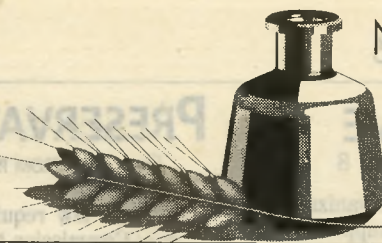


Opinion



The long view

Funders can give nonprofits a high-tech boost

Funders today face the huge job of helping to strengthen and expand the capacity of our state's nonprofit sector to meet the challenges of a world increasingly dependent on technology.

Sadly, few nonprofits or funders are sure about how to proceed. Happily, some powerful tools already exist that could be used in combination with one another to help foundations and corporate funders find creative solutions to nonprofits' technology needs.

First, funders could team up in creating and contributing to a statewide nonprofit technology venture fund. Second, funders could work together to develop a request for proposals from nonprofit organizations seeking grants from the fund. Third, the fund could make grants to those nonprofits or groups of nonprofits with the most creative proposals for meeting the technology needs of nonprofits, whether in the areas of securing hardware and software, training or technical assistance. Finally, individual funders could create their own funding programs to assist nonprofits' technology needs.

Foundations and corporate funders in recent years increasingly have turned their attention to the needs of nonprofits to build their organizational capacity. Today, as nonprofits struggle with a host of challenges involving technology and the Internet, funders have an opportunity to expand their focus on capacity-building to

include information technology.

Two North Carolina funders recently have studied how they might assist nonprofits in the area of technology. While neither has yet determined precisely how it might be most effective, both have raised important questions that other funders should explore.

After studying nonprofits' technology needs for a year, the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in Winston-Salem has concluded the biggest need was for technical assistance, not for dollars to pay for technology.

Under its new program, the foundation will identify five groups of nonprofits that form "natural networks" and need to communicate with one another. The foundation will help each group develop plans to put into effect communications technology such as email and sites on the World Wide Web. Each group may receive up to \$5,000 for equipment.

The Triangle Community Foundation also has studied nonprofits' technology needs - and concluded that the needs are overwhelming and need to be studied further. The foundation has no plans now to initiate any in-house programs. Its uncertainty about how to proceed may in part be the result of the fact that in exploring the issue of technology, it turned to the N.C. Center for Nonprofits, a membership organiza-

EDITORIAL

tion and resource group for nonprofits that has little hands-on experience in technology issues.

The center, which received \$5,000 from the foundation to perform its study, did make a handful of suggestions, including development of a "self-audit tool" to help nonprofits assess their technology and help the foundation make funding decisions; creation of a "one-stop" computer lab to provide training and technical support to Triangle nonprofits; partnerships with corporations and nonprofits to create a warehousing and refurbishment program for computer hardware; and funding to build nonprofits' technological capacity, along with consideration of technology as a critical component of general operating support.

But the center did not offer any concrete recommendations about how to turn its suggestions into realities. And it concedes it is not equipped - and does not expect to be in the near future - to handle nonprofits' technology needs.

Those needs, however, are huge and growing every day. By making the effort to study those needs and looking for practical ways to help meet them, foundations and corporate funders can go a long way toward strengthening nonprofits' ability to deliver services. The solution may lie in combining competitive and collaborative strategies to tap the extensive technological

expertise that exists in our state.

A growing number of funders in recent years have identified specialized needs within defined subject areas in which they choose to make grants - and then have invited nonprofits to submit funding proposals to meet those needs. Such a "request-for-proposals" strategy could prove highly productive in the area of technology - particularly in a state in which neither nonprofits' needs nor the resources available to meet those needs are in short supply. What is lacking are practical ideas for connecting the resources with the needs in the most efficient and effective manner.

The nonprofit sector serves as a kind of research-and-development laboratory for society. Encouraged to develop ideas that will work, and to compete with those ideas for venture funding, nonprofit R&D could prove particularly fruitful in the area of technology - and most appropriate, given the role that creativity and entrepreneurial activity play in the high-tech world.

Creating a statewide nonprofit technology venture fund also would allow funders to practice the type of collaboration - with one another - that they increasingly are asking nonprofits to practice in order to receive grant dollars. Such a fund would be a demonstration project in the finest sense.



SHARI COVITZ

Fundraising mentors

Veterans, novices link up in Triad

Where do you go for help when you are new to the field of fund raising or are an executive director of a small not-for-profit and one of your duties is to raise money?

Recently, the Triad Chapter of the National Society of Fund Raising Executives began a new program as part of its mission to provide professional development to its members.

Shari Covitz is president of *The Development Office*, a fundraising firm in Winston-Salem, and president of the Triad chapter of the National Society of Fund Raising Executives.

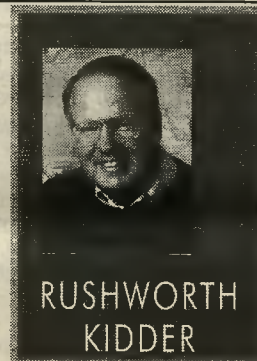
The main purpose of the Mentoring Program, which is chaired by Debra Skeen Perret, is to link members with more than five years experience in fund raising with members who have less than five years or lead smaller organizations.

This fall, a survey was sent to the chapter membership to find members who were interested in serving as mentors and to identify their areas of expertise. At the same time, beginning-level members and smaller organizations in the chapter were asked if they wanted to use a mentor.

Areas of expertise in which mentors provide assistance include:

- Office management - setting up an office, job descriptions, budgeting, policies and procedure.

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RUSHWORTH KIDDER

A different lens

Nonprofits should focus on values

Q & A

JOURNAL: What do you see as the major ethical issues facing the nonprofit sector?

KIDDER: There are really two ways to conceptualize the problem of ethics within the nonprofit sector. One is a code of ethics that is similar to journalism or the legal profession - how the sector operates. Then there is an entirely different set of concerns that for me are more interesting and powerful: How the nonprofit sector addresses itself to ethics. Is ethics only scandal? Or is it something more profound?

If you look in the Foundation Directory, you will not find any listings under ethics, values or morals. Similarly, you don't find many nonprofit

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Civic journalism

Media shift creates new opportunities

ABOUT CHANGE

News organizations are going through an identity crisis, trying to figure out what their readers, viewers and listeners want them to be. The self-searching has generated a host of changes and innovations - some of them cosmetic, others substantive. In particular, a growing number of news outlets have adopted a strategy known as "civic journalism" that aims to better connect them with their communities and better connect citizens with one another.

Regardless of the strategies that individual news organizations pursue, however, the simple process of change has created opportunities. And the nonprofit sector, which occupies the heart and soul of our communities, should take the opportunity offered by the news media's renewed attention to civic life - whether genuine or superficial - to make sure the nonprofit story gets told. That will require a concerted effort by nonprofits to better educate the media about the difference that philanthropy makes in building community.

In the process, nonprofits can help focus the media, which have been in the news a lot recently for changing the way they cover the news. According to reports in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek* and *The New Yorker*, for example, leading news maga-

zines are devoting less space to foreign news; local television stations are ignoring heated congressional races in favor of shallow coverage of a lackluster presidential race; in-depth investigative journalism suffers from sloppy economic analysis; TV networks have converted news events such as the Olympics and political conventions into mere backdrops against which to tell human interest stories; and, in North Carolina, a handful of newspapers and TV and radio stations have teamed up to collectively cover and help set the agenda for this year's elections.

In the face of stiff competition for the time and attention of readers and viewers, news organizations are using market studies and focus groups to find out what their customers want - and then are delivering it with a vengeance.

As a result, news organizations have cooked up a new recipe for the type of news they offer. Standard fare still consists of a full plate of news about crime, violence, war and disaster that feeds public fears, and news about entertainment, celebrity, gossip and scandal that feeds

public curiosity - but in even heavier doses than in the past.

The growing dominance of such coverage, moreover, has come at the expense of a third staple that has been part of America's news diet since before the founding of the Republic - coverage of government, politics and community issues.

In place of day-to-day coverage of public matters and the life of the community, many news organizations have embraced "civic journalism," which takes a variety of forms. Newspapers, for example, hold community forums and commission public surveys to identify citizen concerns and civic priorities. The newspapers then tailor their coverage to focus on the issues they have found are important to the community. Often, newspapers - sometimes in collaboration with local television or radio stations, sometimes even in partnership with other newspapers - undertake long-term investigations of issues raised through their forums and surveys.

Advocates of this trend credit the media with taking long-overdue steps to get closer to their

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