



A Partnership to Spread the Word and Benefit the Community

By Diane Luber

To make the most of reduced resources, share them – with partners.

The economy has forced many of us – nonprofits, organizations and businesses – to make do with less. But a group that formed late last year is a lesson for all of us in how not just to make do, but to make more with what we've got to share. Eleven nonprofits – among the best known in Southern Arizona – got together to educate Southern Arizona residents about the state tax credit they could claim if they donated to charities that serve the working poor.

Barbara Brown, community development director for Habitat for Humanity Tucson, got us together. "Though the tax credit to benefit the working poor was established in 1998, very few eligible nonprofit organizations were promoting it," Barbara said recently. "And the efforts of those that were looked unrelated and left donors confused. "I thought that if an organized marketing campaign could be developed and utilized by a dozen or so agencies, we could start to establish some recognition for the opportunity and all of the eligible agencies would benefit."

The first step – picking the partners – was crucial.

Not all charitable organizations qualify. To offer its donors this tax credit benefit, an organization must certify to the state that it is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that spends at least 50 percent of its budget on services to low-income Arizona residents or chronically ill or physically disabled Arizona children. Then Barbara made a critical decision. She contacted only qualifying nonprofit organizations that were members of the Southern Arizona chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals because the association has set standards for ethical fundraising and professional practice that include a donor bill of rights.

We had our first meeting two days before Thanksgiving 2009. There, we took the second step – agreeing on a focused mission and message. We wanted to raise awareness about the Arizona Charitable Tax Credit and how easy and available it is: 1. Donate. 2. Itemize your state tax return. 3. Complete and submit Arizona Tax Form 321 with your state return. We also wanted everyone to know that they could claim the charitable tax credit in addition to any state tax credits they claimed for donations to public or private schools.

One member came up with our catch phrase – It's better to give AND receive – and we were off and running. "Every member of the group contributed something to the effort, whether it was donated space in the local newspaper, outreach to media contacts, hosting the website, designing a logo...everyone pitched in," Barbara said.

By Dec. 31, the deadline for donations eligible for a tax credit on 2009 Arizona tax returns, we had a website (www.AZTaxCredit-4SoAZ.org), a TV appearance, and a series of ads and a Sunday opinion package in the daily newspaper. Even though we were working for our organizations and the people we serve, our ads referred readers to the Arizona Department of Revenue list of all qualifying charities and our website provided a link to the list.

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A month later, we saw the results of our collaboration. Our members reported a 5 percent to 106 percent increase in the number of tax credit donations in 2009 over the previous year and a 14 percent to 127 percent increase in the dollars raised through tax credit donations. "This success translates into more services for the individuals and families that are struggling to get by, making them more self-sufficient and hopeful about the future," Barbara said.

We have continued to meet this year, with our member organizations hosting lunches and tours for each other. We've added another member. We have a logo. And we have continued to share our knowledge and talents, media contacts and opportunities. "We decided to expand our efforts this year and have included a 30-second spot that will play on local television in addition to newspaper ads, radio and television interviews, and articles in local media," Barbara said.

Could any one member of our group have pulled this off for his or her organization? Doubt it. But together we are far richer now than even tax credit donations could make us.

This partnership has potential.
Yours could, too.

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Contact Diane Luber, development manager for Interfaith Community Services, at dluber@icstucson.org. Luber is the external communications chair for the Southern Arizona Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America, whose members write this monthly column.

Arizona Charitable Tax Credit for Southern Arizona
www.AZTaxCredit-4SoAZ.org

Arizona's Children Association
Casa de los Niños
Catholic Community Services
Child & Family Resources
Community Food Bank
El Rio Health Center Foundation
Habitat for Humanity Tucson
Interfaith Community Services
Literacy Volunteers of Tucson
Our Family Services
Pima Council on Aging
Primavera