

## NONPROFITS ACT BEFORE FEELING AX

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Author: ALEXANDRA ZAYAS

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### Document Text

Agencies will share ideas, lobby lawmakers, and become more business savvy and social.

The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay lost \$250,000 this year.

The Boys and Girls Club lost \$11,000.

It's too soon to tell whether the Centre for Women will also suffer from recent government cutbacks caused by decreased property taxes. But one thing is certain: If voters approve a "super" homestead exemption early next year, the center will lose a lot of government dollars, too.

The cutbacks are not news to nonprofit agencies, which have recognized their vulnerability to government funding for years. Still, leaders rallied last week to find solutions to funding woes.

At the meeting, they said their first step will be to pull together in a "providers association" - both nonprofits and the foundations that give them money - to share ideas and act as a unified voice when dealing with lawmakers, to convey just how important they are in meeting societal needs.

They've already set into motion a plan to get support in other ways. They're shifting their focus to the private sector, becoming more business savvy and more social.

Philanthropy galas and private foundations have always been society staples. Now, they will be key in keeping programs afloat.

Agencies not 'sitting on their hands'

The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay oversees programs for suicide intervention, sexual abuse counseling, medical transportation and elderly care. It costs \$1-million to keep the lights on in the building and employ the people who run the programs, said president Dennis Ross.

After the county slashed \$250,000 of that budget because of recent property tax cuts, Ross had to lay off employees and cut pension plans. But so far, none of the programs were hit.

"If there was any fat to begin with, it's sure gone," Ross said. "The next rounds are going to come more and more out of services.

"We're not sitting on our hands here, just hoping for the best."

The center, formed by Hillsborough County, was completely dependent on county funding until about four years ago. That's when the agency realized its vulnerability to cuts and started looking elsewhere for money.

Its APPLE program to treat sexual abuse started billing health insurance companies. And its TransCare program, which started as a transportation method for mental health patients, expanded to become one of Tampa's premier ambulance companies.

Other nonprofits have created businesses designed to fund their own services - it's called social enterprise. The Centre for Women, for instance, runs a home repair business to help pay for programs.

The center has not yet had major cutbacks, said executive director Beth Fiquette, noting that the city and county, which give money to the center, have not yet voted on final budgets. She anticipates the impact will be significant if voters pass the homestead exemption.

The Boys and Girls Club gets a limited amount of its funding from government, president Roy Opfer said. But the city of Tampa recently reduced its donation to the organization by \$11,000, Opfer said. He's not sure what future government cuts will bring.

Increasingly, nonprofits are hosting fundraisers and writing grant requests to private foundations. Government dollars may be limited, but the philanthropy market is growing.

Private donors pay for a lot but not all

Baby boomers have hit that age when they're thinking about how to pass along their money - and they've made a lot of it.

Last year, the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay, which safeguards the money of about 425 donors, gave \$10-million to charity. The 17-year-old foundation has assets of about \$150- million.

Donors give for various reasons: support a cause, get a tax cut, or for planning's sake. Some "don't want to leave their families too much money," said Sheff Crowder, with the Conn Memorial Foundation.

Many set up private foundations like Crowder's to handle the particulars.

The growth of the private philanthropy market is "unbelievable," said Crowder, whose foundation has been giving since the 1950s. "There's a huge transfer."

But charities recognize that the philanthropists' pool is bottomless. So with increasing budget cuts, nonprofits are already bracing for increased competition for foundation funds.

Foundations won't be able to totally make up for the loss of government funding, Crowder said. And, he said, they shouldn't have to.

"The fact that the government is cutting back and putting more burden on these agencies, we can't make up for that problem," Crowder said. "The financial need for local nonprofits has stayed constant, but you're taking away a very important resource. The public sector has a social responsibility."

Charities are also planning to educate donors about how to make their dollars go further.

For instance, it may feel more warm and fuzzy to donate directly to a specific program. But funding education for the agencies that run that program may have longer-term results.

And although money from events like galas and banquets doesn't account for a huge percentage of charity budgets, the events are vital, Crowder said.

"It's a proven strategy that you get somebody to an event, you get them educated about what you're doing, they're there with a lot of people and that's how individual giving happens," Crowder said.

Ross said commissioners were sympathetic to his agency's needs, and he thinks the government will keep the public informed of the consequences of cuts.

"I also have confidence people in the community will rise to the occasion," Ross said. "As people in the community become more aware of the impact of some of these cuts, private individuals will become more generous in their need to step up to the plate."

Times staff writer Kevin Graham contributed to this report. Reach Alexandra Zayas at 226-3354.

Credit: Times Staff Writer

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## **Abstract** (Document Summary)

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