthropy tech?

Chantal Forster: You know, it is a great question. The nonprofit sector in the United States is so big and so varied that if we say something like philanthropy tech, most people don't know what that is, so I'll just distill it. What we mean by philanthropy tech is the technology in use to support the mission of a philanthropy and by philanthropy, we mean foundations. Whether that's a private foundation, a community foundation, we can get into a little bit more later, but the essence of it is philanthropy tech is tech to support the mission of foundations.

Emily Lewis: So with that, can you share like a real-life example of philanthropy tech at work, maybe something our listeners might see and take for granted and not even recognize?

Chantal Forster: Sure, sure. I think it's important to – I'll give you an example, but it's also important to think about what's the scope of philanthropy in this country. There are [85,000 foundations in the United States](#).

Lea Alcantara: Wow.



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Chantal Forster: The [total giving foundation giving in the United States is about \\$60 billion annually](#), but we will need to sit with that for a minute, but that is equal to the federal spending for NASA plus the EPA plus the Department of Transportation plus the Department of Agriculture.

Emily Lewis: Wow.

Lea Alcantara: Wow.

Chantal Forster: That's how much money foundations give in the United States each year, and I'm sitting with that, too. It's a heavy financial burden. It's a very large financial opportunity for social change makers and difference makers in our communities.

Lea Alcantara: So how does tech come into play with this?

Chantal Forster: Well, let's do a real-world scenario like you asked about. Let's say you are a nonprofit and you're working on preventing domestic violence in a particular community, and let's say you want to work on a new initiative to maybe train survivors to become advocates for intervention in your communities. So to develop this new initiative, where are you going to get the money? So what typically occurs, this nonprofit would go to funders and apply for funding. So, I'll just walk you through that process and you can imagine how technology is embedded every step in the way.

First, that nonprofit would apply online. There will be a grant application. They would apply for the grant. They would share materials, attach them to the application. Then there's some back and forth with the funder during that application process, and all of that uses, guess what, email or a collaboration site, and then you submit all of your paperwork. There's a lot of financial due diligence. At some point, you get paid, you sign contracts online, and then you've got to do the work in your community, and as part of that arc, you're also communicating with your funder. Sometimes you have a question and then they have an idea for you. You also report to that funder and evaluate at the end



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of the grant how well did it work when you trained these survivors to become advocates for intervention. Did you see an increase in people seeking help? So the last step would be, and this is something we sometimes forget is if that is a successful intervention, how do you share that success story?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: So that's the whole digital communication realm. It's creating a succinct and convincing report to describe your approach in what was unique about it. So every step of the way in that process, there's technology, and then think about how this process is scaled all over the country for the – I think it was about 1.5 million nonprofits in the United States. That's a lot of philanthropy tech.

Emily Lewis: I'd love to know if you can share a contrasting perspective. So before technology had such an integral role to this process, what was the analog? What were they doing? Was it just papers and faxing and maybe having to travel more on site?

Chantal Forster: All of the above. The on-site travel piece is still very important because a lot of the work in communities is very relational and so a funder doesn't want to just write a check blindly. He actually want to understand the conditions in a particular community, understand what may be needed there in an authentic way, so that in-person work still exists, but it's done in a much more meaningful fashion. So instead of the transactional work, it's relational work now in person, and all of that transactional work can be done online, and so in pragmatic terms, what I've seen in many of my organization's members is that their time from application to funding for work for a nonprofit, that's very important, nonprofits need their money to deliver programs, so that time between application approval to receiving the funding has shrunk from months and months to in some funders' cases, less than a month.



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Emily Lewis: Wow, that's fantastic.

Chantal Forster: But that's putting money in the nonprofit's hands so they can get out in community and do the great work.

Emily Lewis: So before we talk a little bit more about the tech, I'm curious if there are misconceptions about tech and philanthropy, and I actually wanted to put something out there. As we were preparing for this episode, as I mentioned, this is a new area for me, I'm not familiar with it, and so whenever I thought about tech and philanthropy, I was actually thinking about some of the more seems to be lately headline-making news about leaders, billionaires in tech in Silicon Valley, putting money towards a charity, and so that's what I thought this was about, but what I'm hearing from you, that it's more of the actual mechanism where tech is driving philanthropy.

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Chantal Forster: You know, that is a perfect segue, and in fact, I would say that highlights one of the most common misconceptions about tech and philanthropy. So in the past, IT and philanthropy was all about the operational side of the house, keeping the internet up, keeping the laptops on, making sure that grant applications are now online, but what we're starting to see is a belief that technology can actually serve, scale and even drive an organization's missions, and so going beyond just the operations. Yes, all of that is still true, and you still need to do all of that. My leaders still spend a great deal of their energy and their staffing and their budget to support the operations of their organization, but where we're seeing growth and where we're actually seeing a lot of growing awareness that this work is real is in the ability to drive and serve that organization and be a part of how a funder makes change in a community.

So for example, imagine if you had a million dollars to give away in Detroit. Detroit has about 700,000 people. There's about 35 to 36% poverty rate in Detroit. How far is a million dollars really going to go?



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Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: Not very far. So there's a great example, the foundation, the [Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation](#) in Detroit. They're granting about \$5 million to start a Center for Nonprofit Support, and what they're doing there is using a business incubator group, Tech Town, it's a business incubator in Detroit, and they're funding Tech Town to transfer its entrepreneurship approach to the nonprofits in the Detroit area, and that includes a strong technology component.

So it's not, in this case, about keeping the laptops on and the internet up, but it's about building capacity in local nonprofits to innovate, to be entrepreneurial, to use technology so that that \$5 million, in this case, can go much further to solving some of the social challenges in Detroit.

Emily Lewis: That actually reminds me of our conversation with Fabian Elliot about the importance of making the investment in the organizations and the people who are part of the community.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Emily Lewis: Because they are going to know best what the problems are and be a lot closer to the solutions and who's affected by those solutions.

Lea Alcantara: And I would say also with that episode, I think the emphasis that technology is the tool to help foster these particular problem-solving items as opposed to just the laptops in the office.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: And this is a growing movement. We can talk a little bit about that in what the Ford Foundation is doing with its [Public Interest Tech Program](#). So the Ford Foundation has started to



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invest in what they're calling Public Interest Tech. You can look that #publicinteresttech, and it's a movement to drive people to use their technology skills for the public good.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: So typically those folks will be lured out to Silicon Valley and what the Ford Foundation is trying to do, they're a member of ours, is create space for people with tech skills to also apply their skills in their communities.

Emily Lewis: I love that.

Chantal Forster: So that people can speak both of those languages, the social good language and the technology language, but they have a home in this Public Interest Tech movement and can connect with each other and innovate and drive new solutions to apply their skills for the greater good.

Emily Lewis: You know, it seems to me, at least from what you've been sharing that this growth in terms of technology, playing a greater role beyond operations, that could easily be described by just evolution of tech being more responsive to what people need today, but I'm also curious, is there any part of philanthropy driving that tech to evolve where the needs of the organizations who want to apply for funding or the foundations who want to give it are identifying spaces that tech can fill?

Chantal Forster: You know, it's to both end, so philanthropic giving is growing each year between about 2 to 3% including adjustments for inflation. So in this country, philanthropic giving is growing. At the same time, what we're seeing is new types of givers, so philanthropists who maybe were born out of the tech industry, and so they get what technology can do to realize change at scale, and so I think you're seeing, to a certain extent, philanthropists understanding the changing nature of philanthropy in this country, at the same time, that growth rate of giving changing.



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We're also, unfortunately, seeing that inequity in this country is growing, so that begs the question. Even though giving is growing, inequity is also growing, so we're clearly not doing it well enough. How can we do more? How can we do better? So I think that very obvious question is also driving people to evaluate how technology can scale the investment. Another thing we're seeing that's in line with this, funders also realizing that their job may not just be about writing a check anymore, but their job is to perhaps give their grantee partners, the check receivers, their partners on the ground, the tools that they need to succeed, and that comes from listening to those grantee partners who say, "Thanks for the money."

I love the idea that I want to realize outcomes, but I need help conducting evaluation. I need help with technology to do robust surveys with my beneficiaries." So they're asking for help from funders like, "What is the digital strategy? How can you help me and my organization develop a robust digital strategy?" In fact, what I just heard from a major funder on the West Coast recently, it's a tech-focused philanthropy, and what they said was, "We, as funders, need to do a better job with our partners. In fact, we owe it to our grantees to make the same resources available be done for their work that we use in our work."

Lea Alcantara: So they're like a board of advisers instead of just a board of funders.

Chantal Forster: That's a great way to put it, and I would say most philanthropy would tweak that language slightly and say a board of partners or thought partners rather than advisers. Most funders look at themselves as partners in the chain with their grantees.

Emily Lewis: You know, as you described that, is that a new thing in this area of philanthropy because, again, this might be the misconception thing, but I had a perception that philanthropy was somewhat disconnected. The people funding were disconnected from, like you explained, the grantees. Is that a correct idea from the past that just since changed or is that just a misconception?



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Chantal Forster: You're right, Emily, that is changing. There are a couple of movements right now that I'd love to point out, so grassroots philanthropy, trust-based philanthropy, thinking about that relationship with the change maker, in this case, the nonprofit or the grantee, thinking about how that relationship can be conducted with greater authenticity. So for example, there's a family foundation in Chicago called the [Pearce Family Foundation](#) endowed by Denis Pearce who's still alive and well, probably in Michigan today. The Pearce Family Foundation uses a methodology called grassroots philanthropy, and they work very closely with their grantees in Chicago to the point where their IT director work and goes out to those nonprofits and, if they would like, will conduct a technology assessment of their end-to-end tools and systems so that they can be capacitated to better get the basics done and make more change on the ground.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: So that grassroots philanthropy approach, for example, is an arm-in-arm approach with grantees that is anything but distant.

Emily Lewis: Yeah, it seems that way. So with the Technology Affinity Group, your mission is to promote technology and philanthropy. Can you describe what that looks like on what your organization does?

Chantal Forster: I'm happy to, and I'm glad you pointed that out. We're in the midst of updating our mission. If truth be told, we're not about promoting technology for tech's sake. In fact, I think that's perhaps where organizations have made mistakes in the past or technologists have made mistakes in the past where we promote a tool over the people that use the tool. Essentially, TAG is about tech for social good. It's asking the question, "How can technology be used strategically for organizations to realize their mission?" That's a different way of looking at the question.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]



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Chantal Forster: But this is in reality the way that my member organizations look at technology in their foundations.

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Lea Alcantara: So speaking of those organizations, what type of organizations are they?

Chantal Forster: So we currently have about 1,400 members in North America and beyond. Our member profiles really are leaders and learners and IT and grants management within those foundations, and we have three types or maybe four types, we're growing in the corporate foundation area, so four types of member organizations.

One, our private found foundations, that's what you typically think of, the [Rockefeller Foundation](#), the [Kellogg Foundation](#), for example. Number two, family foundations like the Pearce Family Foundation, I just mentioned, or the [Crown Family Foundation](#), both here and Chicago with living founders or living family members who share their wealth for society's benefit. The third type would be community foundations, so those are public charities that make grants to nonprofits in a particular geographic area, so the [Tulsa Community Foundation](#). It's actually I think still the largest in the country. There's the [Chicago Community Trust](#), another community foundation. And then we also have several corporate foundations that are the giving arm of a major corporation like [Chase](#), for example.

Emily Lewis: And how about the technology. Does TAG evaluate technology and then promote it to your members to affect that social change, or is it a little bit of your members working with technology and that brings it to your attention and then you share it throughout the organization? What does it look like to help these organization leverage technology?

Chantal Forster: Well, that's a dangerous question. TAG is agnostic about tools and technology. We're an educational organization, so our focus is to connect people to each other and to facilitate



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knowledge exchange, and in certain cases, we will fund research, but then we'll evaluate in that case a whole range of tools available on the market and make that information available for members in the sector as a whole to inform their decision-making process. But what we do more commonly is to promote technology standards or best practices.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: Like best practices like, "What's the best rollout methodology or change management methodology for moving your team from local file sharing to cloud-based services like [Box](#) or [Dropbox](#)? How do you go about doing that?" So our members will talk about topics like this. We may put together white papers on how to best manage that change for your organization or we sometimes work with other organizations to create or adopt standards. There's a good one.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: It's called [G4G](#). It's GuideStar for Grant Applications. It's a data standard that allows nonprofits to upload information once to its GuideStar profile for that nonprofit and then every time they apply to a funder who uses a tool that uses that standard, it automatically feeds in their profile information so that's a time saver and it does play a role in creating these standards and driving adoption in order to save effort and money for our grantees.

Emily Lewis: And in terms of that process of sharing that information, is it something that you have people on your own staff who are kind of in the field working directly with the people who are utilizing this technology or is it something where the opposite where people from the nonprofits or from the foundations are feeding you what's happening with them, and from there, you take the direction of communicating these standards.



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Chantal Forster: It's both. Emily, it's both ends. We have a board of directors that's very well engaged that comes from all of the major funders in the country as well as community funders. We have a strong volunteer base, and then we have staff consultants. At TAG, we're a very small group, but we have a few staff consultants, and together that ecosystem works to assess need, how can philanthropy tech improve itself? How can we become more efficient and more effective? So that ecosystem works to, A, assess the need, and then, B, identify where we can work together to better streamline a particular need area, and so by working together, typically that means a couple of key foundations deciding to form a working group and TAG may facilitate that working group on behalf of those foundations.

Emily Lewis: Interesting. Can you tell me a little bit about what your volunteers do?

Chantal Forster: Sure. So we have a number of working groups that our volunteers are a part of, so our volunteers come from our members or member organizations, I should say. So our volunteers can be working on, for example, we just wrapped up [2018 State of Philanthropy Tech](#) survey. We had about 200 foundations nationwide, actually in North America, respond to the survey of best practices in philanthropy tech; what's the current state of the practice. So I have a working group that helped formulate this survey and we're currently in the process of analyzing findings and then we'll begin to craft how we can share that out with a sector as a whole. Another working group might be our Emerging Leaders Initiative, which is a program of TAG to pair emerging leaders with a mentor of more seniority in the sector and to provide coaching opportunities and educational opportunities for them so that we can better develop a pipeline of future leaders in philanthropy tech.

Emily Lewis: You mentioned your survey, will those results be limited to your member organizations or would that be something that information is made public?

Chantal Forster: Emily, you are welcome to read the results once I publish them.



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Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Chantal Forster: That's a change this year. We decided to publish out these results publicly in the sector for the mere purpose that, for the basic purpose, that if our mission is to help improve technology to serve the mission in philanthropy, we should share those results widely. So I'm a new executive director at TAG this year and about eight months into my tenure, and this was one of the changes that the committee made, and I was extremely supportive of and the board was supportive of, to do a better job of sharing out what we learn to the sector as a whole so that we can together become more effective and more efficient.

Emily Lewis: Yeah. I feel like that something like that is just one way to increase awareness of this, increase awareness that this is an area where people who work in IT or build software, build web apps can potentially, like you said, do something good in their local community, and so like you said, the more information that's out there to the broadest number of people, the better chance you have of really increasing awareness and hopefully, having more people involved in this effort.

Lea Alcantara: And I think that also reminds me of the point that Fabian Elliot mentioned in our last talk about how you can't measure success without data if you don't have foundational information of what's even the baseline to start off with.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: So these parts of or these types of information can be really useful not just to like, "Hey, here's where I can help," people can also see where gaps are as well.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]



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Chantal Forster: That was a great podcast. I love Fabian's work and I love his approach to being data driven in service of the ultimate outcome that his organization seeks.

Emily Lewis: I'm curious, what do the demographics of philanthropy tech look like? I have to admit I have probably a very dated view, again, it's probably a misconception about philanthropy, but I think of like old white men. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Chantal Forster: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: Well, that was, right? That was the face of technology leadership nationwide, in every sector. Like private sector technology organizations, we're in the midst of assessing us right now. The survey that I just mentioned, there were several question in that survey to understand and benchmark, where are we right now in philanthropy tech? To be honest, I don't know. I know that many of our member organizations have put a focus on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. What I don't know is how well that DEI focus, as it's called, is translating into the IT departments or the grants management departments in those organizations. So that survey that we just closed will help us assess the current state and drive priorities for how tech and our member organizations can focus on inclusive IT, but I can tell you that overall in the social sector, there's a lot of focus right now on how technology can inadvertently disenfranchise people.

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Emily Lewis: [Agrees]



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Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: Have you been hearing the news regarding facial recognition and machine learning techniques?

Lea Alcantara: Yes, we even had an episode ([Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Design & Dev](#)) on machine learning and AI.

Chantal Forster: So then I don't need to belabor it, but a former college student Joy Buolamwini from MIT found that a facial analysis system couldn't detect her dark skinned face until she put in a white mask, and she went on to found the Algorithmic Justice League to actually confront bias in algorithms. I don't know if you maybe share this on your podcast, but [IBM just announced in June two new public datasets for anyone who's training in facial recognition systems so that they can overcome bias](#). It might be fun to promote for your listeners that these new data sets are available to anyone so that their facial recognition systems can overcome their programmatic bias.

Emily Lewis: Oh, I love that. We'll be sure to include that in the show notes. Yeah, those are kind of challenges that you hear about and they're so frustrating because it makes me wonder who was on the team that built it in the first place, because we've talked about this a number of times, but if the people building the tech or envisioning the tech are not representative of the people who will use the tech, it's missing something. It's missing that even just test of does this work or is this offensive.

Lea Alcantara: Right.

Emily Lewis: You need someone on the team to offer a perspective like that.

Chantal Forster: This speaks personally to me, so I'm not speaking on behalf of my organization, but speaking personally. This is extremely important to me because time and time again, you'll look at a



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development team for a particular product or tool and it's a very homogenous group and yet, that tool was designed to serve a very diverse audience, and so when you launch a product or a tool like that and you don't see the adoption that you are looking for, I think it's important to pause and say, "Hmm, if perhaps we had people from that community or who are similar to that community on the team helping us design this, we might actually have designed it for their needs." But this is basic human-centered design and design thinking, but the reality is, it's much harder to do that when your team looks nothing like your target audience.

Lea Alcantara: And I think I also wanted to point out that technology isn't just limited to our phones or the internet even or the computer screens. Technology could be anything that is a machine that you're interacting with that's analyzing you for whatever reason, because when you mentioned the facial recognition situation, there was this meme that was going around on Twitter where it was the [soap dispenser](#). Have you heard the story?

Chantal Forster: I haven't.

Lea Alcantara: So it's the same concept. Basically, the soap dispenser lasers analyze light, and so when this gentleman, who happened to be Black, put his hand underneath the soap dispenser, it would not dispense any soap.

Emily Lewis: Oh.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah. And then he put a napkin on his hand...

Emily Lewis: Oh.

Chantal Forster: Oh, no.



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Lea Alcantara: Right, right, and then so that that was like a GIF that was going forward to just kind of blame how bias and ...

Emily Lewis: Assumptions.

Lea Alcantara: Yeah, assumptions and improper testing and not enough testing leads to these issues, and to be frank, I'm not really the darkest skinned Filipino, but ever since I've seen that and I've had difficulty getting an automatic sink to start or any automatic thing to start, I wonder, it's like, "Is my skin actually too dark for a split second that it doesn't have the right enough tint?"

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: And that's kind of a weird thing to think about. [Laughs]

Chantal Forster: Imagine a lifetime of microaggressions feeling like you're somehow not quite right. So this is why I'm so thrilled about the Ford Foundation's Public Interest Tech movement, which I mentioned earlier. The focus on bringing some of the best minds in technology to bring their approach, their talent, to answering some of these questions and to crafting tools and systems to support public good in the most equitable way possible, I'm thrilled about that focus for them. We need more of those kinds of folks, even addressing basic issues like an equitable soap dispenser, but scale that all the way up to the facial recognition systems that are used by our police force. We need the greatest minds in technology to be helping us think about these questions in more inclusive and equitable ways.

Lea Alcantara: What do you find then are the biggest challenges to implement philanthropy tech? Like what's stopping people from moving forward?



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Chantal Forster: I would say that my members on the operational side of the house, they're doing a great job in keeping the laptops on and the networks up. There are some challenges on the operation side of the house that are new in the past several years, but security is a really big issue for folks as you can imagine.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: The need to keep systems secure, to secure private information that grantees maybe submitting. Even things like when their staff traveled to high-risk countries where hardware can be compromised, how do you set up a quarantine approach so that all equipment, incoming and outgoing, is quarantined so you're not bringing in compromising programs into your network. So that's a new space, and in fact, there is a desire for funders to work on security issues with their grantees and including in a grant funding to address security issues for those grantees themselves. We're seeing a lot of ransomware attacks on philanthropy.

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: As you can imagine, there's a lot of money there, and so strengthening cybersecurity for the social sector as a whole is a prime concern right now.

Emily Lewis: That makes sense, and a big concern for everyone right now, I mean, our government... [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]



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Chantal Forster: [Census 2020](#) is a very hot topic, for example, right now, and security around that census and several of my funders are thinking about security and data privacy around Census 2020. What I would say in terms of philanthropy tech as a challenge, one thing that we're seeing is, how do we work across funders? Let's step back and imagine New Orleans. There is not one single funder working in New Orleans right now. You might have 15, 20 or 50 foundations funding work in New Orleans. Well, how do those foundations work together in order to understand where the greatest need? Where should we collaborate? Thirdly, how do we understand that what we're doing is working?

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: Or are we just throwing away money and not reaching the people with the greatest need with the most effective intervention? That ability to share data and integrate systems across funders, that's a big challenge right now in philanthropy, and TAG is working on this, several of our member leaders are working on this, but that's an ongoing challenge, it's just that to work at scale across funders to understand how to improve society.

Emily Lewis: Yeah. I mean, isn't that like the ideal scenario to have the greatest impact to have these systems and foundations working together. I imagine that's probably going to be an absolute game changer once it becomes something that's very clear and reliable.

Chantal Forster: I would hope so. Several of my members would hope so. At the same time, we're also being very cautious and respectful of the privacy issues inherent in that work.

Emily Lewis: Yeah.



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Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: And making sure that relationships with grantees are not compromised in any way, that the privacy of their information is maintained. There are innumerable issues there that we're being very cautious about because the desire is to maintain respectful authentic relationships, and at the same time, we're trying to understand need and outcomes at scale.

Emily Lewis: It's so complex.

Chantal Forster: It is, but it's for the greater good and so these are solvable problems, we can get there.

Lea Alcantara: So speaking of solvable problems, what resources, like books, events, workshops, do you recommend for our listeners who want to learn more about philanthropy tech?

Chantal Forster: I'd love to share a few ideas here. So I mentioned Public Interest Tech. I get out on Twitter, follow #publicinteresttech, but the Ford Foundation come up to speed there, stay engaged to help promote that movement. I'd also suggest maybe following thinkers like [Beth Kanter](#).

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: She's one of the leading thinkers in nonprofit tech, if you guys know her.

Emily Lewis: I don't know her personally, but I do follow her on Twitter. [Laughs]



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Chantal Forster: Yeah, she's great to follow. She really has her finger on the pulse of nonprofit technology. I would also say if you are a nonprofit or a tech practitioner consultant serving nonprofits, follow [NTEN](#), the Nonprofit Technology Network. [Amy Sample Ward](#), a colleague and a friend, who's just great, I love the work they're doing. Their conference is so much fun, reinvigorating, and a great learning experience every year in spring.

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And then if you are a funder or you'd like to break into philanthropy tech, maybe you're a CIO in the private sector and you're looking to think about how your career can have more impact and you're looking to break into the philanthropy tech space, consider joining my organization's annual conference. Come on down to Tucson on November 5th through the 8th, and the website for our conference is Tag2018.org. It's a 300-person conference. It's designed for intimate networking and learning so it's a great place to get started on what's going on in philanthropy tech and begin to network into that space.

Emily Lewis: How exciting, and so that's still available for ticket sales?

Chantal Forster: We just opened a couple of weeks ago, so yes.

Emily Lewis: Any final advice for our listeners who would like to actually apply their knowledge, their skills to support social good in their communities?

Chantal Forster: My message would be that your skills are more valuable now than ever before. If you're someone who can bridge both worlds, technology and social justice or social impact, if you can bridge both of those worlds, consider applying your skills for the betterment of our society, of our world. That sounds trite, but there are so many ways you can get involved, perhaps as a volunteer at a civic hackathon, for example. I would urge you to network in and join a nonprofit board. I can't tell



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you how hard it is to find people with technology skills to join a board of directors. In my case, that's not hard because all my members are technology leaders.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Chantal Forster: But most nonprofits, the other boards that I'm on, it's very difficult to find folks with tech skills and it's really critical.

Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Chantal Forster: And then I would say consider even a two- to three-year career sabbatical in which you may be take a career shift in the social sector, either working for a philanthropy for a few years, get that social sector experience. Go back to private sector if you like, but consider doing some crossover, a crossover move in your career.

Emily Lewis: You know, Chantal, I just want to follow up on that last point, because I've known you for a long time, and I feel like that's something you did where we're working a lot of not corporations, but I know you were working with the labs and a school, but then when you moved to Chicago, you got really involved with, I believe, it was the Kellogg Foundation. Was that an intentional shift along those same lines?

Chantal Forster: You know, I love to say I was strategic. I've been strategic through my whole career, but the truth is, I started with an IBM company doing data mining, critiques of analytics, writing for a particular analytics product, and then I moved into the public sector and then I started through client work, being exposed to the social sector.



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And what I will say is I love working at scale, and so when you're working on data mining tools, you're thinking at scale, and then when you're working for a government when I ran digital for the City of Albuquerque, you're thinking about a million people coming to your website to use a bill pay app.

The ability to work in philanthropy and think about that \$60 billion of investment in social change in this country and to think about how can I help or how can my colleagues help improve the outcomes of that investment, it's really hard to walk away from that kind of career shift when you think about how you spend your time every day. So I can't say that it's been strategic, but it's been incredibly rewarding.

Emily Lewis: And just to say a little something to our listeners, like I think what Chantal is describing is a really impactful way to take your career, but you can even go on a smaller scale. I mean, Lea and I are highly focused on keeping our business running, it's a fulltime job, but we really do try to, for example, use this podcast as a medium to introduce our listeners to ideas that maybe aren't common conversations when you go to conferences or meet ups or whatever, and then our focus on these social issues, that's just a really small way we're trying to contribute and use out tech skills and knowledge to kind of affect social change. So it can be big, it can be small, but I do feel like you should do something, it feels good and it helps beyond yourself.

Chantal Forster: And thank you for making that investment, Lea and Emily. I think you're the poster children for making the time to use your skills for the greater good.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Chantal Forster: So thank you.

Lea Alcantara: I appreciate that. Well, this was such a thoughtful episode, lots to chew on.



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Emily Lewis: [Agrees]

Lea Alcantara: But that's all the time we have for today, but before we finish up, we've got our rapid fire ten questions so our listeners can get to know you a bit better. Are you ready, Chantal?

Chantal Forster: I'm ready. I have no idea what these questions are, but I'm ready.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: Okay, first question, what's your go-to karaoke song?

Chantal Forster: [Eyes Without a Face](#).

Emily Lewis: Oh, God. [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Chantal Forster: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: What advice would you give your younger self?

Chantal Forster: I would tell myself to embrace risk earlier. It took me into my 30s before I became really comfortable with risk. I wished I started that in my 20s.

Lea Alcantara: What's your favorite PG-rated curse word?



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Chantal Forster: Oh, that's a good one. My fiancé has a 10-year-old daughter so we try to become experts in curse words. You know, I'd say being from the Midwest, the "freaking" is probably overused. [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: All right, who is your favorite superhero?

Chantal Forster: Oh, my favorite superhero, I would say that I don't have one, but I would say that when I met my fiancé online, he asked me if I had any superhero skills, and I didn't have an answer, but I said, "Well, I'm a beekeeper. Does that count?"

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: What's your favorite time of the year?

Chantal Forster: I love fall. September in Chicago will sucker you in. Don't come to Chicago in September because you'll think the whole year is like that, and then you'll move here, and there's really only one month like that.

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Emily Lewis: If you could change one thing about the web, what would it be?



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Chantal Forster: That's a great question, and I would go back to what Lea talked about earlier, if I could wave a magic wand, I'd make the founders of the internet and I'd make the early teams working on the web, I'd make them much more diverse so that it wasn't set up for one particular demographic from the onset, that it was co-created by a much more diverse population and therefore much more equitable and available for a much more diverse segment of our country.

Lea Alcantara: What are three words that describe you?

Chantal Forster: Words that describe me, oh, interesting, I would say tenacious, I would say joyful, and I would hope that I usually aim to be thoughtful.

Emily Lewis: How about three words that describe your work?

Chantal Forster: You know, I love what I do, so to describe the work that I'm doing right now for TAG, I would say it is highly collaborative. It's very aspirational and idealistic. I would also hope that it's impactful.

Lea Alcantara: What's your favorite meal of the day?

Chantal Forster: Favorite meal of the day, anything with mac and cheese.

Emily Lewis: [Laughs]

Lea Alcantara: [Laughs]

Chantal Forster: That could be for breakfast, but whenever it is, if there's mac and cheese on them.

Emily Lewis: All right, last question, coffee or tea?



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Chantal Forster: Tea.

Lea Alcantara: Perfect. So that's all the time we have today. Thanks for joining the show.

[Music starts]

Chantal Forster: It's been so wonderful to be with you both. Thank you so much.

Emily Lewis: In case our listeners wanted to follow up with you, where can they find you online?

Chantal Forster: I'm on Twitter under [@cocoforster](https://twitter.com/cocoforster). You can always email me, chantal@tagtech.org or look me up on LinkedIn, Chantal Forster.

Emily Lewis: Great. We'll make sure to have a link to that on our show notes. Thanks again, Chantal, it was great having you on the show to talk about this.

Chantal Forster: It's such a pleasure. Thank you again.

Lea Alcantara: CTRL+CLICK is produced by [Bright Umbrella](#), a web services agency invested in education and social good. Today's podcast would not be possible without the support of this episode's sponsor!

Emily Lewis: Many thanks to our hosting partner, [Arcustech](#), who wanted a shout out at the top of the episode.

Lea Alcantara: And many thanks to our listeners for tuning in! If you want to know more about CTRL+CLICK, make sure you follow us on Twitter [@ctrlclickcast](https://twitter.com/ctrlclickcast) or visit our website ctrlclickcast.com.



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Emily Lewis: Don't forget to tune in to our next episode when we will talk with Jeremy Keith about offline web experiences. Be sure to check out ctrlclickcast.com/schedule for more upcoming topics.

Lea Alcantara: This is Lea Alcantara ...

Emily Lewis: And Emily Lewis ...

Lea Alcantara: Signing off for CTRL+CLICK CAST. See you next time!

Emily Lewis: Cheers!

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