



Choosing a Digital Services Company Checklist

This checklist is a supplement to NNEDV's [Choosing a Company for Digital Services](#) handout and is not meant to be a stand-alone tool. Before using this tool, please read through the main document, which describes key concepts and dives deeper into each section included in this tool. Please also see the entire **Section 2: Promising Practices for Digital Service Delivery of this toolkit.**

Company: _____

Contact Name: _____

Contact Email / Phone: _____

Costs

ITEM	COST	ONE-TIME OR ONGOING?	YEARLY ESTIMATE
Purchase & Setup	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> one-time <input type="checkbox"/> ongoing	\$
Use Fees – including any extra charges for additional security	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> one-time <input type="checkbox"/> ongoing	\$

Maintenance	\$	<input type="checkbox"/> one-time <input type="checkbox"/> ongoing	\$
Other (including equipment or Internet upgrades):			

Data Security & Privacy

Does the company keep data about each conversation? (e.g. date, time, IP address, phone number, geolocation, or combination of data about device, software, and/or cookies)	<input type="checkbox"/> Best: No identifying data is recorded. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: Data is deleted automatically and quickly (within 1-3 days). <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: Data can be deleted, but less often or only manually. <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: Data is kept indefinitely.
Does the company store the content of the conversation (recording and/or transcript)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Best: Content automatically disappears after a conversation ends. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: Content can be deleted but is kept for a time or must be manually deleted. <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: Content is kept indefinitely.

<p>Does the tool leave digital traces on a survivor’s device or in accounts that might pose a safety or privacy risk?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: The tool doesn’t leave any traces on a device or in an account that might let anyone else see that the survivor communicated with your organization. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: The tool does leave traces, but they can be easily removed by the survivor with information from the shelter worker, or the survivor doesn’t have concerns about these risks.
<p>Can you assign different access levels to users (e.g. frontline workers, managers) related to what identifying information they might see about survivors?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: You have full control over access levels, can add or delete users, and change their access levels at any point without company assistance. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: You must request that the company add and delete users and change their access levels. The company will immediately process the changes. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: You must request changes from the company and the changes are not processed immediately. <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: All users have the same access level, which includes access to personally identifying survivor data.
<p>Is the conversation encrypted?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: End-to-end encryption (i.e. data is encrypted at every point between the users). <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: Data is encrypted only in transit between the users and the company’s server. <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: Data is not encrypted.

<p>Can the company see personally identifying survivor information?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: It is not technologically possible for anyone in the company to see or access personally identifying survivor information (including phone numbers, IP addresses, and content of conversations). The company doesn't hold a copy of the encryption key. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: Your organization can put a contract in place with the company specifying policies and penalties to prevent company employees from accessing conversations or data about conversations. <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: Company employees can access conversations or data about conversations, and no policies or penalties can be put in place.
<p>Do they use hardware or services of a third-party company separate from their own?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> OK: Third-party companies' access to data does not reveal personally identifying information of survivors who contacted the organization. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: Third-party companies have access to personally identifying data, but an agreement is in place specifying policies and penalties to protect against unauthorized employee access to conversations or data. <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: Third-party companies' employees can access conversations or data about conversations, and no policies or penalties are in place.

<p>Will they share or release personally identifying survivor data?</p> <p>If yes, under what circumstances? How do they respond to requests from government, law enforcement, or lawyers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: The company does not sell or share data and will fight any legal request, using their own resources. They will also notify you <i>before</i> they comply, so you can also fight the request. And/or, all data is encrypted and the company doesn't have access to unencrypted data, so they cannot release or share any unencrypted data anyhow. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: The company does not sell or share data. They will notify you of a legal request before complying, so you can fight it. <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: The company sells or shares data. The company will comply with a legal request without notifying you first.
<p>Will they provide notice of a data breach?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: They will notify you immediately and assist with remedies. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: They will notify you immediately. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: They will notify you, but the timeline is unclear. <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: They will not notify you of a data breach.

Accessibility

<p>Do survivors need to download an app to use the tool?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: Survivors don't need to download anything. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: Survivors would need to download software or an app. <i>(This may only be acceptable for survivors for whom the organization has been able to assess risk and safety plan, including around downloading the app.)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: Survivors would need to download software or an app. <i>(This could be a safety risk for survivors in crisis or who have not had a chance to assess their risk or safety plan around the use of tech.)</i>
--	--

<p>Do survivors need to create a user account, profile, or screen name (this includes any requirement to give the company an email address or phone number)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: The tool doesn't require an account, profile, or username. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: The survivor needs to create an account, profile, or username, but no identifying information is required to create the account. <i>(Only OK for tools used for ongoing clients only – not crisis lines.)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: A survivor would need to set up an account, profile, or username <i>(for tools being used for crisis response lines)</i> or identifying information is required to create the account.
<p>Is access to a strong Internet connection required for a survivor to use the tool or service?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: The tool will work with little or no broadband access. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: The tool requires broadband or cellular data, and the survivors in your area have reasonable access. Or, you offer other options. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution/Unacceptable: The tool requires strong Internet access and many survivors don't have reliable access.
<p>Does the tool meet accessibility standards (e.g. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines)? (see specific items below)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: The tool offers many accessibility features. It may be marketed as meeting specific accessibility standards, a portion of their website may describe accessibility features and/or may include accessibility policies, and there is a way to report errors. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: Offers some accessibility features. May or may not have a section of their website describing their accessibility features and/or policies. <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: Does not offer any accessibility features.

<p>Is the tool easy to navigate for people with cognitive disabilities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: The tool uses a consistent organized layout for ease of navigation. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: Workers are skilled at assisting survivors with using the tool. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution/Unacceptable: Another person (a caregiver or other support person) would need to help a survivor use the tool.
<p>Is the tool or service compatible with screen-reading technology for people with visual disabilities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: The tool has been tested with a variety of screen readers. It includes accessibility features such as alt tags, long descriptions, and/or captions for all images, videos, or audio files, audio descriptions for videos, and accessible forms and tables. Users can change the size and style of fonts, colour contrast, and have options for reading text inside of images. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: The tool is compatible with some screen readers or is navigable for screen reader users but there are still some “traps,” such as redundant labels. <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: The tool is not compatible.
<p>Is the tool or service compatible with closed captioning or ASL/LSQ interpretation (if video or audio)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: The tool has built-in features to support closed captioning and ASL/LSQ interpretation, and/or the option to create a text transcript for video and audio. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: A workaround is available. <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: The tool isn’t compatible and no workaround is available.
<p>Is the tool compatible with assistive technology for people with physical disabilities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: The tool is compatible with assistive technology devices. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: A workaround is available.

	<input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: The tool isn't compatible and no workaround is available.
<p>Does the company offer language translation or interpretation? Is it provided by a machine or a person?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Best: The tool allows for a skilled live interpreter to join the conversation. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: The tool offers machine translation that can be turned off. <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: The tool offers machine translation that can't be turned off.

Features & Customizability

<p>Does the tool support emojis, pictures, and video? Can that be turned off?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> OK: The tool allows emojis, pictures, and/or videos, and you can customize the settings to turn off some or all. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: The tool allows emojis, pictures, and/or videos, but you cannot turn them on or off to create a default for whether they are available for use. (This means you'll have to rely on telling workers and survivors whether they should use these features.)
---	--

<p>Can you set up “canned” or cut-and-paste messages?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: The tool allows you to write an unlimited number of canned messages that can be easily inserted into a conversation and can be updated at any time. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: The tool allows a limited number of canned messages and you must ask the company to make updates or changes to the messages. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: The tool only offers standard messages that you can’t edit and which don’t suit your organization.
<p>Is there cross-platform integration? (e.g. can a survivor reach out through text, social media, or secure chat)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: The tool offers cross-platform integration that can be turned on and off by platform. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: The tool doesn’t offer this. Or, the tool does offer this, but you can’t turn the feature on or off by platform (for example, some cross-platform integration may not be preferable). <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: The tool offers these integrations, and you can’t turn it on or off. Some identifying data might be shared across platforms.

Customer Service

<p>Technical support & troubleshooting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Best: The company offers 24/7 dedicated technical support and customer service. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: The company does not have 24/7 technical support, but they respond to questions in a reasonable amount of time. The tool is easy enough to use and your staff and volunteers can likely resolve common problems OR you have dedicated IT staff or consultants who can help. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: The company doesn’t have a dependable technical support or customer service team. Your organization has dedicated IT staff who are comfortable with the tool and have sufficient access to help.
--	---

	<input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: The company doesn't have dependable technical support and your organization does not have access to IT staff.
Is there any limit on the number of users from your organization?	<input type="checkbox"/> Best: There are unlimited users (including for your staff and people who reach out to you for help). <input type="checkbox"/> OK: Limits on users (for your staff and people who are seeking help) are well above your anticipated need, and the cost for additional users is reasonable. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: Limits on users (for your staff and people who are seeking help) are just enough. Cost for additional users is significant.
What Internet bandwidth is required for your staff to use the tool?	<input type="checkbox"/> Best: Your organization won't need to upgrade Internet bandwidth or equipment. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: Your organization has the budget to make any necessary upgrades. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: The company isn't sure if you'll need upgrades. <input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable: The required bandwidth isn't available in your area and/or you can't afford to make upgrades.
<p>What is their record regarding system downtime? What are their plans in case of unexpected downtime?</p> <p>Will their regular maintenance impact your services?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Best: The company has systems in place to avoid scheduled downtime and a plan for unexpected downtime. <input type="checkbox"/> OK: The company gives advance notice of scheduled downtime and works to ensure it will have minimal impact on users. They also have a plan for unexpected downtime. <input type="checkbox"/> Caution: The company has scheduled downtime that interferes with your services and/or they have no plan for unexpected downtime.

To support your development of safe tech use policies, WSC has developed a [Use of Technology Policy Template Guide for Women's Shelters and Transition Houses](#) (PDF, in English only).

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) is part of a continuum of violence that can be both online and in-person. If you or someone you know is experiencing TFGBV, you are not alone. You can use sheltersafe.ca to find a shelter/transition house near you to discuss options and create a [safety plan](#). You don't need to stay in a shelter to access free, confidential services and support.

© Copyright 2023 Women's Shelters Canada | All Rights Reserved

Adapted for Canada with permission from NNEDV's Safety Net project, based on their resource [Choosing a Digital Services Company](#).

This project is made possible through funding from the department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada.



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada