



CONNECTIONS

COMMUNITY OUTREACH THINK TANK NEWSLETTER MARCH/APRIL 2016

A LETTER TO MEMBERS AND COLLEAGUES

“I believe,” the essayist and novelist Wendell Berry wrote, “that the community in the fullest sense...is the smallest unit of health and that to speak of the health of an isolated individual is a contradiction in terms.”

We had that idea in mind when we began developing the Community Outreach Think Tank initiative. We had benefitted, during the process of creating, refining, and expanding the activities of The People for People Foundation of Gloucester County, from information and ideas generously shared by individuals and other groups in the local nonprofit field. Many elements of the work were new to us, and it was hard to find reliable data about the effectiveness of

some actions or to evaluate the usefulness of available information on nonprofit management and procedures. Thanks to the expert advice we received from colleagues we were able to more efficiently and effectively shape and carry out our mission. We also

“The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

Peter Drucker

avoided some costly and time-consuming mistakes that, without those interactions, might have disrupted or delayed our work. And we felt much less isolated than we might otherwise have been. The generosity of fellow nonprofits allowed us see ourselves as part of a community—even though we

did not have a detailed picture of the nonprofit landscape.

Useful as those communications from other local nonprofits were, we realized that the guidance we received depended to some extent on chance. And it occurred to us that the challenge we faced in identifying useful information was probably shared by many small nonprofits. So we created COTT to specifically help new and existing small nonprofits (those we called grassroots nonprofits, organizations working in one or a few neighborhoods and with goals shaped by specific local needs and conditions) gain access to the latest ideas, practices, and resources in the nonprofit field (which are often unavailable to smaller charities working with tight budgets and limited time for

research), and to provide a venue at which nonprofits could regularly meet to network, exchange ideas, and explore potential partnerships. The less time a nonprofit needs to spend identifying and adapting the best practices for its goals, the more time it can spend carrying out its mission. The shorter the learning curve, the more quickly an organization can have an impact on its community. And the more actively nonprofits come together to function as an actual community, trading ideas and experiences and even pooling resources, the greater the likelihood that they can achieve their goals and reshape the neighborhoods in which they work.

In benefitting from the advice and experiences of other nonprofits, we also learned that there existed a large local reservoir of experience in running nonprofits, but that many nonprofits lacked the time to seek out peers with whom they could exchange information and from whom they could

learn. We could see, based on the many ways in which we had benefitted from interactions with other nonprofits, that an actual active community of nonprofits, possessing some way of routinely communicating with peers, could magnify the impact of each organization in a county or region and allow them to accomplish more with greater efficiency and impact. Functioning as part of a community rather than as an isolated organization each group could do more and potentially do it better.

We learned in working toward our goals that we did not have all the answers, so when we began reaching out to nonprofits in South Jersey we stressed the concept that COTT would be shaped by the needs and uses articulated by its members. We wanted it to be responsive to its member's interests. Accordingly, based on the feedback we have received thus far from members, we are expanding COTT's activities and services

to better meet the needs of nonprofits in the region.

In the coming months COTT will be adding a number of exciting features and activities for members.

We will be debuting a Community Outreach Think Tank website, containing additional articles, resources, and actionable news about grants and initiatives.

We will be launching a series of webinars for members covering basic elements of nonprofit management and actions, from working with social media and launching an online fundraising campaign to website creation.

We will be sponsoring a series of workshops for nonprofits, including one on grant writing as well as presentations on nonprofit accountancy, board activity, and ethical practices for nonprofits, among other topics.

We are especially pleased to announce that COTT will be producing regular podcasts featuring interviews with local

and regional leaders and experts in the nonprofit field.

We are also in the process of creating a Resource Directory for COTT members, listing unique free and low cost resources for nonprofits.

The feedback we have received about the usefulness of our programs and presentations has been gratifying. It's clear that many local organizations shared our perception that more could and should be done to help nonprofits achieve their goals. We remain committed to doing so, and look forward to offering yet more programs and resources for nonprofits. We continue to value your feedback and your participation. And as we work to provide the best services and guides for our members, we would be grateful if you shared information about your work with us and shared news about COTT with other nonprofits. The more members COTT has, the stronger and healthier the nonprofit community that we can join together to build.

And a healthy nonprofit community means a healthier, more compassionate, and more productive society.

Richard Nicholls
People for People
Foundation of GC

RECENT RESEARCH

Despite research demonstrating that those receiving government support are not flagrantly abusing the system the suspicion that they are has not diminished. Most recently it was voiced by a state legislator, who introduced a bill that would have forbidden those receiving SNAP benefits (aka food stamps) in his state from using it to purchase filet mignon and lobster.

A recent report on the *National Geographic's* blog site *The Plate* explains why this conviction is so wide of the mark.

“On average,” the piece notes, “households poor enough to qualify for SNSP spend about \$25 a month on beef and seafood, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey from 2014, which traces grocery spending in households by income. That’s out of a monthly grocery budget of \$244 which means beef and seafood make up

about 10% of a poor household’s grocery bill. Fresh fruits and vegetables, by the way, average about \$30 a month.”

By contrast, the nation’s wealthiest households spend \$538 a month on groceries, including \$45 a month on beef and seafood, and \$77 a month on fresh produce.

For an individual attempting to feed themselves on an average benefit of \$125 per month, luxury food items are clearly beyond their budget, and no evidence exists to back up the accusation that SNSP recipients are using their benefits to buy and then resell such items as lobster or filet mignon. Most SNAP recipients eat less and slightly less healthfully than low income families not participating in the program. And they eat considerably less healthfully than wealthy households.

One of the reasons those attempting to make ends meet by participating in the SNAP

program remain the objects of suspicion may be partially explained by an article in the journal *Consumer Research*. A survey of 1300 Americans found that we consistently use a double standard when evaluating data, applying different moral standards to an action depending on whether or not it was carried out by someone who would be considered poor. For instance, buying organic food was viewed by a majority of those surveyed as healthy, wise and even virtuous—unless those buying the organic products were using government assistance to do so, in which case the purchases were regarded as extravagant. Indeed, many of those surveyed said that they were less likely to give to a nonprofit if it was serving organic food to its clients. Those receiving government support, no matter how desperate their situation or limited the benefits they receive, seem still to be

regarded by many as hustlers for whom all help is unearned and thus unmerited.

A related criticism of the very poor is that they do not know how to make the best use of their limited resources, and thus squander support. Research by Michigan Ross professor Yesim Orhun would seem to debunk such assertions—at least for one essential item. She looked at data on toilet paper purchases (compiled by Nielsen), and found that while the very poor did tend to pay more for such necessities, it was not by choice. They simply did not have the resources to buy in bulk, nor did they have the resources to set money aside to take advantage of a sale at some point in the future. While lower income households tend to buy cheaper brands of many staples to save money, a large proportion of that savings is lost because they buy smaller package sizes at a higher price and don't utilize sales—because they lack sufficient discretionary resources. They

may also not have local access to retailers offering regular sales and bulk prices, and be unable to travel to such stores.

As a result low income households spend 5.5% more on a roll of toilet paper than higher income households able to purchase in bulk and take advantage of sales. This is not, Professor Orhun points out, because they are unaware of bargains, but because they lack the resources to take advantage of them. For the very poor, necessities cost more, are often harder to come by, and must be purchased more frequently.

Both of these reports demonstrate the extent to which poor Americans are held to a different standard than other income groups, one that begins by assuming that to be poor also means that one is incompetent or, worse, necessarily crooked.

Richard Nicholls
*People for People
Foundation of GC*

FUNDRAISING & SMALL NON- PROFITS

For most nonprofits the process of fundraising is always challenging, often frustrating, and sometimes downright baffling. Small and very small nonprofits face additional fundraising challenges. Unlike their larger counterparts, they usually lack a well-heeled and influential board of directors, a highly trained fundraising staff, or large cadres of supporters. Yet their needs are as great as their wealthier counterparts, and the services they provide to a neighborhood, a county, or a region are often crucial and unique. Small nonprofits are usually the overlooked base of the nonprofit pyramid: it's only because of their hyperlocal focus and their success in addressing local issues that larger regional and national nonprofits can pursue programs on a very ambitious scale.

Lacking the resources of nonprofits operating on annual budgets of a million

dollars or more, small nonprofits have to play to some unique strengths to survive. Their greatest strength is the loyalty of their volunteers and supporters. Larger nonprofits often find that supporters and donors come and go, and they frequently concentrate their efforts on generating ever more leads. Small nonprofits are more visible in the neighborhoods in which they work, and can have a more enduring relationship with volunteers and donors, who witness the necessary work the charity is doing.

For small nonprofits, fundraising is at its core about loyal, local supporters and about the ways in which their commitment can be leveraged. This may involve asking volunteers and supporters if their employers offer a matching gift program. It may involve recruiting supporters to reach out to their neighbors to hold a presentation or

fundraiser in their home. (It might be useful to develop or adapt a guidebook on small events that supporters could follow in soliciting donations, including a basic script on the nonprofit's history, goals, and local impact.) Or it may mean identifying the organizational skills or other talents or special skills of supporters or volunteers and matching those skills to a fundraising event (to give just one example, a dedicated supporter might also be a runner, and might have contacts with running clubs useful in staging a race for charity).

While the board of a small nonprofit may not have the networks or resources of board members at larger nonprofits, they nonetheless have a variety of local business contacts, and like the nonprofit's supporters they can be effective advocates, utilizing telephone calls, notes, and meetings with local business people or local

representatives of large corporations. It's also worth noting in this regard that many national retail corporations have in-kind donation programs which are run through their local stores, overseen by local store managers, and these corporations often put a special emphasis on helping local charities to prove that they are observant and supportive neighbors.

Small nonprofits may not share all the elements of fundraising utilized by large nonprofits (direct mail, telemarketing, bequest programs) but they do definitely share one element with their wealthier colleagues: many fundraising events or campaigns don't work. Large nonprofits tend to be pretty ruthless in such matters: if a campaign fails, they drop that approach and move on. Smaller nonprofits may be more reluctant to jettison a technique that has worked in the past, but the sophistication of modern audiences, driven by

omnipresent social media, mean that events or fundraising pitches that once drew a response can become dated pretty quickly. Adapting fundraising techniques to new realities isn't just a good idea. It's a necessity.

This brings up a related point: social media have the ability to be a great leveler, giving small nonprofits an opportunity to reach audiences once unavailable to them. Supporters can again play an important role, by posting updates on social media about fundraising events, by urging others in their networks to check out a nonprofit's website or turn out for an event, and by helping a nonprofit stage a crowdfunding campaign for a focused goal. These kinds of campaigns require, in turn, that a nonprofit have a website to which potential donors can be directed, and that the website has some mechanism in place (and to which interested parties can navigate easily) for collecting donations.

Fundraising is most effective, of course, when it emerges from a carefully thought out plan. Every nonprofit, no matter how hyperlocal, needs such a plan, which can serve as a resource and as a playbook. It should begin with an organization's budgetary needs for the fiscal year, and continue with a succinct explanation of a nonprofit's mission, including the specific ways in which the budget will be allocated to fund each element of the mission. The core of the plan should be a detailed list of fundraising ideas, with dates attached and step-by-step explanations of how, for instance, an event will be staged or an online campaign launched and maintained.

While it's tempting to envy the well-oiled fundraising machinery of national nonprofits, there are ways in which small nonprofits have an advantage: they can adapt more readily to fundraising possibilities and new ideas. They tend to have loyal supporters willing and able to

speak out for them and to become partners in the fundraising process. And they have the edge on national nonprofits in the kind of arguments for support that they can make. A very large nonprofit may have to work to convince potential supporters that they are having a direct impact in a donor's backyard. Small nonprofits have a built-in visibility, because they can be seen to be working in a neighborhood, and the impact of their efforts may already be visible to a local donor pool. As with many other aspects of their work, small nonprofits are most effective and efficient when they concentrate on their local roots and stress their local connections and impact.

Richard Nicholls
People for People
Foundation of GC

RESOURCES

Webinars

Wednesday April 6th. **10 Emerging Trends in Digital Communications and Fundraisers.** *Free.* For information and to register go to *Nonprofit Tech for Good* (<http://www.nptechforgood.com/>). Click on “webinars schedule” in the Contents bar at the top of the page.

Friday April 8th. **Cause Camp Online.** \$39.00. Seven one-hour presentations, including “The Power of We: Harnessing the Science of Stories for Nonprofits,” “5 Trends Shaping a New Reality for Nonprofits,” and “Using

Digital Tools to Learn About and Engage Potential Donors,” among other topics. For information on the conference and to register go to Cause Camp (<http://www.cause.camp/>) and click on Agenda in contents bar at top of page.

May 5th. **Mobile for Good: A How-To Fundraising Webinar for Nonprofits.** *Free.*

For information and to register go to Nonprofit Tech for Good (<http://www.nptechforgood.com/>) and click on “webinars

schedule” at top of page in contents bar.

June 15th. **What Your Nonprofit Needs to Know About .NGO, .ONG, and On Good.** *Free.* For information and to register go to Nonprofit Tech for Good (<http://www.nptechforgood.com/>)

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For more information about membership in **COTT**, please contact **Paul Blackstock** by emailing paul@pfpfoundation.org or by phoning the People for People Foundation at [856-579-7561](tel:856-579-7561). For questions regarding the content of the newsletter, please email **Richard Nicholls** at ricknichollspfp@gmail.com

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