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The Pollyanna Principles

Reinventing
“Nonprofit Organizations”
to Create the Future
of Our World

by
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**Funding Everyone:
Collaborative Capacity Building
Technical Assistance Partnership
St. Luke's Health Initiatives, Phoenix, Arizona**

If there is anything considered to be proprietary in the world of Community Benefit Organizations, it is "Capacity Building." Because Capacity Building is the term used for building the internal capacity of an organization, it is by definition, all about the "me" or "us" of building a strong organization.

Much of the work emphasized in Capacity Building is assumed to be competitive. Learning to raise money is obviously considered competitive, as is marketing - gaining the competitive advantage that tells a donor why he/she should give to your organization rather than another. Board development and volunteer management also have a competitive bent, as the "good ones" are frequently considered to be in short supply, and the demand for those "few good ones" is steep.

Capacity Building is therefore not typically seen as a group activity.

Unless, of course, the group spearheading the Capacity Building is St. Luke's Health Initiatives. Always a step ahead, the Technical Assistance Partnership at SLHI places most of its emphasis on the word "Partnership."

The Project: The Technical Assistance Partnership (TAP)

The Technical Assistance Partnership at SLHI has become a hallmark of how a foundation can leverage its dollars to create significant community impact, by funding everyone who applies.

Here's how it works:

Several times a year, SLHI announces a TAP Talk Meeting - a gathering of all organizations who are interested in getting technical assistance for any facet of their work. As long as their mission in some

way addresses building a healthy community, groups are welcome to participate.

Attendees split off into groups based on what they want to learn. Those interested in planning might gather in one area; those interested in board development in another area; those interested in technology enhancement in another area; and so on.

The organizations in those groups become a team. Team members determine specifically what they want to accomplish, and SLHI provides a consultant or other professional to assist all of them together in gaining that expertise.

The results are staggering. Yes, organizations learn and grow, gaining the knowledge they would have gained had they hired a consultant on their own. But there is so much more! The TAP teams build on the knowledge and wisdom of the teammates, providing an ongoing source of support. SLHI reports that some of their TAP teams are still meeting regularly, years after SLHI stopped providing professional assistance. That happens because the participants find value not just in the professional guidance, but in each other.

The dollars invested in this program prove that funding everyone does not have to be pricey. In 2007, 150 individuals representing 128 organizations received capacity building assistance through participation on a TAP team. The total expense for that effort was \$155,000, or \$1,200 per organization. It does not take much to know that a grant of \$1,200 per organization for capacity building would buy virtually nothing if it were doled out individually.

In a wonderful irony, by funding everyone, SLHI is able to accomplish more for \$1,200 per organization than many funders are able to accomplish for ten times that amount.

But the money is not the whole story for TAP. The more important story has meaning far beyond the financial statements - the evidence that Capacity Building does not have to be a solitary act. In fact, TAP proves that Capacity Building can be far more effective when

done as a group effort, where a Learning Community and group support are added to the benefit of just getting a consultant to get the job done.

Evaluation of the TAP project has been ongoing, as St. Luke's Health Initiatives measures the program's effectiveness year after year. But TAP participants do not need to see evidence as measured by SLHI. They know the impact the program has, and they tell their stories loud and clear, to anyone who will listen, repeatedly using the same words: "*We would not be nearly as effective if it weren't for TAP.*"