

Making Your Case to Supporters, the Public, and Elected Officials

The Challenge

Connecticut faces its largest budget deficit since the early 1990's, and budget cuts to community based programs and local governments are expected to be severe. These are precarious times for nonprofit organizations already struggling with reductions in private and corporate philanthropy. In these difficult and uncertain times, nonprofit staff and board members need to be strategic in meeting dual objectives: 1) planning for the possibility of reduced funding, and 2) advocating to sustain the highest level of government funding possible. The capacity of nonprofits to meet the needs of the people we serve depends on our ability to "make the case" that what we do provides a public good and a community priority.

The Response

What do we want to have happen? We want to take essential programs "off the cutting table" and protect funding for services and programs.

How do we do it? Convince supporters, the public and elected officials that nonprofits are doing valuable work in innovative, responsive, locally appropriate, culturally competent, and cost effective ways. Each organization facing cuts needs to prepare and present a compelling case for its programs and services. Elected officials state that they want to set funding priorities based on program outcomes and leveraging of resources. It is important to tell them what our organization does to meet community needs, how you know that your work is having the intended impact, and what additional funding and volunteer activity that government support for your program leverages.

To tell your story, write a case statement that can be presented in a one or two page briefing or a brief conversation. Some basics should be included:

- What you do, your clients, and the geographic area you serve.
- The impact of your work – include the number of people served; your organization's objectives for meeting a need; how much your strategies save in future costs; and ways in which your work contributes to the quality of life for the community.
- Uniqueness – identify ways that you meet a need not addressed by others.
- Sources of funding – describe how government support allows you to leverage support from private donors, foundations, corporate sponsors, and volunteers.
- Most of all be prepared to describe the consequences of possible cuts!

Make Your Case

Some strategies for making sure that your organization is well understood include:

- Prepare your staff, board, and program participants to make the case for funding for your organization's work.
- Reach abroad audience in your community by writing about your organization in your local newspaper and newsletters that reach new audiences. Offer to talk about your work on a local radio or cable access program. Invite others to contact elected officials to urge support for your program.
- Begin or continue work to ensure that your state representative and senator know your organization. Identify committee chairs and members who will make decisions about your organization's funding and ensure that they hear your case.

Nonprofit organizations can and should lobby.

It isn't difficult.

It isn't mysterious.

It isn't expensive.

It is not an unnatural act.

**It is a responsibility to those we serve and support,
and it *is* a proper role for nonprofits.**

- Ron Cretaro, CAN Executive Director, and
- Marcia Avner, Director of Public Policy, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits