



CONNECTIONS

COMMUNITY OUTREACH THINK TANK NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2016

NON-PROFIT NEIGHBORHOOD

The social threads that knit us together as a nation are becoming badly frayed. That's the conclusion of *"Less in Common,"* a 2015 study examining the state of public life in America. And implicit in its conclusions are some points of relevance to nonprofits.

Contemporary Americans are, the report argues, more isolated, more self-absorbed, more likely to huddle in small groups of like-minded individuals than previous generations. The diverse neighborhoods and robust public life which once characterized the nation have dwindled, and the results are evident in almost every aspect of our lives. "We spend," the authors write, "less time in public pools and more time in private gyms. We ride the streetcar or bus less and spend more time alone in our cars. High income people increasingly live in

separate, wealthy neighborhoods...Our city governments, schools, and communities are more fragmented and less inclusive than in days gone by." Technology, instead of

We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men."

Herman Melville

overcoming barriers, has allowed people "to cocoon themselves in their own environments," making Americans even "more disconnected from one another." This fragmentation matters. "A divided, disconnected and often balkanized populace is likely to make it more difficult to address and solve national problems." Because we feel that we have less in common "in the form of a shared base of knowledge and belief about the nature of the

challenges we face" and because we suffer from a weaker sense of mutual interests we are less able to communicate, agree and cooperate.

The statistics the authors use to advance their argument are alarming. Only three people in ten agree that "most people can be trusted." Nearly a third of those surveyed for the study report no interactions with their neighbors. "Between 1970 and 2009, the proportion of families living in predominantly affluent neighborhoods doubled from 15 percent to 33 percent." There are an estimated 20,000 gated or access-controlled community developments in America having 3000 or more residents. As wealth became more geographically concentrated, so did poverty. In 1970, 26 percent of the urban poor lived in neighborhoods with a poverty rate above 30 percent. By 2010, 42 percent did so, further limiting

their access to services and economic mobility.

More people live alone. They travel to work alone (85 percent of American commuters travel in private automobiles; fewer than 10 percent carpool). They socialize less (approximately 42 minutes per day). And the proliferation of new media, while allowing access to much wider sources of information and entertainment, has also fostered the growth of increasingly isolated (and intensely partisan) virtual communities.

The report does find a few reasons for guarded optimism. Social media continues to have the potential to facilitate new kinds of communities cutting across geographical, economic and cultural divisions. New kinds of public gathering places, such as coffee shops, have emerged. There is a resurgence of patronage in public libraries, and a greater variety of activities being offered in that venue. People are dining out more. Sporting events remain intensely popular. Many municipalities are striving to create new kinds of public events to regenerate a sense of community.

Which leads us back to nonprofits. They remain one of

the most democratic organizations in America, drawing together volunteers, partners and staff from across the political and racial spectrum, exposing participants to a wide range of ideas, opinions and experiences. Their public events offer people a chance to meet their neighbors, to cooperate in achieving a shared goal, and to derive a sense of satisfaction from helping others as well as benefitting the public sphere. They also serve to remind everyone they touch of the public sphere of life and of how much we still do have in common. Nonprofits, in fact, don't just enhance the health of neighborhoods. As they work to improve lives, they also actually function as a surrogate neighborhood for a fragmented age, drawing a wide variety of people together to achieve a common goal and offering a model of mutual support.

There are many ways in which the impact of a local nonprofit can be measured. But one which often gets overlooked is the manner in which nonprofits remind their communities and the nation of the humane, cooperative and generous spirit that has been a

crucial element of the national character.

Richard Nicholls
*People for People Foundation of
GC*

A FIELD GUIDE TO GRANT WRITERS (Part One)

Securing grants is a necessary element in any nonprofit's sustainability plan.

But grant applications can prove to be a daunting challenge for even experienced nonprofit personnel. They draw on so many different skills: the ability to do original research and translate statistics into lucid evidence, to compile a convincing return on investment model, to weave compelling stories of individual need into a rigorous argument and to incorporate all of these elements, and more, into a fluid narrative. Applications, in most cases, are time intensive. And, given the competition for grant money, it's crucial that your application be as terse, strong and convincing as possible. It's not surprising that a special class of professionals has emerged to answer the need in this competitive field. Larger nonprofits can afford to add a grant writer to their staff, or to keep such a writer on a retainer. Smaller nonprofits don't have that luxury. In the next several issues of *Connections* we will be exploring aspects of finding and working with grant writers to maximize your chance of success. We begin with responses to several questions we have received on the subject from COTT members.

Is it acceptable to pay a freelance grant writer a portion of a grant for which they wrote the application?

No. The term for such arrangements is "contingency pay," and it is widely regarded as unethical in fundraising circles. In fact, members of some professional organizations for grant writers would cancel the membership of a grant writer found doing so. There are several compelling reasons to steer clear of such an arrangement, including the possibility that it could profoundly damage your relationship with a funder. Most grant-giving organizations expect that the money they give you will be used only for the purposes detailed in your application, and their application materials are generally explicit in noting what you may and may not use the money for. They expect *you* to absorb overhead costs. And they also expect you to provide, upon request, a detailed record of how their grant money was spent. Discovering that you took money away from the project to cover the cost of getting it—after having failed to note the intention in your application-- would likely provoke a damaging response from the funder. Grant-giving foundations also expect applicants to function in a professional manner. Hiring a grant writer, in their eyes, is no different than

paying for the services of an accountant or an attorney: these are elements they expect to see routinely incorporated into the operating budget of a nonprofit. If you have not built these functions into the structure of your organization and are instead treating them as occasional and unwelcome additions to be dealt with in an offhand manner, how can they expect you to make the most efficient and professional use of their grant? All of this being said, it is certain that some nonprofits do strike such deals with freelance grant writers, and have undoubtedly gotten away with it. But the downside of doing so if the action is discovered—the damage to your reputation, the likelihood that it will be even more difficult for you to secure grants in the future—makes the cost of playing fast and loose with a funder's rules dangerous and potentially very damaging.

Another reason such a practice is a bad idea is that legitimate freelance grant writers behave like professionals: they set hourly rates or project fees for their work, and expect—based on their record of successful applications and their credentials—to be paid for their expertise. A grant writer willing to work for a portion of a grant that may or may not be obtained is more likely to be either inexperienced or

desperate. Neither quality is reassuring.

Which leads us to a second question: *how can I find an experienced freelance grant writer?*

The answer requires a brief detour. We first need to ask what a grant writer is. The response might seem obvious: a grant writer is someone capable of drawing together the data and details of the work a nonprofit does and creating from those materials a thorough, carefully argued and persuasive narrative (relying heavily on statistics and other evidence) explaining why your nonprofit needs and deserves a grant, why your program is needed, and how it will impact its target audience. The problem is that while there are professional organizations for grant writers and certification procedures, there is no single dominant organization or standard for the field, unlike such professions as attorneys or accountants—or plumbers. Anyone willing to tackle the challenges of grant writing can call themselves a grant writer, whether they have experience or certification or not. Someone presenting themselves as, say, a lawyer, but lacking true credentials could end up in a great deal of trouble, financial and/or legal, if they attempt to practice the law.

Someone offering to help you raise crucial dollars, but lacking training or experience, would not, so you must proceed with caution in searching for a grant writer.

To return to the question at hand, to find a grant writer you need first to take the same actions you would when searching for any sort of professional. Turn first to your networks.

Ask colleagues at other nonprofits for referrals.

Call additional local nonprofits and ask if they can recommend a freelance grant writer.

Ask around to find out if any experienced fundraisers or directors of local nonprofits have recently retired. They would have the experience to write grant applications, and might have an interest in continuing to work at a more limited pace in their field.

Ask appropriate contacts in your Facebook or LinkedIn circles for referrals.

Approach the development office of local colleges or universities. They may be able to refer you to a faculty member who has expertise in grant writing.

Consider attending a meeting of a local chapter of such organizations as the Association of Fundraising Professionals to network for referrals.

Go to such freelance sites as eLance (<https://www.elance.com>),

upwork

(<https://www.upwork.com>) and Guru (<http://guru.com>), which match freelancers in a variety of professions with specialized work, where you can post your need for a grant writer.

Consider posting your need on Volunteer Watch (<http://www.volunteerwatch.org>) which matches nonprofits seeking assistance with skilled volunteers.

As this list might suggest, it isn't easy to locate an experienced freelance grant writer. It's even harder if you are working under a tight deadline. If you think you may need a grant writer in the future, start building contacts now. In our next issue, we'll talk about what you can expect to pay a freelance grant writer. We'll include a list of questions you should ask when interviewing a candidate. And we'll also talk about alternatives to hiring a grant writer, by turning to resources much closer to home.

Richard Nicholls
People for People
Foundation of GC

WE ARE NOT ALONE ➤

How many nonprofits are there in Gloucester County? At times, as we work to find allies to carry out an urgent initiative or seek additional insight on an issue, it can seem as if there are relatively few nonprofits nearby. If we were asked to guess at a number, we'd likely start our count by listing our partner nonprofits, those we have regularly worked with, and move on from there to those we have occasionally interacted with in passing. After that, we might recollect the nonprofits we have only heard about—giving us a list of from several dozen names up to a hundred. And then we might guess about the number that might be out there unknown to us. Let's say we double or triple our list, and arrive at what might seem to be a very generous estimate of three or four hundred nonprofits in the County. It's a reasonable guess, but according to our research it's off the mark by an astonishing margin.

In 2014, the last year for which data is available, there were **1567** nonprofits registered in Gloucester County and its immediate vicinity (based on a search organized by postal zip codes, drawn from data collected by the IRS) — and we are not talking about regional or national nonprofits with offices

here. We are talking largely about homegrown organizations.

The reported assets of these nonprofits, when totaled, were \$1,392,000,000.00.

That's right: **One billion three hundred and ninety two million dollars** in assets.

Our initial survey of these nonprofits suggests that they address almost every imaginable area of need—as well as some that one would be unlikely to imagine. The majority of these organizations are intensely focused on an issue. The majority of them have modest assets. Many are dormant. Others, based on their assets and visibility, are clearly thriving. But it is the sheer number of them that is stunning.

How does the size of the county's roster of nonprofits compare to statewide figures? Surprisingly, it seems relatively modest. New Jersey is a state rich in nonprofits. According to data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics, there were 25,862 public charities in New Jersey in 2013, with revenue of 37 billion dollars, and assets of 74 billion dollars.

In future issues of *Connections* we will be sharing more detailed information on nonprofits in Gloucester County and South Jersey, spotlighting a number of unique local nonprofits and sharing

stories of their origins, missions and successes. We will also be working to make information on local nonprofits and their missions more widely accessible.

In the meantime, it's worth thinking about the implications of these statistics. The day-to-day battles we wage to answer pressing needs, maintain services and to create new programs can leave one feeling isolated and anxious. But we are not, in a very real sense, operating alone. All around us there are an extraordinary number of organizations, large, small, and downright tiny, working in almost every town and section of the county and the region to make our state stronger, healthier, more humane and more resilient. It's heartening to know that many more are laboring for change than we might have been aware of, and it is exciting to consider the possibilities that might emerge from this information, including new partnerships, shared knowledge and new initiatives.

Richard Nicholls
People for People
Foundation of GC

CALENDAR

The next COTT meeting will be held in February. Featured speakers will include **Kevin Pustizzi** of SNJ Today, a Southern New Jersey news and entertainment service discussing the best methods for communicating news about your nonprofit to the media, and **Bob D'Alessandro**, explaining the ways in which Shop.com's unique programs for nonprofits offers local nonprofits several unique avenues of generating regular income. Date and location will be forthcoming.

RESOURCES

Free webinars

Webinars are one of the most efficient ways to circulate new ideas and share lessons about successful campaigns and procedures in the nonprofit field. A number of businesses providing services to the nonprofit field regularly sponsor free webinars. Nothing is entirely free, of course: the webinars help these companies to compile lists of potential clients, so in many cases you can expect a sales call or e-mails after you have registered for a webinar. But these sessions also help nonprofits access cutting-edge ideas in a field that

continues to undergo rapid change. Many of these webinars are detailed, timely and very useful

January 20th. **Going Digital for Major Gifts.** Online donations (including monthly donations, crowdfunding projects, giving days, annual funds and even major gifts) have become a vital part of the revenue stream for nonprofits. The webinar will explore which crowdfunding and giving day tactics are likeliest to bring in major gifts, the process of efficiently managing such gifts and how to leverage social media to maximize donations. Register at

<https://www.ruffalonl.com/events/going-digital-for-major-gifts>.

January 21st. **New Year Inspiration: The Best of 2015 for Your Best 2016.** Sponsored by Classy, which provides a variety of marketing-related services to nonprofits, the webinar will offer in-depth studies of original and successful fundraising strategies implemented by four nonprofits in 2015. Among the topics covered will be the structure of peer-to-peer campaigns, how recurring giving programs work and the characteristics of successful fundraising models.

Register at

<http://go.classy.org/webinar>.

January 26th. **Getting Un-Stuck: How to Create and Achieve Goals that will Transform Your Organization, Your Team and Yourself.** Created by #No Filter Nonprofit, an initiative of Blackbaud, a company offering a variety of services to nonprofits. The webinar covers methods of boosting the efficiency and effectiveness of fundraising utilizing new technology and innovative social media techniques to increase donor retention.

Free e-course

The Ultimate Donation Page Course. Created by the Network for Good. A series of 20 minute lessons walk you through the process of creating a compelling and effective donation page for your website. The course includes step-by-step conversion techniques, real examples of successful pages, useful resources and detailed actions to implement. Available anytime. Access it at

<http://learn.networkforgood.org>.

Free report

2016 Nonprofit Communication Trends Report. Kivi Leroux Miller, an

influential and innovative thinker in nonprofit marketing, conducts an annual survey of the ways in which nonprofits market themselves and utilize social media and other resources to raise funds. This year's edition, based on responses by 1600 individuals working in nonprofit

communications, spotlights trends and identifies new thinking about the most efficient and effective ways of explaining an organization's mission and reaching donors, volunteers and potential partners.

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For more information about membership in **COTT**, please contact **Paul Blackstock** by e-mailing 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 ricknichollspfpf@gmail.com

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