



Nonprofit News

10 Simple Things You Can Implement Now to Strengthen Your Nonprofit Board

by Elizabeth Vibber, MS

This past October, Cindy Bergvall, CPA & I attended the 2008 BoardSource Leadership Forum for three days in Washington, DC. There were more than 800 nonprofit organizations represented from across the Country, plus a respectable International presence.

Cindy and I split up to attend various workshops and training sessions, then we'd meet back and compare notes, looking for ways to impart this knowledge to our clients and nonprofit friends. One of the results of our tête à tête is the following list of **Ten Simple Things**. Some of these you might already be doing, others may seem impractical for your group. The idea is to engage your board at a deeper level, especially during these difficult times.

1. *Have your Mission and Vision statement on every board Agenda.* A subtle reminder to all board members that the mission is central to all board discussions and decisions.

2. *Start each meeting with a Member Minute.* Here each board member spends a minute explaining what they have done since the last meeting to serve the organization: secured a donation, made an important contact, read an article, etc.

This exercise should only take about 15 minutes of your meeting, but will be well worth it by encouraging your board members to think about and promote your organization outside of the monthly meetings. Board members will learn from

one another-and your organization will be the beneficiary.

3. *Introduce a By-law Amendment that limits the number of other boards your members can serve on.* I am always amazed to hear of individuals who sit on 3 or 4 Boards. Where do they find the time? How are they able to balance the tasks of your organization with their other commitments? Now if you have a Board Contract which clearly states the expectations for sitting on your board, and you hold your members accountable, this could be a non-issue. For other organizations this may be the nudge the 'over-committed members' on your board need to move along. At the very least, it should make for an interesting discussion.

4. *Create a 'Face page' for each of your board members in your board manual.* Although boards meet on a regular basis, they don't always get to know one another on a deeper level. A 'Face page' or bio page would include more personal information for board members such as hobbies or previous work/board experience. This is another way to build camaraderie on your board, not to mention discovering the hidden talents of your board. These Face Pages belong in the board manual and aren't for public viewing. Don't forget the picture!

5. *Use a DA or Devil's Advocate card at each board meeting.* Each meeting

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someone different is given the DA card and their job is to play the devil's advocate on issues before the board. This straightforward yet powerful tool can be used to avoid the pitfalls of those boards inclined to 'group think'; to correct a flawed decision making process; or simply to give a voice to members of the board who may be less inclined to share an opposing view point.

6. *Create a FAQ for new board members created by current board members.* Remember all those questions you had but were afraid to ask when you first joined the board? Or maybe you did ask them and you saw in the eyes of your fellow members that they didn't know the answer either. This is also a terrific tool to use when recruiting new members as it provides a glimpse into the culture of your organization!

7. *Make sure all of your board members have business cards with the organization's mission statement on the back.* What better way to get your cause into the hands of your board member's friends & acquaintances?

8. *Decrease the number of your committees and increase the number of your task groups.* Task groups are established to accomplish a specific objective-within a specified time frame. Once the objective is completed, the group dismantles. Task groups give boards greater flexibility, engage members more efficiently and allows issues to be tackled immediately.

9. *Create a strategic plan dashboard tracking 3-5 critical indicators to the health of the organization and update monthly showing a 12 month trend for each.* Dashboards are designed to provide a simple visual overview of the health and direction of any organization that has financial statements, i.e. balance sheets, income statements (also known as profit and loss, or operating statement) and cash flow statements. These graphics give the non-financial persons in your organization a clear picture of the finances.

10. *Ask each board member to think of the single most important issue that they feel the organization should focus on in the next year and have them write it on an index card.* Now, shuffle the cards and read them out loud to begin a strategic discussion. This last tip is pretty self-explanatory and a great way to begin the annual review of your strategic plan.

A Devil's Advocate on the Board?

Board Cafe • By Elizabeth C. Vibber • March 17, 2009 • at www.blueavocado.org

Wouldn't it be wonderful if boards could foresee the obstacles ahead - in time to make the right decisions?

Absent a few sprinkles of fairy dust, using the devil's advocate technique might assist you in identifying such obstacles. A devil's advocate (DA) is someone who takes an opposing view to test an idea or project the board is considering. The DA's job is to ask questions and make the best case possible against the proposal. By responding to the questions and challenges, the board is forced into healthy debate as it considers arguments it might never have thought of had it not been someone's specific task to challenge the board's thinking.

Here's how it works. Select one board member and place an index card marked DA or devil's advocate in front of that person. Throughout the meeting, this person should ask questions to test the soundness of the decisions the organization is considering.

A services center averts disaster

For example, a small suburban nonprofit that provides services to elder adults was considering expanding services to include another age group. At the insistence of one very vocal board member, this 25-year-old agency was wondering if it should use its expertise in day services to assist young people.

After the first meeting using this technique, the board began to pass the DA card around the table, giving more the opportunity to offer challenges to the proposal on the table - all under the cloak of security the DA card offered.

Through the tough and sometimes tense discussions, board members decided that their goal was "increased" service, not necessarily "expanded" service. By using the DA card over the course of several meetings, the board realized that the additional licensure, insurance, and expertise that the organization would need to offer youth services outweighed the potential benefits. The agency then looked for ways to make it easier to access their offerings, such as providing transportation from a nearby bus depot.

Don't forget to be nice

Use this technique every meeting or only when an important issue is up for discussion. A couple of caveats: holding the DA card does not give this board member the ability to block or hold decisions from a vote, nor should the board hold it against the designated DA for asking tough questions. You shouldn't be annoyed with someone whose "job" it is to question the wisdom of an idea...right?

Assessing Your Organizational Funding Profile

by Cynthia M. Adams, CEO, GrantStation

Diversifying Your Grants Income

Part Two

Diversifying your organization's overall income will result in a financially healthier organization.

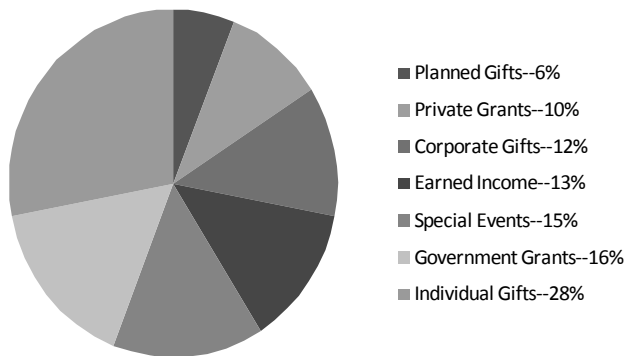
The first step in diversifying your grants income is to have a clear picture of your existing sources of grant funds.

To do that, prepare an Excel spreadsheet, using the following list as a guide. Add the amount of income your organization now receives from each source, and then, using the charts function in Excel, create a pie chart to visually demonstrate your existing situation (just like we did last week with your organizational funding profile).

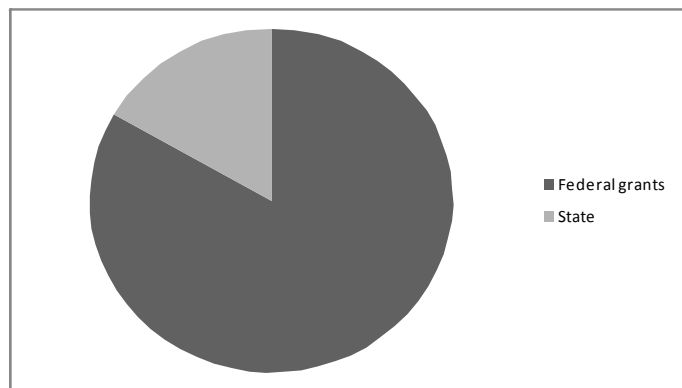
A simple analysis of your organization's current funding profile and what you need to do to build a healthier grantseeking program becomes easy once you've charted this information.

How much of your annual income is from:

Federal grants and contracts \$ _____



When you are finished charting your present situation, you will probably have a chart that looks something like this:



In this profile you're looking at \$150,000 in federal grants, and \$30,000 in state grants. That means 100% of this organization's grant dollars come from government agencies. This isn't an unusual grants profile for an organization. Obviously, this organization needs to diversify, bringing in additional grant awards from other types of grantmakers.

Just as you did with your overall fundraising activities, you want to begin by deciding how you can diversify. The organization's fundraising committee may come up with a first-year diversification objective that, when achieved, will look something like this:

In this scenario, the organization added several different types of grantmakers to help diversify their income: private foundations, corporate support, a family foundation, and one small association grant. The idea is to diversify first, and then begin to grow the amount of funding.

Part III of this article will talk about several general suggestions that may help you, or your fundraising committee, begin to develop a grants diversification plan.

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Are you reading a colleague's issue of Nonprofit News? Did you know that many of our announcements are only sent via e-mail? To be placed directly on all of our mailing lists, please contact Liz Vibber at 215-343-2727 or lvibber@bbco-cpa.com.

BBCo Community Bulletin Board

We are pleased to accept your submissions of jobs and special announcements. E-mail directly to: Liz Vibber, lvibber@bbco-cpa.com. For a more complete listing, visit our website at www.buckscountynonprofit.com

Montgomery County Foundation announces **InfolinkPA** www.infolinkpa.org Need help finding help? Use the Directory for health and human services in our community. Families, seniors, youth and everyone in-between, here's an easy-to-use and up-to-date directory of community resources. You can search by zip code and by city, by topic and by keyword, and save the services you find for later reference. As this site grows, even more detailed information will be available. Non-profits, who have not yet entered their organizational information into this web site, should call The Montgomery County Foundation, Inc. at 610-313-9836. Nonprofits outside of Montgomery County are also invited to register.

The **State Budget Office** is looking for worthy projects for the stimulus money. If your organization shelved a construction project because of the recession, post your project on the State's new website, www.recovery.pa.gov.

Visit <http://www.councilofnonprofits.org/> to access these reports:

NCN Special Report #1 (2/23/09) Analysis of stimulus bill & details on specific grant areas that nonprofits can access.

NCN Special Report #2 (2/24/09) Tips, strategies and ideas on how to access stimulus money.

NCN Special Report #3 (3/3/09) How states plan to spend the stimulus money. **NCN Special Report #4** (3/3/09) State & national sources of information on stimulus money.

NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT TRAINING SEMINAR SERIES--Spring 2009

The Bucks County Center for Nonprofit Management is pleased to announce our seminar dates and topics:

Tuesday, May 5th --**Meet the Funders Grant Writing/Grant Seeking**

This full-day will have a morning (8:30-12:00) session and an afternoon session (1:00-4:30). Participants may register for either or both sessions.

Monday, May 18th--**Fundraising, Business Development and Sales: Different or Similar? How and Where to Focus in Recessionary Times** Gary Fedor, Sandler Training (1:00-4:00pm)

Wednesday, June 3--**Maximizing Capacity Building By Understanding Finances & Data** Cindy Bergvall, CPA (8:30-12:00)

All sessions will be held at the PA Center for Biotechnology, 3805 Old Easton Rd., Doylestown. Registration begins at 8:15 for the am sessions and 12:30 for the afternoon sessions.

Cost is \$35 per person (\$30 for clients of Bee, Bergvall & Co./BCCNM). **Special Offer:** 1 board member attends free with a paid staff member.

Liz Vibber 215-343-2727 or e-mail lvibber@bbco-cpa.com. More information and registration forms are available at <http://www.buckscountynonprofit.com/training.htm>

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