

Survey of Thurston County Nonprofit Organizations October 2008

Analysis of Results by Larry Geri, The Evergreen State College

In late October 2008 United Way of Thurston County (UWTC) and the Community Foundation of South Puget Sound jointly designed and administered a survey of Thurston County nonprofit organizations. The goal of the survey was to determine 1) which community services are or may be at-risk due to the uncertain economic climate, and 2) the best strategies for our community to give, advocate and volunteer during this time of uncertainty in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. Twenty-four of 39 organizations responded, for an estimated response rate of 62 percent. The respondents generally reflect a representative cross section of the county's health and social services nonprofit sector.

Increases in Demand for Services

- All but one of the responding organizations reported an increased demand for its services in the past year. Services for which the demand has increased generally include major programs from each organization.
- Fifteen of these 23 organizations provided an estimate of the increase in demand (which ranged from 100% to a 5-10%). Overall these 15 organizations estimated an average demand increase of 33% for this set of programs.

Reductions in Program Funding In the Past Year and Impacts of those Cuts

- Fourteen of the twenty four respondents (58%) reported a reduction in program funding in the past year from either private or public sources. Seven of these 14 reported reductions primarily from city, county, state or school district funds. Five reported reduced individual giving. Two noted reduced in-kind gifts.
- Ten of the fourteen respondents reported reductions or changes in services for specific programs. The most significant of these were housing programs. In both cases, reduced funding is likely to result in a reduction in the number of homeless, particularly homeless men that will be served by both shelters.
- Other impacts reported by these fourteen organizations included: impacts on food security (as food banks cut back), reductions in pay for some clients, reductions in operating budgets, hours and staff, the need to spend more time raising money, and impacts on program infrastructure.

Changes in Demand For Services in 2009

- Twenty-two (92%) of the respondents stated that they expect a change in demand for their services in 2009. Twenty of these included expected higher demand for services or more requests for services; several mentioned the deteriorating economy as a factor.

Changes in Program Funding During 2009 and Related Outcomes

- Eighteen of the respondents (75%) expected changes in their program funding during the next calendar year.
- Projected outcomes of this for their program/organization included seven projections of reductions in services, cuts in non-required programs or reductions in staff hours.
- Seven respondents reported that they will try to replace lost revenues through grant funding. One program reported concern that funding cuts threaten the existence of their program and organization.

Conclusions and Cautions

- These results suggest that the operating environment for Thurston County nonprofit organizations became more challenging in the past year as funding sources were reduced or eliminated, with reductions in services an unavoidable result for most respondents. Many also expect the upcoming year to be equally or more challenging.
- It is possible that non-respondents to the survey are having fewer financial and operational problems. However, it is very likely that the funding environment for all nonprofits is tightening as government entities and foundations lower contract and grant awards. Over time, this will have a broader effect on local nonprofits.
- Even if the agencies that responded are facing more problems than most, this is a challenge for the county since several of these organizations are at the core of the county's human services network.

Survey Questions.

1. In the past year, has your organization seen an increased demand for its services? (Yes/No)
2. If yes, for which services has the demand increased, and by how much?
3. In the past year, has your organization experienced cuts or reductions in program funding or services from private or public sources? (Yes/No)
4. If yes, what cuts or reductions have you experienced, and what are the possible outcomes for your organization and the community as a result of those cuts?
5. Do you expect a change in demand for your services in 2009? (yes/no)
6. If yes, what changes do you anticipate?
7. Do you expect changes in your program funding during 2009?
8. If yes, what changes do you expect, and what are the possible outcomes for your organization and the community as a result of those cuts?
9. What is the name of your organization?
10. In what county or counties do you provide services?