



A Community Conversation

Report of Roundtable Discussion

December 12, 2008

A Community Conversation was held in London on December 12, 2008, hosted by Pillar Nonprofit Network and the London Public Library. Nonprofit community organization representatives discussed "How will London's nonprofit sector respond to the world-wide economic downturn?"

These are the comments compiled from the discussion:

1. How will the economic downturn affect your clients/participants and the demand for your services?

- Increase in demand with fewer resources because spread around further
- Need to target supports
- Less ability to pay for services/collect user fees
- Increased debt
- Increased stress and depression
- Pressure on donors
- Reluctance to seek help
- Transfer of services from government and other agencies that are cost-cutting
- Worried about recruitment
- Are they getting the information and do they really know what is going on
- Waiting lists
- Clients' families will have greater stress levels
- Fewer students expected next year at university or colleges
- Less membership
- Participant levels at core fundraising events going down

2. What areas of your organization are most vulnerable?

- Ability to serve
- Financial risks
- Keeping the doors open
- Community fundraising
- The care level of the clients. Dropping staffing levels to the minimum as mandated by the Ministry.
- Community counseling
- Credit counseling
- Keeping the lights on
- Corporate sponsorship
- The ability to maintain the status quo
- Decrease in sponsorships and ticket sales
- Decrease in media coverage
- Maintaining viable organization administratively
- Stay anchored to vision and mission
- Funding
- Being overcautious and cutting staff
- Reliance on same sources for funding
- Staff morale

3. How is your organization planning to respond in the short term (1-2 months) and longer term (3-9 months or more)?

- Layoffs
- Stepping up development department and diversity
- Staying the course
- Building on the department to continue to diversify funding base
- Access other nonprofit agencies and market services
- Advertising
- Co-programming
- Becoming more efficient
- Collaboration

- Partnership
- Stewardship
- Smaller partnerships will grow into longer term
- Leaner philosophy
- Still moving forward with plans and fundraising
- Considering waiting lists
- Reevaluating staff vacancies
- Hiring and wage freeze
- Reassessing funding that has already been determined
- Strategic planning
- Volunteer reliance
- Quality volunteers
- Working smarter with less
- In-kind donations
- Restructuring
- Reduced work week
- New market development
- More volunteers
- Service cuts

4. What can be done to support services and infrastructure (i.e., organizational capacities, collaborative networks, etc.)?

- Sharing space and materials
- Sharing services
- Find ways to access info
- People through one door
- Child Youth Network
- Communication links
- Dissemination of info
- Build on established relationships
- Access other agencies
- Social entrepreneurship
- Provide support for one another
- Stop working in silos
- Share information
- Think before printing
- Streamlining
- Barter system for excess resources
- Collaborative fundraising
- Increasing flexibility
- Keep focused
- More personal touch with community relations
- Collaborative efforts with Pillar to inform business of nonprofit availability
- Best practices
- Emphasize what you do best
- Advocacy
- Lobbying

5. What suggestions can be tabled to mitigate any negative impact on our organizations and on our community?

- No more negativity
- Back to the core of your mission
- More creative
- Realistic budget
- Bring local professional development
- Good news stories printed by the media
- Our social responsibility to reach our partners
- We don't need to be all things to all people
- Be prepared
- Build on what is already there
- Support politicians to do their job of being leaders who are keen to work on solutions in positive ways
- Collaborative fundraising
- Focus on accomplishments
- Diversification in funding
- Communication
- Increased community relations
- Ask Pillar to be a voice
- Proactive media relations
- Be flexible
- Contingency budgets
- Streamline activities
- Shared voice – Pillar & United Way
- Get the organizations information and value out into the public eye
- Shared voice for sector
- Proactive media relations
- Leadership that promotes collaboration
- Formalized peer support
- Strong board and Executive Director to provide strong leadership
- We are all in this together
- Engage politicians

- Can't cry the blues about the economy when donors are living in it
- Social enterprise workshop with 4 models presented from concept, operation, activities and outcome

6. Did you learn anything new or did you find any surprises at this sharing of information session?

- Volunteerism goes up in an economic downturn – Can't give dollars so give time instead
- Some places are hiring?
- Business in Elgin county will be hiring over 130 people sometime in next year

7. General comments:

- We need more connection opportunities like this
- Peer to peer groups continue
- Workshops on signs when someone is depressed
- Quarterly peer to peer meetings – afternoon or early evening roundtables on various topics
- Have to find ways of working more effective and efficient
- Learning how to do more with less
- Ensure staff don't get burned out
- Instead of formal agenda, talk about the accomplishments
- Use accomplishments and highlights to bring up morale
- What do we do that is unique
- Sticking to the mission
- Turn the situation into an opportunity to promote
- Tell the community what you do and make them aware
- Pillar has a role to get the message out
- Make sure we use the foundation
- We have an incredible network, let's keep it going
- Supporting each other is extremely important
- Keep up morale
- Peer to peer could be sector specific
- Comments today were positive, no negativity
- Volunteers and fundraising committees looking kind of scared

8. Actions and/or ideas:

- Need to share and support like this forum on a more frequent basis
- As people we can watch for signs of depression
- Workshop on depression awareness
- Workshop on social enterprise/entrepreneurship – what is it?
- There is a province wide initiative heading to trillium
- Reverse biz after five event
- Always looking for partners to work collaboratively
- More networking
- More info sharing
- Forum on line
- Need to support volunteers
- Staff need to provide volunteers with as much info as possible – we're all in it together
- Museum London would donate space for a mental awareness workshop

Michelle Baldwin, Executive Director of Pillar Nonprofit Network, summarizes:

In the face of turbulent economic times it is important to stay focused on our missions and our strategic directions. In fact services and needs in the nonprofit and charitable sector increase as we see job loss, more people hungry, mental health problems on the rise, more stresses in the home resulting in an increased need for family counseling, the need for increased capacity in homeless shelters and women's shelters, and the list goes on. At the same time, the need to preserve our quality of life, including arts,

culture and sports, continues despite hard economic conditions as this is what nurtures the mind, body and spirit.

After reviewing all the media and perspectives shared today, here is what I have taken away as key to the sustainability of the nonprofit sector:

1. Look to the long term strategy as this is what has worked in the past during tough economic times
2. Continue to share your story as those who need you need to know your organization exists
3. Continue to share your case for support so you can clearly articulate your financial needs
4. Collaboration and shared services are more vital than ever
5. Volunteerism actually increases according the generosity index from the Fraser Institute because if people cannot give dollars they will give with their time
6. Nonprofits and charities should review their spending because it is important to be accountable at any time in the economic cycle
7. Innovation and creativity is essential in looking for new solutions

We will get through this and it is through the conversations, sharing of ideas and support from one another that we will continue to contribute to the betterment of our community.