

**An Assessment
of the
Information
and
Professional Development Needs
of
Selected Nonprofit Organizations
in the
Western Suburbs**

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Project Summary

Selected nonprofit organizations in the western suburbs participated in a series of focus groups between August 2008 and February 2009. Participants came together to discuss their information and professional development needs. Nine focus groups were held with a total of 50 persons from 22 local nonprofits participating.

Major resource needs of area nonprofits include information on:

- Local, state and national demographics, data and statistics
- Area businesses
- Legislative issues
- Local cultural, political and social issues
- Capacity building

Professional development and training needs include some of the following areas:

- Board recruitment and development
- New and emerging technologies
- Networking with colleagues, clients and donors
- Volunteer training and management
- New and innovative fundraising techniques

Nonprofit professionals also expressed an interest in a wider variety of modalities for workshops, training opportunities and networking with colleagues. Many participants favored learning and networking via online teaching modules, webinars, listservs and discussion boards rather than through workshops and sessions offered in traditional formats and settings.

These and other issues that emerged from this project deserve the attention of the Philanthropy Center and other area organizations that serve the DuPage nonprofit community.

Background / History

The Philanthropy Center at the College of DuPage provides resources and services to nonprofit organizations in the western suburbs. The Center was established in 2000 and is a partnership between the College of DuPage Library and the Donors Forum, a state-wide nonprofit membership association of grantmakers, nonprofit agencies and individual donors that is headquartered in Chicago. Funding for the Philanthropy Center is provided by the College of DuPage Library, the Donors Forum, the Community Memorial Foundation of Hinsdale, and the West Suburban Philanthropic Network, an organization of nonprofits in DuPage County.

The Philanthropy Center is widely respected in the nonprofit community and is used extensively by nonprofits in the western suburbs. The collection includes books and videos for checkout on a wide variety of nonprofit topics, reference materials and directories, philanthropic periodicals, and databases of grantmakers and individual donors. Professionally trained staff are available to assist with the use of these resources, and free orientations to the Philanthropy Center are scheduled regularly. The Philanthropy Center's website can be accessed @ <http://www.cod.edu/library/Philanthropy/index.htm>.

An assessment of the current information and professional development needs of nonprofits in the western suburbs is timely since nearly ten years have passed since the establishment of the Center. Thus, this project was undertaken for the purpose of conducting such an assessment, synthesizing the input gathered from selected nonprofits, and sharing those results with other 'umbrella' organizations in the area that support the needs of the nonprofit community.

Project Goals

This project focuses on the information and professional development needs of nonprofit organizations in the western suburbs and the resulting implications for the College and other area organizations that support nonprofit organizations in DuPage County. Selected nonprofit personnel were surveyed to determine their major information and training needs. Participants were asked about their use of the College's resources, services and facilities as well.

Discussions held with staff from selected nonprofit organizations focused on the following topics: (See Appendix A for exact wording of questions.)

- What kinds and sources of information do you rely on as an organization to meet your goals?
- What information are you lacking that would help to enhance your performance?
- What are your most urgent professional development and training needs?
- Who currently provides training and development for your staff?
- Have you used the College at all? If so, what resources and services have you used?
- What programs and services of the College are you most interested in? How could the College most effectively deliver programs and services to your organization?
- Who do you partner with in the greater community to most effectively deliver your services?

The approach was qualitative as people were asked to talk about their specific needs in small focus-group settings. Rather than conduct written surveys of area nonprofits, I as the project coordinator listened to and recorded the verbal stories and thoughts of selected nonprofit staff. While a relatively small number of organizations and staff were involved, the discussions did uncover a wide range of needs on the part of local nonprofits as well as a surprising amount of consensus about what they needed to effectively meet their mission and goals. This final report which summarizes the input of participants will be shared with selected areas of the College as well as other organizations that work to support the philanthropic community in the western suburbs.

Details of the Focus Group Sessions / Participants and Data Gathering

(See Appendix B for specific information regarding focus group participants.)

- Nine focus groups were conducted during the fall and spring semesters between August 14, 2008 and February 19, 2009. All were led by the project coordinator, Judy Wagner.
- A total of 50 people from 22 nonprofit organizations in DuPage County participated in the discussions. A concerted effort was made to include nonprofits from many different service areas with a wide range of budget and staffing sizes.
- Two one-hour luncheon round tables were conducted with selected Community Memorial Foundation grantee organizations. Participants volunteered to take part in the discussions. Each roundtable followed a workshop the grantees had attended at the LaGrange County Club. One group involved five individuals from four nonprofit organizations. Six individuals from five nonprofits comprised the second group.
- One two-hour luncheon roundtable was held at the College of DuPage Library. Ten organizations were asked to participate and seven individuals from seven different organizations were in the focus group.
- The other focus groups were held at the actual site or location of six area nonprofit organizations representing a wide variety of service areas. Each discussion was one hour in length and included staff that had been preselected by the executive director or manager of each organization.

Results of the Focus Group Sessions

There were several common needs and ideas expressed by focus group participants which will be presented here. There were many interesting comments made during the discussions as well, some which are also noted.

What are your major information needs?

What kinds of information are you lacking?

(There was considerable overlap between these two questions during the focus groups.)

- An overwhelming information need exists for local, state and national demographics, statistics, data and research studies so that nonprofit staff might:
 - “Locate community and area concentrations of need”
 - “Respond to community shortages and deficiencies”
 - “Substantiate local needs for planning purposes and raising funds – to accurately ‘paint the picture’ and ‘create the story of need’”
- Many people not only cited the need for such demographic and statistical information but also noted the importance of learning how to locate this data. In addition, they are looking for a “one-stop” place to access these kinds of statistics, such as a Research Guide on the Philanthropy Center or Donors Forum web site.
- Information about local businesses and how to access that information is another important need. Nonprofits increasingly demonstrated an interest in reaching out to local businesses, particularly the smaller and medium-sized companies in their communities. They want to “more effectively connect” with them in order to:
 - Promote voluntarism on the part of company employees.
 - Expand their corporate donor base.
 - Find new sources of in-kind and promotional support of special events and programs.
- Legislative issues that impact nonprofits were noted throughout the discussions, and people frequently mentioned the difficulty of staying abreast of state and federal laws and policies. A central “place” to access such information for nonprofits is on their ‘wish list.’
- People are also looking for current information – local, statewide, national and international - on cultural, social and political issues that impact the world of philanthropy. They are particularly interested in “easy” access to newspaper and magazine articles regarding these issues.

- Capacity building was frequently referred to in the focus groups. Participants want information on how to:
 - Effectively manage their organizations in these difficult economic times.
 - Increase capacity to meet the increased demand for their services and programs.
 - Partner with similar or compatible nonprofit agencies to more efficiently serve clients.

Where do you currently go to obtain your information?

- Most frequently-mentioned resources are:
 - [Philanthropy Center at College of DuPage](#)
 - [West Suburban Philanthropic Network \(WSPN\)](#)
 - [Donors Forum](#)
 - [Giving DuPage](#)
- Other sources include:
 - [Community Memorial Foundation](#)
 - [DuPage County web site](#)
 - [Chronicle of Philanthropy](#)
 - [GuideStar](#)
 - [Community Resource Information System \(CRIS\) – DuPage County](#)
 - [United Way of DuPage County](#)
 - [DuPage Community Foundation](#)
 - Local colleges and universities

What are the most urgent professional development and training needs of your staff?

- The topic of governing boards was one of the most frequently mentioned areas of interest for purposes of training and development. Two major focus areas regarding boards emerged throughout the discussions:
 - Board recruitment
Nonprofits noted the importance of knowing how to most effectively recruit board members. They value the role that boards play in their organizations and want to attract people who are energetic and truly committed to their goals and missions. They also expressed an interest in a

“board matching” service for the western suburbs, which would provide a “place” where prospective volunteer board members and nonprofits could interact.

- Board training and development
Focus group participants were also interested in a “Board Bootcamp” or “Board 101 Training” to “demystify board membership for new recruits. They envision a regularly-scheduled ‘one-shot’ training session to which they could send these board members, perhaps hosted by the Nonprofit Academy at College of DuPage or Giving DuPage.
- Knowledge of new and emerging technologies and how to effectively utilize these technologies was frequently mentioned. People want training on how to integrate technology into their organizations in order to:
 - Enhance internal operations.
 - “More effectively network with colleagues” using social networking systems.
 - Develop a “high quality” website that meets constituents’ needs.
 - Support and promote online donations.
 - Communicate with younger donors and volunteers.
 - “Identify and reach clients” who are using technology.
- Networking and connecting with other nonprofit staff is a #1 priority for DuPage organizations, according to the focus groups. People want an opportunity to more frequently “dialogue” and “converse” with their colleagues. They desire specific communication avenues for discussions with:
 - Their direct job counterparts
 - New professionals in the field
 - New professionals to DuPage County
 - “Young” nonprofit personnel
 - Specific interest groups within the field

However, it was interesting that how and where people wanted to dialogue had a direct correlation with the age bracket they were in.

- “Younger” nonprofit staff are more interested in communicating and participating in workshops and training sessions via technology such as:
 - Social networking
 - Online teaching modules
 - Webinars
 - Blogs
 - Discussion boards
 - Listservs

- “Middle to older” persons want to physically gather with their colleagues to learn and to network. They do not like the “remoteness” of online communication and consider it to be “impersonal” and “out of sight.” “Blogging is a generational thing,” noted one participant. “It is not of interest to those of us who are older.” This generation prefers to travel to an “actual site” for networking and professional development and enjoys lunch sessions and half-day workshops, preferably during the workday.
- Volunteer training and management was also noted in some of the discussions. Those smaller organizations with no in-house volunteer managers were especially interested in the idea of someone such as the Nonprofit Academy taking on the role of “formal training of volunteers” – perhaps as a regularly-scheduled course to which nonprofits could refer their new volunteers. People commented that this is particularly crucial at this time, given the increase in the number of unemployed persons who are interested in volunteering.
- Fundraising in the current economic environment was often cited, not surprisingly, as an area in which all nonprofits believed they were in need of new and innovative ideas. Many expressed the belief that they could no longer rely solely on traditional fundraising strategies and were seeking training and workshops that focused on how to raise money in this “new and challenging context.”
- Other notes of interest:
 - Many nonprofits expressed the need for training and development of their clients as well including:
 - Computer training
 - Financial planning
 - Language skill development
 - Career information
 - Several participants pointed out the need for “higher level” workshops to be offered on nonprofit topics in the western suburbs. People felt that most programs tend to be “introductory” in nature, while many “seasoned” nonprofit staff are “beyond” that level.
 - Some people were interested in developing a formal “pool of local nonprofit professionals” who could be called upon to provide training, teach workshops and conduct in-house seminars on specific topics.

**Have you or other members of your organization ever used the College of DuPage?
If so, what resources and services have you used?**

A majority of participants (and their colleagues) had used the College of DuPage for either personal or professional development purposes. The following areas of the College were frequently cited during the focus group discussions:

- College of DuPage Library / Philanthropy Center
 - Check-out of resources
 - In-house use of databases
 - Philanthropy Center orientations
- Center for Service Learning
 - Host service-learning students from the College
- Career Services Center
 - Refer clients to these services
- Academy for Non-Profit Excellence
 - Register for noncredit seminars and workshops
 - Serve as instructors in selected Academy offerings
- Human Services Program
 - Hosted students as interns from this program which was specifically noted
- Cooperative Education / Internship Program
 - Host students as interns; the COD Human Services program was specifically noted
- ABE / GED / ESL Programs
 - Refer clients to these programs
- Classes
 - Certificate programs
 - Noncredit programs
 - Traditional for-credit courses
- McAninch Arts Center and WDCB programming
 - Frequently noted as “jewels” of the College

How could the College most effectively deliver programs and services to your organization? What programs/services would you like to see us offer that we currently do not provide?

- Much discussion focused on the Non-Profit Academy and its offerings and curriculum. Participants greatly value its presence here in the western suburbs. They especially appreciate the proximity of location, the reasonable price point,

and the variety of curriculum. The following suggestions were presented as possible ways to enhance programming and marketing:

- Expand marketing efforts by working with other local agencies such as WSPN, Giving DuPage, DAVA, Access DuPage, Funders Collaborative, DuPage Community Foundation who have extensive e-mail lists they might be willing to share for this purpose.
 - Many noted they “never” receive any news about course offerings.
 - One individual commented she had actually taken a class and another had taught an Academy class, yet neither ever received follow-up e-mails regarding future courses. There is “a confirmed gap in marketing,” they both pointed out.
- Design a continuum of courses for selected major subject areas; i.e., provide beginning as well as more in-depth classes on topics of particular interest to area nonprofits.
- Re-establish the Academy’s Steering/Advisory Committee to provide input from local nonprofit staff on an annual or semi-annual basis regarding curriculum content and design.
- Offer courses in a wide variety of formats
 - Online modules
 - Webinars
 - Traditional “in-class” courses
- Offer a fee-based consultative service to local nonprofits using interns from Chicagoland nonprofit graduate programs

It was also noted that the nonprofit community has an “obligation” to support the Academy. Staff participation in Academy programs needs to be encouraged and supported by area nonprofits. Several focus group participants also felt that area nonprofit professionals who are “experts” in particular nonprofit subject areas should volunteer to teach in the program.

- The “accessibility” of the College was a major talking point during many of the focus groups – access both for nonprofit staff as well as for clients. The following, cited as “intimidating” for everyone, include:
 - Size
 - Parking
 - Lack of campus signage
 - Public transportation to College problematic
 - Distance to travel
 - Few offerings in Regional Centers

Other less “traditional” areas of concern were also noted. Participants commented that COD, despite its claims as a “community” college, has become “out-of-the-range for many segments of the community.”

- For the more than 100,000 people in DuPage who are “low income,” the tuition is unaffordable and the scholarship availability is inadequate.
- There is also a problematic “literacy gap” with the College eliminating the highest ESL Level 7 in the free program, on the one hand, and raising the score for entrance to the GED program, on the other.
- Many nonprofits recommended that the College partner with area nonprofits who specifically work with low income or immigrant families and apply for grants that would help to reduce these gaps.
- Expansion of Philanthropy Center and Donors Forum workshops was also recommended.
 - Currently the Philanthropy Center offers monthly free orientations to the Center’s nonprofit resources. People would like to see additional workshop offerings to include:
 - Finding statistics and local demographic data
 - Using business databases for prospect research
 - Enhancing grant writing with Library resources
 - Establish an Advisory Committee for the Philanthropy Center to provide an opportunity for local nonprofits to give input on an annual or semi-annual basis for programs and services.
 - The Donors Forum offers very limited programming in DuPage. Nonprofits recommend the expansion of their wide variety of programming to include the western suburbs on a regular basis.
- Nonprofits who currently use the services of the Philanthropy Center and the Service Learning Center are also interested in partnering with and learning more about other areas of the College. These include:
 - Sponsoring COD interns at their organizations.
 - Using COD students for specific class projects such as web site design.
 - Co-sponsoring programs with specific curricular areas such as health or business.
 - Pairing students and clients in areas of human services, the elderly, youth, immigrants etc.

Conclusion

Many interesting and thoughtful ideas were presented during the focus groups. Participants, who all volunteered their time for the discussions, had given the questions serious thought prior to our meetings and came well-prepared to make their comments and suggestions. A wide range of nonprofit organizations were a part of this project, representing the great diversity of nonprofits that operate in the western suburbs.

People who participated in the focus groups were very positive about the purpose of the project. They all deeply care about the quality of life in the western suburbs as well as the ability of nonprofits to serve their communities. They also seemed pleased that they had been asked to be a part of the discussions. “It always feels good to be asked your views,” noted one of the participants.

Many of the ideas presented in the discussions will be of particular interest to the Philanthropy Center for purposes of collection development and future program planning. Other areas of the College will also be interested in what the nonprofits had to say about their information and professional development needs including the Academy for Non-Profit Excellence and the Service Learning Program.

There are many topics of interest here that deserve the attention of other major organizations that serve the DuPage nonprofit community as well, such as the Donors Forum, the West Suburban Philanthropic Network, Giving DuPage, area Chambers of Commerce with nonprofit members, the DuPage Community Foundation and the Community Memorial Foundation. As a final note, it might be worthwhile for representatives from these organizations to gather for conversation about where the direction of training and development is headed in the western suburbs and how those responsibilities might be divided among interested groups. Planning of this nature would serve to insure that it is focused on the major needs of west suburban nonprofits and is fairly and equitably spread over several area providers.

Distribution of Project Report

The report will be made available as follows:

- Philanthropy Center web site <http://www.cod.edu/library/Philanthropy/index.htm>
- Summary of findings in the fall issue of the West Suburban Philanthropic Network quarterly newsletter which is distributed to all members.
- Printed copies in the Library – Philanthropy Center Reference area.
- Copies to specific persons and areas of the College mentioned in this proposal.
- Copies to all nonprofit organizations that participated in the focus groups.
- Copies to other area agencies involved in programming and training such as Giving DuPage, Donors Forum, and the West Suburban Philanthropic Network.

Bibliography

The following resources served as background reading material for the project and as a guide for organizing the focus groups.

Berry, Jeffrey M. Surveying Nonprofits: A Methods Handbook. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute, 2003.

Edwards, Richard and John A. Yankey, eds. Effectively Managing Nonprofit Organizations. Washington, DC: NASW Press, 2006.

Learning for Results. Washington, DC: Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2007.

Philanthropy Center Web site. College of DuPage Philanthropy Center.
<http://www.cod.edu/library/Philanthropy/index.htm>.

Salamon, Lester M., ed. The State of Nonprofit America. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2002.

Sharken Simon, Judith. Wilder Nonprofit Field Guide to Conducting Successful Focus Groups. St. Paul, Minn.: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1999.

Appendix

Appendix A – Focus Group Questions

1. What is one of the major information needs of your organization that you rely on to meet your mission and goals?
2. Where do you currently go to obtain that information?
3. What kinds of information are you lacking; i.e., information that would help to enhance your organization's performance?
4. What is the most urgent professional development and training need of the staff in your organization?
5. Who currently helps your organization provide that training/professional development for your staff?
6. Have you or other members of your organization ever used the College of DuPage? If so, what resources and services have you used?
7. How could the College most effectively deliver programs and services to your organization?
8. What programs/services would you like to see us offer that we currently do not provide?
9. Who do you currently partner with in the greater community to most effectively deliver or provide your services?

Appendix B – Focus Group Participants
(Staff titles listed at time focus groups were held.)

August 14, 2008

Community Memorial Foundation Grantees
LaGrange Country Club
LaGrange, IL

- ChildServ
Support for at-risk children, youth and families.
Sandra Danforth – Vice President, Resource Development
- Samaritan Interfaith Counseling Center
Counseling and psychotherapy for individuals, couples, families and groups.
Linda Kolaya – Development Director
- Seguin Services, Inc.
Services for adults and children with developmental disabilities.
Valerie Ossler – Annual Fund Director
- Teen Parent Connection
Support for pregnant teenagers and adolescent parents.
Becky Beilfuss – Executive Director
Cindy Smith – Resource Development

September 04, 2008

Community Memorial Foundation Grantees
LaGrange Country Club
LaGrange, IL

- CEP Youth Leadership, Inc.
Leadership training for youth.
Maureen Vulich – Board Member
- Community Support Services, Inc.
Support for independent living of persons with developmental disabilities.
Mary Lazarikos – Marketing Manager
Kathie Schiffman – Event Manager
- Deicke Center for Visual Rehabilitation
Training and tools for people with low vision.
Diane Levine – Director of Development
- Lutheran Social Services of Illinois
Healing, justice and wholeness for individuals and families.
Mara McClellan – Director of Development

- Rainbows
Peer support group programs and services for grieving children.
Toni Harris – Development Officer

November 21, 2008

Selected Nonprofit Organizations

College of DuPage Library

- BR Ryall YMCA
Programs to build healthy bodies, spirits and minds.
Brad Warren – Associate Executive Director & Director of Development
- Giving DuPage
Promotion of giving and volunteering in DuPage County.
Kathy Blair - Manager
- LifeSource
Provision of safe and adequate blood supply for Chicagoland.
Suzanne Hammer – Field Recruiter
- Parents Alliance Employment Project
Employment services for persons with disabilities.
Kristen Crampton – Executive Director
- Poised for Success
Professional clothing for women on assistance who are searching for employment.
Gail Foster – Executive Director
- Serenity House Counseling Services, Inc.
Substance abuse services for adult men and women.
Lisa Snipes – Vice President & Development Director
- Wellness House
Support for patients with cancer, their families and friends.
Tim Walker – Director of Development and Marketing

December 1, 2008

Easter Seals – DuPage and the Fox Valley Region

Services for infants, children and adults with disabilities.

Addison, IL

- Mary Alice D’Arcy – President/CEO
- Roger Hendrick – Vice President/Operations
- Susan McHabe – Vice President/Development
- Cassandra Pieler – Volunteer Coordinator
- Susan Rusco – Vice President/Clinical Services
- Pam VanDiver – Director/Foundation and Community Relations
- Stephanie Walsh – Associate Director/Annual Fund

December 11, 2008

Elmhurst College

A private liberal arts college with undergrad and graduate programs.

Elmhurst, IL

- Charley Henderson – Director, Public Relations
- Jill McWilliams – Foundation Relations Officer
- Ann Palumbo – Corporate Relations Officer
- Heather Winter Sobecki – Director of Constituency Relations

January 14, 2009

Bridge Communities

Services and support for homeless families.

Glen Ellyn, IL

- Danita Hines – Case Manager
- Joyce Hothan – Executive Director
- Mark Milligan - President
- Karen Stewart – Case Manager
- Amy Van Polen – Resource Development Director

January 15, 2009

Family Shelter Service

Programs for those affected by domestic violence.

Wheaton, IL

- Bridget Darst – Individual Gifts Officer
- Jennifer Gabrenya – Director of Programs
- Karen Kuchar – Executive Director
- Robbie MacRoy – Director of Resource Development
- Amy Milligan – Director of Community Advocacy Services
- Connie O’Gorman – Director of Residential Services
- Sandra Prichard – Director of Counseling Services

January 15, 2009

People's Resource Center

Resources and programs for DuPage County residents in need.

Wheaton, IL

- Mary Ellen Durbin – Executive Director
- Lesley Gena – Arts Studio Director
- Karen Hill – Development Director
- Dennis McCann – Computer Literacy & Jobs Program Director
- Maryanna Milton – Literacy Program Director
- John Victor – Computer Access & Information Technology Director

February 19, 2009

DuPage Community Foundation

Fosters philanthropy in DuPage County.

Wheaton, IL

- Jessica Daley – Associate Grants Coordinator
- Michael Sitrick – Development Coordinator
- Barb Szczepaniak – Director of Grants

Appendix C – Participant Letter

(E-mailed to participants prior to the focus groups.)

Dear _____ :

Thanks so much for agreeing to participate in a focus group discussion on _____ .

I am currently soliciting input from nonprofits like yours regarding what kinds of information and training are necessary for your organization to successfully meet its mission and goals. Where do you currently go to obtain sources of needed information and training? What do you envision to be your future information and training needs and what kinds of resources and services will meet those needs?

Please review the attached questions that we will be discussing in the focus group. Give them some thought before you come as I want to hear from each of you!

Throughout the year I will be using a variety of qualitative methods to solicit input from local nonprofits including roundtable discussions, focus groups, and individual interviews. My findings will be posted on the Philanthropy Center web site in the Summer of 2009, and print copies will be available in the Library as well. **No statements or comments will be directly attributed to any of the nonprofit participants in the final written project.** Participant names and organizations will only be listed in a Participant Bibliography at the end of the report.

Please e-mail me that you have received this letter and the attached focus group questions.

I look forward to seeing you on _____ .

Judy Wagner
Philanthropy Center/College of DuPage
wagnerj@cod.edu
630-942-2021

Appendix D – Project Approval Forms

- Dean, Learning Resources Center
- Earned Compensation Committee