

FUNdraising Good Times: Is there a need for your nonprofit?

Written by Mel and Pearl Shaw
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"What do you do when an organization wants to raise money, but there really isn't a need for the organization?" That was the question we were asked recently. We were taken aback by the bluntness, but recognized its value. Here are our thoughts.

Most people we meet believe passionately in the organizations they are involved with. They see the impact being made and want it to continue. The challenge is to step outside of the organization and look at it within the context of the community. Are there other organizations now offering similar, competing, or more effective services? Is the need for your nonprofit as great as it was ten years ago? Have demographic shifts increased or decreased the need for your work? Have new needs emerged within the community that require funders and individuals to reallocate their giving?

The needs that nonprofits respond to and advocate for change over time. And the priority that others place on our needs change. Some changes we can anticipate, others we can't. Sometimes we are proactive, and sometimes all we can do is react and retrench. Because of this each organization needs to periodically assess its role within the community. What – if anything – do you need to change? Which organizations are you competing against? How could you be more effective? Ask donors and funders. Ask those who support you and those who have never provided funding.

Nonprofits who have received federal funds either directly or indirectly know about decreasing revenue streams. Grants have been decreasing and disappearing for a long time now. Continuing to cut programs and services and make do with less is one way to address this market challenge. Another is to look to collaborate, partner and as appropriate merge organizations. You may need to restructure how you provide services. You may need to be bold and launch a major fundraising campaign. Consider engaging your board in a dialog that looks beyond "how do we get through this fiscal year?" to asking deeper questions about how the organization can best serve its market.

Here is the hardest question: is your nonprofit relevant? Does it really meet a need? Even if you are successful with your fundraising, could the funds invested in your organization better benefit the community if invested in another nonprofit? If you are a new organization: were your founding assumptions accurate? If you have a history of service, are younger organizations

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better able to meet emerging needs? Don't be afraid to ask these hard questions: doing so may open new doors. Assuming that your organization should continue to exist – without testing those assumptions – may prevent you from being of greatest value to those you serve. Only you and your board can provide the answers.

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Mel and Pearl Shaw position nonprofits, colleges and universities for fundraising success. For help with your campaign visit www.saadandshaw.com or call (901) 522-8727.