

The Modern Builder's Toolkit

Three standard platforms and what they could offer the Red Cross — what each does, in plain language, and why an organizational account is worth a conversation. Every professional software team, startup to Fortune 500, relies on these.

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The Situation

Every discipline gets a standard toolkit. Office work has Microsoft Office. GIS work has ArcGIS. Building software has one too — a code platform, an app platform, and a managed database — and until recently, only professional developers needed it. Generative AI changed that: domain experts who understand disaster operations, blood services, and volunteer logistics can now build production-quality tools themselves, with AI handling the engineering craft. This is not a lower grade of software built by amateurs; it is the same software, built by different people. The Red Cross provisions Office for its office workers and ArcGIS for its GIS analysts. The question this brief raises is whether it should provision the builder's toolkit for the same reason.

As volunteer builders, we are not aware of an organizational option in any of the three open to us — though such accounts may exist within IT, in which case this is simply a conversation about access. An organizational account offers three things: **ownership** (anything built for the mission belongs to the Red Cross from day one), **continuity** (tools outlive any individual builder), and **visibility** (IT can see, review, and govern what exists). All three sit comfortably inside the Microsoft relationship the organization already has.

The Three Pillars

PILLAR 1

A Code Home

Microsoft's GitHub • alternatives: GitLab, Azure DevOps

What it is: The industry-standard place where source code lives — version history, code review, permissions, and an audit trail. Over 150 million developers use GitHub.

What an org account offers: Every Red Cross project becomes discoverable, reviewable, and transferable between people. A Microsoft company since 2018 — the vendor the Red Cross already relies on.

Cost: verified nonprofits receive the GitHub Team plan free, or 25% off Enterprise Cloud.

PILLAR 2

An App Platform

Azure Static Web Apps / App Service • commercial: Vercel, Netlify

What it is: A managed place to run web applications — push code, get a working app at a URL, with automatic updates on every change. No servers to maintain.

What an org account offers: Tools get official Red Cross addresses, single sign-on with existing credentials, and deployments IT can see. The Azure version keeps everything inside the tenant — the same pitch as the companion brief.

Cost: small web apps cost pennies; the Azure nonprofit grant includes \$2,000/yr in credits.

PILLAR 3

A Data Backend

Azure Database for PostgreSQL / Dataverse • commercial: Supabase

What it is: A managed database with built-in security and APIs — the layer where application data lives, with backups, access rules, and defined owners handled by the platform.

What an org account offers: One canonical home for application data instead of scattered spreadsheets and one-off exports — the foundation for data consolidation rather than sprawl.

Cost: small managed instances run tens of dollars monthly; covered by the same Azure credits.

Completing the Stack (Already in the Microsoft Family)

The three pillars don't stand alone. Four supporting services close the loop — each one already part of the Azure / GitHub ecosystem, no new vendors required.

SECRETS

Azure Key Vault — API keys and credentials kept out of code, centrally managed and rotated.

IDENTITY

Entra ID single sign-on — internal apps open with existing Red Cross logins.

AUTOMATION

GitHub Actions / Logic Apps — scheduled jobs and CI/CD, included with the above.

AI

Azure OpenAI — the API layer from the companion brief plugs directly into this stack.

How to Frame It

"These are the standard tools of modern software work, used daily by millions of professionals — including many of our own people in their careers outside the Red Cross. The nonprofit programs make them nearly free. An organizational account simply means that when something useful gets built for the mission, the Red Cross owns it, IT can see it, and it outlasts any one of us."

Worth saying plainly: this is a low-risk conversation. Nothing here touches production systems or member data on day one. It establishes a known starting point — so that future tools begin life inside organizational accounts with IT visibility built in. And if suitable accounts already exist, the ask shrinks further: just an access path and the guardrails below.

The Ask: A Builder Sandbox

- **One organizational account on Microsoft's GitHub** under the free nonprofit Team plan, with IT as owner and approved builders as members.
- **One Azure subscription** activated against the nonprofit credit, scoped to a sandbox resource group with a hard budget cap.
- **Simple guardrails from day one:** naming conventions, periodic access review, a secrets policy — lightweight, written with IT, not around it.
- **A six-month check-in:** what got built, what it cost, what IT learned. Then decide whether to grow it, formalize it, or wind it down.

On cost: the pilot above runs almost entirely on nonprofit grants. Even at full organizational scale — many builders, production workloads, enterprise licensing — the complete stack would likely run \$25–50K annually. And should budget ever become the obstacle, we have specific donors who have already agreed to sponsor these capabilities. The decision can rest on governance and value, not money.