

CHECK BEFORE YOU TECH!

A Guide for Choosing Language Apps and Software



Check Before You Tech is a guide to help you consider what is right for your community in terms of digital technology apps or aids for language learning. Language apps, online dictionaries, and other similar technologies seem like they can be helpful for language work, but determining if this type of product is right for your community and the goals of your language program can be daunting. This checklist can help you ask the right questions before making a decision and investing in a new language app or software.

Where to Start?

It will be important to familiarize yourself with some **KEY TERMS** and **DEFINITIONS** used by tech providers so that you can ask the right questions. It may be helpful to have someone on your team who is comfortable with this terminology to ensure best decisions can be made. If you are assisting a community with selection of tech tools, it is important and strongly recommended to involve the community at all stage of the project and ensure decisions are made by the appropriate community language teams.

Technology

Any tool that provides a service to users in order to achieve a goal. It includes web-based applications, desktop & mobile applications, cloud-services, language learning games, and hardware devices



Usability



Refers to how easy the technology is for its users. Technologies with poor usability are challenging for new users or require users to become 'experts' in order to use the tool.

Accessibility

Refers to how available a tool is to a broad audience. Is the technology available to users with slow or no internet or does it require an internet or wifi connection? Is it accessible to people with a visible or invisible disability, etc.?



Provider



Refers to the company or organization who builds the digital tools and/or provides a service to use the tool or technology.



How Can Technology Help?

When considering to use an app or digital tool, choose a technology based on whether it will support the goals of your language program and the needs of your community. For example, if your goal is to have young beginners learning to speak, an online dictionary isn't necessarily going to help. But, if your goal is to provide resources for fluent teachers and advanced learners then an online dictionary might be helpful.

Technology is just a tool to support the work of language and teaching. A language app or online dictionary won't revitalize your language, but it can support teachers and learners who are working toward that goal.

Below are checklists to review when thinking about the **goals of your program** and some questions to consider when meeting with a **provider**.

CHECK: Goals / Needs

- ☐ What goals do we hope this technology will help us achieve?
- ☐ Do community members want a technology solution and are they supportive of this?
- ☐ Who will use the technology? Age group?
- ☐ What is the level of language ability needed in order to use the technology effectively?
- ☐ Will users need to "set up accounts" to use? Do you need wifi?
- ☐ What devices is the technology available on: computer, smart phone, tablets, etc.?
- ☐ If your language has a writing system, is it compatible with the technology?
- ☐ What equipment and access are needed to host the technology?
- ☐ Consider pros & cons of the technology and its effect on the community

CHECK: Provider

- ☐ Do we get to meet with the provider and talk with them?
- ☐ Are there others already using this technology? Do we get to see a demo?
- ☐ Does the provider and technology meet the needs we have identified, especially what is important to us?
- ☐ Will the provider charge fees if we want to switch providers (you can ask about 'vendor lock-in')?
- ☐ What is the initial cost and the cost over time? Are there any license fees associated with the technology?
- ☐ Are we **building**, **buying**, or **subscribing** to the technology?
 - Building: do we have a strategic plan for the lifespan of the technology?
 - Buying: this is less common than it used to be, but the technology 'works until it doesn't'
 - Subscribing: the technology is reliant on maintained subscription or partnership with the provider



Are We Ready for Commitment?

Every technology requires ongoing maintenance and will eventually become out-of-date. You will want to make sure your community and the provider have a long-term plan to support the product or service for as long as you need it.

CHECK: Commitment

- ☐ Are the tools, people, and resources to run this technology available for as long as we will use it?
- ☐ Do we have staff in-house who are able to work with and maintain the technology?
- ☐ Are there any hidden costs for ongoing development and maintenance?
- ☐ How often will changes/updates occur?
- ☐ Does the provider offer tech support?
- ☐ How will technology be affected by updates to computer operating systems or mobile device updates?

CHECK: Ownership & Control

- ☐ Does your community retain full ownership of all your data?
- ☐ Is the provider asking for or claiming ownership of any of your data?
- ☐ Does your community have the power to make all decisions on the use and management of the data?
- ☐ What skills, tools, and people do you need to transfer, control, and manage data in a secure and reliable way?



Data Ownership, Control, & Accessibility

Data ownership is very important for a technology project. Carefully examine how to protect and maintain control over your data and its use. Even if your community retains copyright and ownership of your data, if the way the data is stored makes it difficult to access and use, your ownership is less meaningful.

CHECK: Access & Possession

- ☐ Who can access the data: from the community? from the public? from the provider?
- ☐ Where is the data going to be stored and how is it going to be used?
- ☐ Has the provider given information on how they will use or change the data? How will they ask you for permission?
- ☐ Is the data in a format you can use? If the tech provider takes your data to create a tool, will they return it to you in an accessible format?
- ☐ How will you get your data back if you decide to switch to a different technology or provider?
- ☐ Have the materials/data been reviewed for appropriate cultural and linguistic content for this type of use?
- ☐ How are your data sovereignty and management rights protected in this project? How will you communicate these decisions to others?



Security, Privacy, and Disaster Recovery Planning

There are **two types** of security to consider for any technology you use. One is the **security of the software**—an example is requiring secure logins to access the information. The second type is the **security practices of people** who will use the software—an example is keeping password information confidential and private. It will be important to keep systems and policies up-to-date and have staff and users trained on best security practices.

Another important tool to have is a **disaster recovery plan**. This outlines how to recover data after a disastrous event such as fire, flooding, cyber-attacks or sabotage. Recovery plans help to be more prepared if a disaster were to occur. It should include plans for how to work on the technology after a disaster; and how will you help the people who are using the technology for their language work if a disaster happens.



CHECK: Security & Privacy

- What do you already know about security & privacy best practices? What do we need to learn yet?
- Who can you turn to if your data or access is compromised?
- How 'security-minded' is the provider?
- Is any security built into the technology & how often is it updated?



CHECK: Recovery

- If you provide the service, what is the plan if service is unavailable?
- What is the impact if you lose data or access to the data?
- Do you have back-up copies? Do you have a plan for how often this occurs?
- Who is your contact in case there are issues?



Usability & Maintenance

The technology tool will only help language efforts if people can use it and if it doesn't become outdated over time. Think about what might keep people from using the app or software—slow internet connections (or no access to internet) or not displaying information correctly. On-going maintenance will be important. Maintenance of the software or technology for the digital tool will be important to consider for your project & includes anticipated lifespan of the technology or product.



CHECK: Usability & Maintenance

- ☐ Who is responsible for 'fixing bugs' with the software or technology tool?
- ☐ Is there a cost for technical service & maintenance?
- ☐ What is anticipated life-span of the technology? Is there a plan for replacement or upgrades?

What can be learned from other tech tools people find easy to use? Or from technologies that are harder to use?

This **Check Before You Tech!** guide was created by the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). It was inspired by and adapted with permission from the First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) and the Check Before You Tech guide they developed. FPCC works with First Nations communities in British Columbia, Canada. We are thankful for their collaboration and permission to adapt the checklist. To learn more about FPCC visit their website at: <https://fpcc.ca/>



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