

'We can't be sitting on the sidelines'

When Adam Rosenberg took the helm of the Baltimore Child Abuse Center a year and a half ago, the attorney's charge was to raise the agency's profile.

Then the economy tanked, and suddenly Rosenberg was forced to act much quicker, with greater urgency and far fewer resources. The threat of dwindling state funding, an 83 percent decrease in monthly support from the United Way Foundation, and virtually no assistance from cash-strapped Baltimore City didn't deter the agency. It still managed to serve the same number of clients it had in the past: more than 1,000 families per year, all dealing with child sex abuse.

But the Baltimore Child Abuse Center

had to compensate for the losses somehow.

"We were forced to raise more money," Rosenberg said.

That meant boosting awareness in the community. Though the nonprofit admits to a shoestring development budget of \$12,000, that was 60 percent more than it allocated for development in fiscal 2008. With those funds, the agency established an Internet presence that now includes Facebook and blogging; re-branded with a new logo and building signage; and held small yet more frequent fundraising events, including local happy hours and concerts.

ELIZABETH HEUBECK | CONTRIBUTOR

It worked. In fiscal 2009 — July 1, 2008, through this June — the Baltimore Child Abuse Center raised about 5 percent more than the prior year, for a total of \$565,450.

In the wake of slashed government funding, falling foundation support, and battered investment portfolios, steadfast donor support appears to be the one bright spot in the realm of Maryland nonprofits. But as the Baltimore Child Abuse Center knows, retaining veteran donors and cultivating new ones during a recession doesn't just happen.

Maryland nonprofits have pulled off some ambitious new strategies to retain

veteran donors and pull in new ones, including executing mass and layered appeal campaigns to donors. That approach is normally reserved for securing funds in times of dire emergencies, like the 2004 tsunami that hit Asia.

Nonprofits also are ramping up programs and services, even when purse strings are tight, and increasing grassroots volunteer forces.

A volunteer army

This latter tactic has served The Associated well.

In fiscal 2009, the organization that serves the needs of the Jewish commu-

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nity in Baltimore and abroad raised \$31 million, up from \$30.3 million in fiscal 2008, and added 1,400 new local donors. Executive Director Marc Terrill attributes the increase to doubling of The Associated's volunteer work force since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 — from 200 to 400 local campaigners.

Volunteerism has become such an integral part of The Associated's mission, in fact, that the nonprofit recently created an agency to reflect that: the Jewish Volunteer Connection.

"We train them [volunteers], nurture them, and talk to them about why, on the heels of this recession, we can't be sitting on the sidelines," Terrill said.

To generate revenue during the recession, Baltimore-based Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has raised its mass appeals for donations to levels typically used during emergencies like natural disasters. The nonprofit's three-pronged appeals approach in fiscal 2009 included a personalized letter sent by President Ken Hackett to 850 of the organization's largest donors.

There was also a broad-based annual giving appeal sent to some 750,000 donors or prospects nationwide, offering a match by major donors of \$2 million, and a phone call by the organization's highest donor to an estimated dozen strong

supporters.

"We don't have the final figures, but we can see upticks as a result," said Mike Weiss, executive vice president of charitable giving for CRS.

Widening the circle of donors has become more pressing for the nonprofit as it has seen the size of donors' gifts decline. Between July 2008 and last month, the average size of unrestricted donations to CRS fell about 7 percent, from \$85.49 to \$79.54.

'Donors just won't let go'

A similar story is playing out at other nonprofits in town. Though the Enoch Pratt Free Library added 900 new donors in fiscal 2009, annual giving — exclusive of foundation support, bequests and capital campaign revenue — was down 9 percent compared with fiscal 2008, said Jamie Caplis, director of institutional advancement at Enoch Pratt.

Caplis credits the public's increased usage of the library's programs and career-related resources — more popular as the unemployment rate has climbed above 7 percent in Maryland — with the surge in new donors.

During fiscal 2009, an additional 12,000 people compared with the prior fiscal year came to hear speakers at Enoch Pratt. Attendance at adult programs increased 64 percent in fiscal 2009, and career workshop attendance rose 92 percent.

As the demand for the libraries' services soar, its government funding has taken a hit. Enoch Pratt is bracing for a \$2 million decrease in funding from Baltimore City in fiscal 2010. Already, reduced funding has forced the central branch and a few others to cut hours. "Night Owls," an evening telephone reference service, has been cancelled temporarily.

Budget cuts aside, Caplis said she believes the public's reliance on the library will work to the Enoch Pratt's advantage when the recession subsides. Recently, she opened a check from a donor for \$10 with a note that read: "Without the library, I never would have gotten my job."

While some nonprofits naturally become more visible during a recession because of the services they provide, others — particularly those whose mission takes place out of donors' sight — have to pound the pavement harder to get out their message. That's been the case with Catholic Relief Services.

And that's why, this year, the nonprofit made a conscious decision to increase outreach, sending guest priests into the nation's 19,000 Catholic parishes and 201 Catholic colleges to educate crowds on fighting global poverty. A snapshot of July donations shows the extra leg work to be paying off: The nonprofit collected 2,000 more gifts last month than during July 2008.

Those additional gifts boost the morale of the organization's staff, even as overall unrestricted giving has dipped 12 percent this fiscal year.

"What we find most remarkable is that these donors just won't let go," Weiss said. "They see this as part of who they are. It is not discretionary [spending]."

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By the Numbers

66

Percentage of Maryland nonprofits reporting an increased demand for services.

65

Percentage of Maryland nonprofits expecting demand for services to continue rising.

45

Percentage decrease in corporate giving to nonprofits.

33

Percentage decrease in foundation giving to nonprofits.

36

Percentage decrease in state government funding to nonprofits.

23

Percentage of local government funding to nonprofits.

Source: Maryland Nonprofits