



Summit to help nonprofits adapt to funding realities

By Barry VanderKelen

On Sept. 19, the local nonprofit community will gather at the Veterans Memorial Hall in San Luis Obispo for a collaboration summit. Speakers and activities will help board members and staff of local nonprofits understand the significant changes to state and county funding, and provide tools to navigate this time of radical change. Interestingly, this may be the only such communitywide gathering in the state, so far.

Social scientists find that there is greater group productivity when members cooperate rather than compete. At the same time, group members who compete have higher levels of insecurity than those who cooperate. This applies to nonprofits. Reducing competition and better use of resources are reasons for nonprofits to find ways to work together often.

Accepting the fiscal realities of traditional governmental funding sources is vital. The projections are that at the state level funding will be dramatically, and most likely permanently, reduced.

The ability to see new ways of achiev-

ing goals is nearly impossible without first accepting that following only the old ways may no longer lead to success.

The methods of collaboration fall on a continuum that has sharing information on one end and merging operations on the other. These methods are like a tool kit from which a nonprofit can find the most appropriate tool to accomplish a goal.

Evaluations of successful collaborations find that a clearly defined need is at the core of the effort. Obtaining and maintaining buy-in from partners will be easier if everyone understands the primary need. Furthermore, each participant will have a different perception of the need, thus compelling the sharing of information. A study of 431 business executives conducted by Ernst and Young in 1997 found that the biggest impediment to greater collaboration was the perception that hoarding information was rewarded more than sharing.

Open and honest sharing of information will build trust among the collaborative partners, thus making it easier to accomplish the group's

goals. Groups may decide to pool funds in order to begin programs or activities. They may also decide to share any revenue that those programs or activities generate. Another method is to share expenses without having a joint specific program or project; for instance, two organizations may share a bookkeeper or database manager.

This summit is a collaborative effort led by the United Way of San Luis Obispo County and the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation. Both organizations are sharing staff and money to create the programs, and numerous others have joined the effort, including the Nonprofit Support Center and the Collaborative Edge. Speakers at the summit include Jean Ross, executive director of the California Budget Project; David Edge, county chief administrative officer; and Jean DeCosta, dean of students at Cal Poly and an organizational development expert.

It will be from 8 a. m.–2 p. m. and includes lunch. Visit 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.