

Southside Va. Nonprofit Resource Center Steering Meeting March 20, 2009 Information Exchange Meeting Report

The first meeting of the steering committee for the newly merged Southside Va. Nonprofit Resource Center (SVNRC) group convened on Friday, March 20, 2009, 9:00am – 11am, in the Appomattox Regional Library (ARL) in Hopewell, VA. Attending were some 25 participants from a spectrum of local and regional nonprofit and government organizations representing health care, social services, arts, and business.

Scott Firestine, Director of the Appomattox Regional Library System (ARLS), welcomed attendees, stating that he is excited to have the newly merged group as a program of the library because the group's mission fits well with the library's mission to provide services and programs to the community through support of life-long learning and the exchange of ideas with a focus on effective use of traditional library resources and emerging technologies.

Wendy Austin, Director of the merged group introduced the program staff:

Chuck Koutnik, Coordinator of the Nonprofit Resource Center and
Sara Hinojosa, Coordinator of ConnectSouthside.org and Professional Training

Wendy thanked the group in attendance for participating as an informal consortium of informed community leaders who can help with advice, ideas, and information sharing to help shape the merged group to best reflect and serve the local communities.

Wendy then conducted a short presentation that included:

1. The mission of the merged group:

Build community capacity in a strategic way through developing and strengthening the nonprofit sector

2. A brief description of the merger process that bought the three separate groups – SVNRC, ConnectSouthside.org and Focus INC together as an operational program of the ARLS under the governance of its Board of Directors and under the guidance of a community Advisory Council.

3. An explanation of the services and resources available including:

- Nonprofit Resource Center – collection of 300+ books, periodical and online resources on fundraising and nonprofit management topics
 - Collaboration incubator services for emerging community programs
 - Find Funding – Individual research instruction and self guided tutorials on successful processes for researching funders using key reference works, online databases and other research tools
- Professional training workshops and programs designed specifically for nonprofits

- Networking and web-based services through ConnectSouthside.org
 - Database of local community organizations and services
 - Interactive Web communication - Post or find...Jobs...Events...Volunteer Needs...and Donations
 - Community Email Group
 - Local weekly e-Newsletter about nonprofits

The group then began the discussion/feed-back portion of the meeting.

Discussion Summary

The following information, feed-back and suggestions were provided during the discussion session.

General

There are groups that are not represented or are under-represented:

- Faith-based connections need to be built
- Need more comprehensive inventory of all local organizations in service area
 - Information on board members, executives, etc. for each organization
- How do we draw these "other" organizations in? – Highlight in Weekly update?
- Welcome packages out to new organizations/staff

More collaboration

- Leading more collaborative efforts for similar-issue-focused organizations
- Teaming on projects → partnering on programming and fundraising
- Pro-active in encouraging these partnerships – Maintaining up-to-date contact information on executives at organizations to regularly update organizations
- Guidance on merging or going out of business – restructuring for bad economic times
- Better connections with local businesses – through local chambers of commerce
- List of specialties - executives who will offer specialized support to others
- Chambers of commerce help identifying business leaders to use as board members
- Disburse/share print media/ between organizations to ease client referral processes

Networking and web-based services through ConnectSouthside.org

Communication

- Remind, remind, remind about inputting information
- Cut-down length of instructions
- More frequent and brief user & "How to" reminders
- Offer revolving training on "how to" use available CS features.

Blog/Forums

- Easy access, simple & SHORT progression of steps to get there
- Can ask questions about connect and get more immediate responses
- Provide an email format already structured with fields for user to input/send quickly
- "Who's new" box to keep up with turn-over

Online Structure of Web site

- Better search functions/more ways to search

- Categorize info. → separate by more categories, services, client population, client based vs. non-client based
- Better calendar viewing format

Social Networking – Some interest; will need training on how to use

Add Feature to track personnel turn-over to maintain contact

- “Entrances & Exits” - Highlights new/moving Executive Directors/ board members
- Send welcome package to new executive directors when hired
- Track Connect job listings “
- “Update staff” button on org. profiles

Specialty email groups

- Suggested issues/groups → health, arts, education
- Reach out to local Executive Directors to find moderators

Nonprofit Resource Center

- Facilitate collaborative issue meetings (seniors, health, learning)
- Organize periodic networking meetings
- Include some meetings on Saturdays or in the evenings
- GRANT REVIEWING SESSIONS – receive tips before submission
- Shared issue-specific contact lists
- Board Sources – identification of new board members and development of board bank
- Pro bono clearinghouse – consultants who can provide guidance on pro bono level?
- Clearinghouse for white papers – collection of organizational policies, staff salaries, by-laws, strategic plans, job descriptions etc that executives can access
- Provide prepared grant information/paths for specific issue areas – bring groups into the Center to discuss possible collaborative programs

Trainings/ Workshops

- Board governance topics & inclusion strategies (training sessions on-site at board meetings?)
- Weekend or evening trainings
- Online training formats available
- Online payments
- Annual Large workshops - multiple topics covered
- Bi-annual networking social for local org.s - business community leaders, NP general staff included
- Offer mini-meetings - shorter time-frame and more frequent
- More brown-bag seminars - collect topics discussed on forum

Next Steps

The planned next steps were to:

- 1) compile and distribute a report on the meeting,
- 2) requested that participants utilize the Nonprofit Resource Center and spend time on the ConnectSouthside.org Web site and use the email list, then send any additional assessments to her at waustin@connectnetwork.org , and

3) announced that the merged group would be working with a Richmond agency, Martin Branding Worldwide to develop a name that reflected the value of nonprofits to the community

Wrap Up and Thank You

Wendy concluded by thanking the participants and requesting that in addition to the planned next steps, attendees "stay in touch" with information to help keep the Nonprofit Resource Center and Connect Southside current and relevant to the local communities and the Southside region. She then stated that staff would be available at the conclusion of the meeting to talk with those with questions, comments or for further information.

Contact information:

Appomattox Regional Library System
205 E. Cawson Street, Hopewell, Virginia 23860
(804) 458-6329

Scott Firestine, Director, Appomattox Regional Library, Sfirestine@arls, Ext. 2005

Wendy Austin, Director, Nonprofit Resource Group, Waustin@connectnetwork.org, Ext. 2010

Chuck Koutnik, Coordinator, Resource Center, Ckoutnik@arls, Ext. 2009

Sara Hinojosa, Coordinator, ConnectSouthside/Training Programs,
Shinojosa@connectnetwork.org, Ext. 2013