

**Philanthropy Corner – 1-29-12**  
**“Volunteers Are Superstars”**  
**Dianna L. Sutton**

Last week more than 300 people came together to celebrate the act of volunteerism in our community. Over 81 volunteers were recognized at the annual Unsung Heroes luncheon for unselfishly giving of their time and talent. These volunteers were described as “superstars,” “champions,” and “tireless advocates” by the organizations they represented. Their many tasks included grocery shopping, gardening, serving meals, mentoring, database and website maintenance, painting, and patient care to name a few. In addition to helping deliver services and programs, many were thanked for an equally important and critical role for volunteers – serving on the board.

Although the still-troubled economy is making it difficult for many organizations to continue operating, now is not the time to lose sight of the importance of having strong leadership. Critical thinkers are needed to review and evaluate trends affecting the nonprofit sector and philanthropy in general. A recent article in the Chronicle of Philanthropy outlined some key issues that organizations must be ready to face. In addition to the obvious continued economic struggles, dwindling government aid, changes in the tax code, demands to measure effectiveness and show results, and innovation and competition from social enterprises are issues facing the nonprofit sector.

As 2012 begins there is no better time to invest in board development. Recruiting and selecting a board is a major factor in laying the groundwork for success in any nonprofit organization. A good board will offer not only vision and direction to a nonprofit group, but also provide critical skills, funding or fundraising support, and integral community relationships. A poorly assembled board can undermine a charity's mission.

One of the most common mistakes organizations make is not including board recruitment in their yearly strategic plan. Defining the board plan early allows time for scouting and active recruitment, time to ensure that those who are engaged are ready and able to produce results. Take time to plan and identify the organizational needs, thinking through what talents, strengths, skills and diversity will be needed to reach the nonprofit's goals. Having a plan to continually cultivate new leadership allows a nonprofit to grow and evolve, and adjust to the ever-changing challenges in the philanthropic community.

Organizations should make it easy for board members to be involved by giving them specific instructions on its needs and how to run the organization. The Community Foundation's Leadership Success Academy (LSA) teaches volunteers the roles and responsibilities for serving on a nonprofit board. Now in its fifth year, the LSA continues to provide a significant value to the community by improving the effectiveness of nonprofits through best practices in the areas of board leadership, development and evaluation, organizational governance, legal and ethical policymaking, staff management, and fiscal accountability and transparency.

Participant surveys show attendees are increasing their knowledge level and understanding of nonprofit leadership and management, as well as their personal understanding of board roles and responsibilities. The LSA provides tools to help board members identify and understand the challenging issues of relationships and protocol that can surface among a group of individuals who care passionately about the success of an organization. In addition, the Sustainability Award provides personalized, hands-on consulting services to four organizations to help them incorporate knowledge from the LSA best practices training. Resources and templates of typical policies and procedures, as well as instructions for how to incorporate a nonprofit organization and general nonprofit management information are also available at the Center for NonProfit Excellence and the Resource Library on the [cffk.org](http://cffk.org) website.

Volunteers who agree to serve as a member of the board have already shown they care about an organization's mission, and they need to be provided with practical ways to become involved. Taking steps to build leadership will ensure the health of your nonprofit for years to come. And the time to do it is now. The LSA starts February 15<sup>th</sup>. It's a fun, free and practical way for board members to become better leaders for your organization. Visit [www.cffk.org](http://www.cffk.org) or contact CFFK for an application.

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