



Ten Creative Ways to Pay for Training and Consulting

By Andy Robinson

MANY GRASSROOTS LEADERS and their organizations could benefit from occasional infusions of outside expertise, energy, or motivation—the buzz words for this work include “capacity building” and “technical assistance”—yet they often struggle to pay the regular bills. If you’re a grassroots leader, how can you find the resources to pay for the training, coaching, facilitation, or consulting services you need?

Here are ten ideas for financing your capacity-building costs. Everything on the list is based on the real-life experience of clients, friends, and colleagues.

- 1. Honor local expertise.** Mark Twain once joked that “An expert is anyone who comes from more than sixty miles away.” Don’t assume that all the smart people live somewhere else. Your friends, neighbors, and movement coworkers have a variety of skills that can benefit your organization. Most of these people don’t think of themselves as capacity builders, but they may be able to offer exactly what your organization needs—and at a lower cost than that person “from away.” Consider trading services: “How about if I help your board with fundraising? Maybe you could teach mine how to review financial statements.” You can also look for local consultants with appropriate expertise but without the travel costs of an out-of-town professional.
- 2. Ask for free or discounted services.** Given the choice, many volunteers would prefer to contribute a specific, time-limited service—editing your fundraising appeal, critiquing your website, offering retirement planning advice to the staff—rather than commit to an ongoing

obligation (like serving on your board). The more specific and time-limited your request, the better your odds of finding a willing and capable volunteer.

For example, my spouse Jan and I were recruited to facilitate a workshop for local hospice volunteers. If we had been asked to design the entire training series, it never would have happened. But a one-hour workshop? Sure, we can do that.

- 3. Ask professionals to make a voluntary donation after their work is completed and they’ve learned more about your cause.** This strategy can bring you a new donor while reducing the net cost of the services provided, since some of the fee you pay comes back to you in the form of a contribution. Clients request this from me every now and then, and I am frankly surprised it doesn’t happen more often.
- 4. Don’t be afraid to barter.** Over the years, I have donated or discounted services in exchange for food, artwork, accommodations, airline tickets, a variety of services, or the opportunity to learn from somebody else. What does your organization have, know, or do that someone might want to trade for?
- 5. Ask friends and family to sponsor your attendance at a conference or workshop.** This method works in the same way as requesting donations to participate in a walk-a-thon or other pledge event. A young friend in Tucson attends a youth leadership conference each year, covering her travel expenses by sending fundraising letters to her parents’ friends. These letters are always

personal, engaging, and irresistible. She also does a great job thanking her donors and letting them know what she gained from attending the conference.

6. **Ask your board to pay for their own education.** For example, you could ask each board member to pay his or her share of the cost of a facilitated board retreat. The beauty of this approach is that it also increases board buy-in. If trustees invest in their own education and development, they are more likely to engage, participate, and follow through.
7. **Collaborate with other nonprofits to split the costs of shared work.** Board development training offers a great opportunity to pair up with other groups to split the costs. I've done this a number of times, most recently on a trip to Michigan organized by the NorthSky Nonprofit Network. We offered a shared board fundraising workshop for three organizations, followed by individual consulting with each group. Total cost per organization, including fees and travel, was less than \$700—far less than they would have paid had they not joined together.
8. **Host a community workshop and charge fees to cover the costs.** In Spokane, more than one hundred people from dozens of organizations attended a board fundraising training sponsored by the Peace and Justice Action League, which charged \$35 per person or \$100 for up to four people from the same nonprofit. Workshop tuition covered all the costs, including the trainer's fee. The event netted enough money to allow the trainer to stay for a second day to work with the PJALS board, staff, and fundraising committee. By organizing this workshop, PJALS received the professional support they wanted, strengthened relationships with partner organizations, and made a little money. (For the record, they also devoted a lot of time and energy to produce the community event.)
9. **Seek business sponsorships for public programs.** The MetroWest Nonprofit Network, which is based near Boston, recently organized a board training series. The same workshop was presented on five evenings in five different communities. The Middlesex Savings Bank donated \$13,400 to sponsor these events, which enabled the bank to reach an important audience of community leaders. Bank sponsorship also allowed the presenters to offer the workshops for a flat fee of \$50 per nonprofit, with a maximum of six people per organization. After all the bills were paid—conference room rental, catering, supplies, promotion, trainer fees, travel, staff support, and so on—MetroWest Nonprofit Network netted

about \$2,000 on the series while serving more than 300 participants from 65 local organizations.

10. **Build these costs into your budget.** Does your organization have the tools, training, and skills you need to create meaningful social change? The idea of setting aside money to pay for tools and training may not qualify as creative, yet few organizations budget funds for staff and board education and for leadership development. “Capacity building” means learning how to increase your impact by delivering your mission more effectively. If doing your work more effectively is a priority for your organization—and I hope it is—that priority must be reflected in your budget.

If you're trying to stretch that budget, the suggestions outlined above should help. ■

Andy Robinson (andyrobinsononline.com) is a long-time contributor to the *Journal*. In October, he will be leading “Nonprofit Leadership Skills for Social Change” at the Hollyhock Centre in British Columbia (hollyhock.ca).



Manage all of your relationships using the Databank, an all-in-one CRM package.

FUNDRAISING | EMAIL | ACTION ALERTS | MOBILE

Looking for software that fits
your ideals *and* your budget?

Look no further than thedatabank.
During July and August you can save hundreds of dollars
with our **Summer Service Specials**.



Great Software. Great Service. Great Value.

www.thedatabank.com | 1-877-603-0296