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Posted on Thu, Nov. 12, 2009

Nonprofit consortium to raise funds lost from United Way

By Christopher K. Hepp

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Seven of the region's most venerable nonprofit groups have formed an unusual fund-raising consortium in response to the loss last year of United Way support.

The organizations - which include the local branches of the Salvation Army, the YMCA, and the Boy Scouts - will launch a joint marketing effort today and are exploring cooperation in other areas, as well.

Under the banner of GivePhilly, an upstart version of United Way itself, the organizations will seek to raise money. GivePhilly will maintain a Web site (<http://givephilly.org/>), where donors can contribute to any or all of the consortium's members.

"We came together with a recognition that we are all pretty much in the same boat," said Robert Capanna, executive director of Settlement Music School, which lost about \$135,000 in United Way funding, or 2 percent of its operating budget. "We want to try to replicate the broad reach that we had had through the United Way campaign."

Laura Otten, executive director of the Nonprofit Center at La Salle University, said she thought the effort could be successful.

"They are seven of the biggest, most well-known nonprofits," Otten said. "Depending how they tell their story, I don't see why it wouldn't work."

GivePhilly comprises the Boys and Girls Clubs of Philadelphia, the Cradle of Liberty Council of the Boy Scouts of America, the Salvation Army of Greater Philadelphia, Settlement Music School, Travelers Aid of Philadelphia, United Cerebral Palsy of Philadelphia and Vicinity, and the YMCA of Philadelphia.

These seven were among 44 agencies that had traditionally received funding through the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania but either lost or received reduced assistance because of

changes in the United Way's funding philosophy.

Rather than underwrite the operating budgets of well-intentioned agencies, the United Way has chosen fund-specific issues and sought programs that could show results for the money received.

The lost United Way funding represented a small, but still significant, portion - about 2 percent to 3 percent - of the revenue of many of the seven groups.

Initially, the conversations that led to GivePhilly included 20 to 30 of those no-longer-funded groups, said Ted Weerts, executive director of Travelers Aid. Eventually, GivePhilly's membership whittled itself down to seven.

"We have been working on this for well over a year," Weerts said. "It made sense to us to cooperate in marketing and fund-raising, which can have some high costs."

The effort received a boost from the Philadelphia Foundation, which agreed to provide administrative support for collecting and distributing funds that are raised.

That means 100 percent of donations will go to the nonprofit groups, Capanna said, with no money used for administrative support.

The marketing campaign is just a start, Weerts and Capanna said, because the group has already begun discussing other ways to cooperate.

"The idea of management collaboration is very attractive," Capanna said. "We all face an increasingly complex environment from a regulatory standpoint, in terms of financial accounting and human resources. We are really interested in seeing if there are ways for us to share resources in those areas."


That potential for further collaboration attracted Andrew Swinney, president of the Philadelphia Foundation, to GivePhilly's effort.

"This is the sort of thing the nonprofit sector should be looking at," Swinney said. "This may be the first step toward a greater collaboration on a much broader business model."

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