

# Added Value

More than Money

Fall 2008

## Silver Linings

### The Other Sides of Economic Downturn

Are you weary of talk about unemployment? Rising prices? Tanking real estate values and similar news? This article looks at the other side of the economic downturn in nonprofit organizations. Over the last few weeks, I've asked leaders about their organizations and the current economic climate. In particular, the POSITIVE results they are experiencing or they anticipate. In other words, where are the silver linings? Here are some:

#### A Partner in Need... A Partner Indeed

The Education Foundation of Sarasota's revenue from Florida Education License Plates is down. And, they experienced a 50 percent cut in state funding. So what's the good news? Laura Breeze, the Advancement Director shares, "Recently, two donors came to us and said they wanted to make a donation *now* because they knew we really must need the money."

Kevin Lindberg, Executive Director of the Red Cross noted, "Our governing board has recognized how important it will be for everyone to be involved in fundraising and has stepped up to initiate planning for several revenue sources, including major gifts and special events."

Finally, in terms of new partnerships, there was the recent news about the gift to the

Patterson Foundation. The gift increased the Foundation's

assets from \$3 to \$25 million. Whatever the Foundation's eventual priorities this is good news. Funds from the Foundation will help nonprofits to meet their missions for years to come. And, Mrs. Patterson's generous gift stands as example to others.

#### When Current Events Help to Make Your Case Clearer

Economic downturn, as we have seen, can make your need for support even clearer to potential and existing donors. Bob Carter, Executive Director of the Senior Friendship Center believes that the challenges ahead will help nonprofits to tighten their focus on their values and mission. Laura Breeze agrees, "Our case is even more compelling in this climate."

#### Stronger Every Day — Without Exceptions

This, also, is an opportunity to make sure your organization is in order. "Our organization will remain strong because we are

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being proactive in monitoring the economic conditions and taking appropriate action to keep the costs and plans at an even pace or even cutting back for the time being,” shared Alexandra Quarles, CFRE, President & CEO, Sarasota Memorial Healthcare Foundation, Inc.

In the same vein, Kevin Lindberg, adds, “Nationally, American Red Cross has been involved in an organizational structure change for a couple of years which creates regional groupings of chapters and promotes and encourages more collaborative efforts, particularly in the areas of back office functions, like accounting and payroll. This will help to improve cost efficiencies and maximize use of the donor dollar.” Locally, he notes, “We’ve also taken a close look at expenses and managed to find a few areas where we can cut back.”

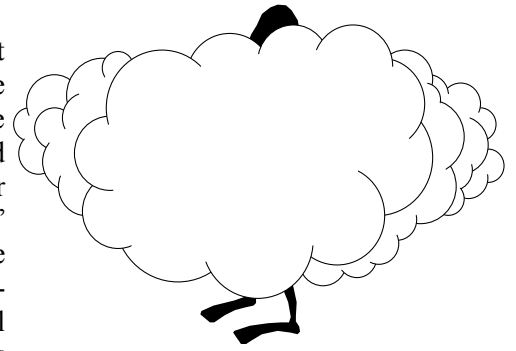
Others have found that lean times create an excellent opportunity to discard activities that are no longer profitable or viable in terms of mission. Perhaps there is an activity or program you’ve wanted to discontinue. Do the economic conditions give you a chance to take “the elegant out?”

### Other Opportunities

Two other executive directors shared that the people who were applying for key leadership positions were far superior to previous applicants. Bob Carter, also confirmed that there is less job-hopping and therefore less expense related to filling positions. And even though you didn’t need it, you now have further impetus to show how donations made to your organization represent money well spent. How might you convey this to your donor’s in new ways?

## Onward and Upward

After the shock, it is time to get back to our tasks, never losing site of the goal or underestimating the challenges ahead. And, as a friend quipped, “Whining will no longer work. It’s time to get back to work.” By finding and focusing on the essentials you can, like these leaders, decide that the conditions will be a learning experience. Make this the year that your organization found its way to its next level...and took advantages of many silver linings.



## How to Use This Time to Build The Next Good Time

What can you do you to help your organization now and in the long-term? Here are four practical suggestions.

1. **Evaluate.** This exercise takes time and thinking—but not money. List all your organizations activities during the year. Include everything you do from client services, to answering the telephone, to making referrals, include friend-raisers and fund-raisers. Rank each activity for mission achievement. How much mission does this activity create? Create a second column. Using the same scale rank your activities on how much time, money and energy you invest in them, with the low rank being low investment and high being maximum investment. For example, you rank office supply shopping a one on mission achievement, but a three on cost, time and energy.

Review your list. What activities create the most mission for your investment? Most organizations undertaking this exercise, can eliminate or reduce some of their high-cost low-mission activities in order to increase the low-cost high-mission activities (In this case, you decide to order office supplies quarterly and use the “extra” time to get current in your field.)

### 2. Add Low-Cost Training

All of us can use quality training to master challenges, especially when times are tough. Consider these low-cost alternatives:

- As a staff, read a book together, like, *Forces for Good*. Discuss a chapter at a weekly meeting for nine weeks.
- Download podcasts, such as those from Stanford’s Social Innovation Network
- Use *Ted* (18 minute talks by the “world’s best thinkers and doers” at ([www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)) or
- Listen to a CD or teleconference (from our website)

### 3. Institute Low-Cost High-Benefit Changes

In response to gas prices, the United Way of Manatee County and many other organizations now offer their staff a four-day workweek. Try this or a variation on it, i.e., like creating

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varying start times to provide your customers longer hours or other changes that have low costs, but potential high benefits. What ideas have you been wanting to use?

**4. Maintain Good Focus.** As we enter October, my neighbor’s tree is filled with dozens of little green just-beginning-to-ripen oranges. Harvest produce begins to fill the stores. Donors still give to nonprofits for their mission because mission continue to be important. What do nonprofits find that works? What has always worked—one-to-one relationship and requests based on real needs that offer real solutions.

You can take advantage of *now* to find and refine the essentials for your organization.

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program basics that allow you to continue to provide essential services, streamline operations and become more self-sufficient. For example, seek funds to replace a worn, high-mileage vehicle with a low-mileage model to transport seniors to medical appointments. Install a telephone system that allows you to reduce staff. Replace the daycare center’s roof. Request help for an entrepreneurial effort to provide new income.

- **Modest Work Best.** Make your request at the average or less than the historical amounts given by the donor. When the market is growing, nonprofits often request more than the historical average. When the market shrinks, it is time to seek less.
- **True Commitment.** When they must make choices, donors prefer to go with those whom they have the longest successful relationship--- don’t forget to ask you tried and true friends for help. And when you reach out to new people, even if you are not funded now, remember your efforts are establishing the groundwork for future relationships.
- **Buddy Up.** Collaborations have always helped grant donors to help multiple organizations with one gift. Also, donors recognize that collaborations spur new interactions and possibilities. Because of these and other reasons, collaborative applications hold special attraction now. Contact the person on your list from that other organization. This is the time to explore all the ideas of how you might work together. . .and receive grant support to do so.

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## Grant–Link

### Anatomy of Grant Seeking in Challenging Times

While many grant donors are sharing that they are inundated with requests — opportunities to win grants still exist. For example, in the last month, I've helped groups to renew state funds, seek new federal, corporate, and foundations funds plus grants from the proceeds of a community event.

Seeking funds and making plans is a sign of hope and commitment to your future. At the same time, it is realistic to acknowledge the competition and approach each request with care. How can you write a strong application to make your case? Which requests stand the best chance of funding? Consider the following:

- **Aim For the Bull's Eye.** Request help where help is needed the most. If you face new requests for help from your customers, this is an obvious area to seek funding. What about requesting funds for a short-time position to help people for the next year, especially if you can make the case that you will have less demand at the end of the grant cycle?
- **Back to Basics.** Request essential items that will save staff, energy or other costs. Seek funds for

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## *Money -tastic!*

### Tip of the Month

**#1 Collect Emails.** Email fundraising raises more money than website fundraising. The best email lists are the one you create through your personal contacts. So, keep emails of people that contact you. And collect emails by creating sign-in sheets. Offer a drawing. Pass around a notepad at your presentation so participants can receive a follow-up piece. Use your collected emails to provide your new contacts value on a regular basis, i.e., monthly. In this way, you will create and grow an interested-in-your-mission-community. As appropriate, seek donations.

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