

2003 Could Bode Well for Nonprofits - Provided They Stay Focused on Mission

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Streetwise

Survival in a recession may seem impossible, but non-profits that stay focused on their mission have the best chance of receiving corporate foundation grants, which may also dwindle because of the economy in the coming year.

"The competitive edge is research that knows your organization's mission but also what program funders are giving to and how it fits your mission," said Ruth Cardella, public policy director of the Donors Forum of Chicago, which co-sponsored a recent workshop on grant-seeking with the office of U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL).

The north side congresswoman's office co-sponsored the event because a dearth of federal and state funds have made it more "challenging for non-profits to secure the resources necessary to meet the growing needs of those they serve," according to a news release.

American Indian Center Executive Director Joe Podlasek, for example, noted that federal money for Native Americans has recently shifted to tribal reservations from urban community centers. As a result, 32 urban centers have closed in the last three years.

"The networking is becoming real important now with funds becoming tighter," Podlasek said. "We made new connections at a meeting like this to sustain us." Now celebrating its 50th anniversary, the American Indian Center in Uptown is the nation's oldest, he said.

Successful nonprofit organizations have a diversified funding base that includes money from individuals as well as corporate and government grants, said Donors Forum material decorating the room. The Donors Forum of Chicago maintains a library of private and corporate foundation directories, foundation annual reports and databases of national and local grant-makers. It also sponsors networking events with grant-makers.

