



Nonprofits get together to work together

By Barry VanderKelen

On Sept. 19, volunteers and staff from throughout the county participated in a Collaboration Summit.

The purpose of the meeting was to create new ways to work together to adapt to real cuts in funding from state and county agencies.

It was the only community meeting of its kind in the state. The United Way of San Luis Obispo County and the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation co-sponsored the summit.

Jean Ross, executive director of the California Budget Project, analyzed the state budget, including how a multibillion deficit was created.

County Administrative Officer David Edge reviewed the county budget and forecasted continued cuts in spending. Jean De Costa, dean of students at Cal Poly and an organization development expert, helped everyone see the opportunities in a time of increased requests for services and decreased funding from traditional government sources. Finally, Brad Isaacs, of the Collaborative Edge, led a series of exercises that processed all of the information.

Rick London, CEO of the United Way, said the day was designed to help peo-

ple adapt to the new fiscal realities. "We really wanted to challenge complacency and inspire people to find a new way of doing their work," he said. "We were successful."

"A lot of information about government funding was presented, most of it was scary," London said. "Jean De Costa and Brad Isaacs really helped people climb above their fear and begin co-creating solutions to funding problems."

During the summit, 15 groups were created to work on specific ideas. For instance, one group is exploring sharing administrative costs. Another group is developing tools to recruit volunteers.

And a third group is meeting to find ways to work together on providing health care for children of poor families.

These groups are self-sustaining and will exist for as long as necessary. "People were doing practical collaboration," London said. "Instead of theoretical collaboration, people saw clearly that we have to find ways to work together in order to meet the growing needs in our community." During the summit in San Luis Obispo, California legislators were

finalizing a budget for the 2008-09 fiscal year.

Specific impacts on local nonprofit groups are being determined, although it anticipated that some programs and services will not be funded at the same level as in past years.

An enacted budget allows state agencies to release funds to compensate nonprofit organizations for providing services during the budget impasse. Some of these nonprofit organizations have spent reserves and used lines of credit to meet their obligations.

Perhaps this was a good test of resilience because Ross observed that the techniques used to close the funding gap this year would create even larger problems next year.

Two participants asked, independently, why there wasn't more talk of organizational mergers during the summit.

"People need to learn to work together before they combine operations," London replied. "If the idea of merging is presented before they're ready, the relationship will crumble."

Periodic updates on progress in the working groups formed during the summit will be posted on www.collaborationslo.org.

Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

Nonprofit Business Column of The Tribune

The San Luis Obispo Tribune publishes a column every other week in the Business section dedicated to the business practices of nonprofit orgs. Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes the bi-

weekly column to help strengthen nonprofit organizations in the community. Each column is reprinted here as a one-page handout for use by local organizations. Barry can be reached at 543-2323 or by e-mail at barry@slocf.org.