

# Axelson Review

INSPIRE. EDUCATE. CONNECT. FALL 2010

FOR NONPROFIT PROFESSIONALS  
AND VOLUNTEERS

## I've started blogging—and I like it!

Everyone is talking about social media. Do this, do that...you must have social media to raise funds, reach younger audiences, stay competitive (the list goes on and on). One social media tool, blogging, is touted as an



incredibly effective way to inform and engage your audience.

More than a year ago, the Axelson Center decided to embrace the 21st Century and start a blog. We thought, how simple...we will just recruit a group of bloggers from our faculty, and get them to write articles about the things they already know. So we

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## The Axelson Interview

### Considering a social enterprise?

#### *Three local programs share lessons learned*

Although there are many definitions of "social enterprise," for the purposes of this article we define it as a revenue-generating business activity of a nonprofit organization that often directly or indirectly competes with the business sector. Examples include everything from a hospital gift shop to a coffee shop whose proceeds benefit a youth organization.

As nonprofits strive to achieve financial stability, social enterprises are often considered and pursued. Below are highlights from three successful Chicago-area programs.

#### **Cafe Too** ([www.cafetoo.org](http://www.cafetoo.org))

Parent organization: **Inspiration Corporation**  
*Provides food service training to homeless clients.*

Received United Way of Metropolitan Chicago's Highly Innovative Program Award (2005) and Harry Chapin Foundation's Self-Reliance Award (2007).

#### **Why did Inspiration Corporation form Cafe Too?** **Margaret Haywood, director of training programs:** We

had served homeless people breakfast and dinner for years, but we wanted to do more to help them become self-sufficient. Since our commercial-grade kitchen stood idle between shifts and we already had connections in the food service industry, creating the Cafe seemed a natural way to teach clients both food service and personal management skills.

#### **Is this a good source of revenue for Inspiration Corporation?**

**MH:** It's not a huge moneymaker for us;

we basically break even on expenses. But social enterprises aren't always about making money. They're about furthering a mission. Revenue and profit aren't as important to us as graduation and placement rates, which are 50 and 75 percent, respectively. The Cafe also helps break down stereotypes about homeless people, which is important to us. The community sees that these folks want to work.

#### **What advice do you have for organizations considering a social enterprise?**

**MH:** On your planning committee, include people who understand social service (grant writing, client servicing, and so on) as well as business experts (in our case, chefs who run restaurants).



And if you plan to hire clients, ask yourself if you're also willing to fire them. Your social enterprise is a business. If a client/employee doesn't show up for work, what will you do?

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**THE AXELSON CENTER**  
FOR NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT  
*at North Park University in Chicago*

## Considering a social enterprise? *(continued from page 1)*

### **Open Books** ([www.open-books.org](http://www.open-books.org))

*Collects 8,000 to 12,000 donated books each month, then sells them online, in stores, and at events which fund literacy programs that serve 2,300 children per year.*

Received Social Enterprise Alliance's Innovation Award (2010).



### **What was your biggest challenge when you started Open Books?**

**Stacy Ratner, founder and executive director:** We had trouble finding the right site for the store, so we opened it three years behind schedule. In the meantime, we had three years of donated books to catalog and store. That was a big issue, because I had originally hoped that we'd have 50,000 books by the time the store opened...but in the first year alone we received 75,000 books. We retooled our business model several times.

### **How do you define success at Open Books?**

**SR:** We look at a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures. We track sales figures, customer traffic, and attendance at signings and other events. We monitor media coverage, Yelp reviews, blogs, and so on.

We also make sure we communicate our mission clearly. Early on, many customers loved the bookstore but didn't know about our literacy programs. Now you can't miss our mission—it's posted all over the store.

### **What tips do you have for groups new to social enterprise?**

**SR:** First and foremost, don't move forward unless your business idea aligns perfectly with your mission. Also think about scale—is yours a realistic idea, given your resources? If you're a small nonprofit, you probably don't want to open a hotel.

You also need to feel so passionate about the idea that you can convince others to back it—and not because they feel guilty. It's not enough to say, "Buy these cupcakes because developmentally challenged kids baked them." You need to love those cupcakes because they're delicious and full of chocolate chips.

### **Cleanslate** ([www.cleanslatechicago.org](http://www.cleanslatechicago.org))

Parent organization: The Cara Program  
*Offers on-the-job training to unemployed people and interns provide neighborhood beautification services such as light landscaping, litter abatement, snow removal, and property preservation.*



### **Who should be involved with deciding to move forward with a social enterprise?**

#### **Eric Weinheimer, CEO and president:**

Your staff, board members, and key funders all need to be fully engaged from the start. Social enterprises are popular now, but plenty fail due to poor execution. That puts the entire organization at risk, so everyone needs to be informed and involved throughout the process.

### **What lessons can we learn from failed social enterprises?**

**EW:** Lots of nonprofits see these as great ways to make money. But making money in business is always hard, and when you do business with a mission in mind it's even tougher. There will always be a healthy conflict between growing the business and promoting the mission. You need to serve the needs of the mission first, rather than the needs of the organization, so there may be times when you choose not to make a profit.

### **What has surprised you most about running a social enterprise?**

**EW:** Cleanslate gives people access to The Cara Program. It expands our entire network, introducing us to people we would otherwise not have met. That's a tremendous—and unexpected—benefit. ■

## Axelson Center at a glance

*(July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2010)*

The Axelson Center exists to provide nonprofit leaders with relevant, high-value programming. We had a successful year, and are pleased to share just a few highlights.

### II<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL NONPROFIT SYMPOSIUM

One of the largest gatherings of nonprofit leaders in the region, this year's event had 502 attendees, 53 speakers and panelists, 27 sessions, and 18 exhibitors. In an effort to be responsive to the current economic situation, we provided a record 82 discounts and scholarships.

### BOOTCAMP FOR NEW NONPROFIT CEOs

The fifth BootCamp for New Nonprofit CEOs had 22 attendees; 100% of whom stated on their evaluations that we met or exceeded their expectations.



### WORKSHOPS

469 people attended one of our 26 workshops. Of those, a whopping 97% marked on their evaluation that they were “glad they attended.” We also introduced a six-session Aspiring CEO webinar series.

### AWARDS PROGRAM

We presented the Alford-Axelson Award for Nonprofit Managerial Excellence along with \$5,000 cash grants to two outstanding

nonprofits: The Bridge Youth & Family Services and Erie Family Health Center. Our new Excellent Emerging Organization Award, which comes with a capacity-building package valued at over \$50,000 and a \$2,500 cash grant, was presented to the Family Defense Center.

### ONLINE RESOURCES

The Greater Chicago Nonprofit Gateway received a complete overhaul this year. The renovated site is more user-friendly and has bonus features, including: job postings, workshops and trainings, blogs and news, and many resources. It is still a completely free membership.

We launched a resource blog on the Tribune's ChicagoNow site: *Nonprofit Chicago: Helping Do-Gooders Do Better*.

### RESEARCH

We released the findings from our nonprofit financial health study, which evaluated the management strategies that most impact an organization's financial stability.

## Blogging *(continued from page 1)*

put the “ask” out there and waited (...and waited). With only two responses, we hit a sobering reality—it would be a challenge to maintain an operative blog. We had heard stories about ghostblogs. The ones with few postings and even less traffic. We didn't want that to be us.

Then serendipity happened. This spring we were approached by ChicagoNow (the Tribune's blog site). They were interested in giving a voice to the Chicago nonprofit community. This was just the spur we needed to start blogging. We started *Nonprofit Chicago* in May 2010. Two staff members at the Center are the official bloggers. We have had a wonderful response, with hundreds of weekly hits (and growing!).

Not that it was easy. There are challenges with blogging. It is hard to make blogging a priority. It is hard to find the time. But the ChicagoNow folks told us that the most well-read blogs post twice a week, so we strive to hit that mark.

Here are a few things I learned. My initial posts read more like a journal than a blog. They were long and didn't engage the audience. Then I started asking the audience questions and encouraged folks to comment. I saw that it was essential for me to find the right combination of resource sharing, engagement, and “quirkiness.” (I'm still working on the “quirky” part!)

Also, I still feel a bit “exposed,” but I know that it is important to put a face to the blog, which is why Christa (my co-

blogger) and I both blog under our own names and not just as the Axelson Center.

The bottom line is this: I've jumped into the blogging world and I'm enjoying the challenge. Instead of seeing it as a burden, I am now excited to find new and useful information to share.

So send positive thoughts my way as I take a deep breath, hope for inspiration, and set out to share an experience, a resource, or a useful tip. I hope you join the conversation, either by commenting on the *Nonprofit Chicago* blog or by starting your own. ■

**Pier C. Rogers, Ph.D., Director,  
The Axelson Center**

## The question of must-have technologies inspires must-ask questions



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A long, long time ago—say, 2004—most of us were probably happy leaving communication technologies to the IT department and to the experts. Today, with the availability of low-cost (or even free) web-based tools, we can manage most communications ourselves, providing we have the interest, time, and encouragement.

Want to write a blog—or even build a website? Try a content management system such as WordPress and start posting. Increase staff collaboration? Share Google docs or create your own wiki space. Reach volunteers working in far-flung places? Dial up with Skype and turn on your webcam. Showcase the latest event? Film it with a Flip cam and upload it to YouTube.

And sharing our stories is now easier than ever, thanks to social media networks such as Facebook (b. 2004; now more than 500 million users), and Twitter (b. 2006; now

more than 100 million users).

Indeed, most organizations are expected to have more than a website that tells who they are—they're expected to take part in an ongoing conversation that shows what they do.

Fortunately, you don't need to be a technie—or even know a technie—to become an expert user of social media. One of the most revolutionary aspects is that the technology fades into the background (finally giving real meaning to the phrase “user friendly”).

While many popular technologies and tools are undeniably useful, it's imperative for each group to consider its internal and external communication goals (and budget) and not get caught up in what everyone else is doing. I used to be a news reporter, so I like using the five Ws to start the conversation:

**Who are we trying to reach?**—Before we sign up for every social media option, have we identified our key target groups? And who on staff (or board, or volunteer network) has the necessary skills and enthusiasm to take on these responsibilities? (Point to consider: You can pass up certain technologies, but you should not pass up having a staff member who is enthusiastic

about technology.)

**Why are we doing this?**—What, exactly, are our goals, and how do we measure results?

**What are we going to do?**—Which tactics best support our goals? Will our focus be long-form news and policy analysis, short messaging updates, or some combination?

**Where are we going to do it?**—Which social media networks do our constituents use? What new networks should we consider?

**When are we going to do it?**—Do we understand the time involved? What about after-hours and on weekends? (Social media never sleeps, but you still have to.)

\*Bonus question: **How are we going to make it happen?**—This final question might be the most complex. Not only do you need to consider whether you're willing to work with emerging technologies (and sometimes fail), but you have to be willing to yield complete editorial control.

This is, after all, a two-way conversation. If we only use these tools to broadcast press releases, we overlook the true potential of technology to share stories and resources and build a community with current—and potential—members, advocates, and donors. ■

### Save the date

Axelson Symposium:

**May 17, 2011**

Join us for the 12th Annual Symposium for Nonprofit Professionals and Volunteers at the newly-renovated Holiday Inn Chicago Mart Plaza (*note new location!*).

Early bird registration will begin January 2011.

### Contact the Axelson Center

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*Nonprofit Chicago* Blog: [www.chicagonow.com/blogs/non-profit-chicago](http://www.chicagonow.com/blogs/non-profit-chicago)

Gateway Resource Site: [www.nonprofit.northpark.edu](http://www.nonprofit.northpark.edu)

Facebook: The Axelson Center for Nonprofit Management

# Axelson Workshops

FOR NONPROFIT PROFESSIONALS  
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## Fall 2010 Workshop Series

[www.northpark.edu/axelson/workshops](http://www.northpark.edu/axelson/workshops)

SEPTEMBER 22

PART I: 9 A.M.–NOON

PART II: 1–4:30 P.M.

Your Case for Support: Translating Your Strategic Plan into Donor Values

SEPTEMBER 28, 9 A.M.–NOON

Board Development: Transforming Your Board for the Challenges of Tomorrow\*

OCTOBER 6, 9 A.M.–NOON

Effective Staff Supervision

OCTOBER 13, 9 A.M.–NOON

Developing a Communications Plan\*

OCTOBER 19, 9 A.M.–4 P.M.

Miracle Major Gifts

**FREE WORKSHOP**

OCTOBER 21, 9–11 A.M.

Build Your Online Brand

OCTOBER 23, 10 A.M.–2 P.M.

Launching Your Nonprofit Career

OCTOBER 28, 9 A.M.–NOON

Financial Management for Non-Financial Managers

NOVEMBER 5, 9 A.M.–NOON

How can I get my board excited about fundraising?

NOVEMBER 11, 9 A.M.–NOON

How to Start a Fundraising Program from Scratch

NOVEMBER 17, 9 A.M.–NOON

Determining Your Key Performance Metrics

DECEMBER 2, 9 A.M.–NOON

Website Principles for the Rest of Us

\* Takes place at CCS,  
155 N. Wacker, Suite 1790,  
Chicago



### Workshop Information

Fees: Full-day: \$150; half-day: \$75 (some discounts and scholarships available)

All workshops take place on North Park's main Chicago campus (3225 W. Foster Ave.) unless otherwise indicated. For more information, call (773) 244-5799.

Additional information about each workshop and bios of the instructors can be found on our website at [www.northpark.edu/axelson/workshops](http://www.northpark.edu/axelson/workshops).

## Thank you to the following 2010 Symposium Sponsors



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### About the Axelson Review

The *Axelson Review* is published quarterly by the Axelson Center for Nonprofit Management at North Park University, which serves the educational needs of nonprofit professionals through degrees and certificate programs, on-site trainings, and an annual symposium series that addresses the contemporary issues and challenges confronting nonprofit organizations. For comments or feedback regarding the content of the *Axelson Review*, please email [cbeall@northpark.edu](mailto:cbeall@northpark.edu) or call (773) 244-5747. To subscribe, please email your contact information (name, organization name, address, email) to [axelson@northpark.edu](mailto:axelson@northpark.edu). Include in the subject line "Axelson Review Subscription." Please notify us if you would like to be removed from the list, or if you are receiving multiple copies.



## Have you visited *Nonprofit Chicago*?

The Axelson Center is blogging on ChicagoNow (the Tribune's blog site). Every week we post about nonprofit resources and critical issues facing those in the sector. Join the conversation by visiting [www.chicagonow.com/blogs/non-profit-chicago](http://www.chicagonow.com/blogs/non-profit-chicago) today.

A few recent blogs from *Nonprofit Chicago*:

### Is your ED leaving? Four things all boards should know

We talk a lot about succession planning as a best practice for nonprofits. But what happens when the head of the organization leaves suddenly and you don't have a plan in place?

It is the role of the board to hire the executive director, but because it is a task that (hopefully) happens infrequently, many are not prepared and do not know the critical steps involved. Here are four immediate considerations for boards dealing with this type of leadership transition...

(Read more at [www.chicagonow.com/blogs/non-profit-chicago](http://www.chicagonow.com/blogs/non-profit-chicago).)

### Tips straight from foundation leaders

Leah Bradford, program officer, The Chicago Community Trust; Steve Solomon,

[www.chicagonow.com/blogs/non-profit-chicago](http://www.chicagonow.com/blogs/non-profit-chicago).)

### Two resources to help you create a great elevator speech

I am tired of everyone telling me we need a compelling, well-written elevator speech. I'm sold—but creating a succinct, meaningful and interesting explanation of my organization is easier said than done. Are you in the same boat? Read on.



president, Exelon Foundation; and Diana Spencer, executive director, William G. McGowan Charitable Fund, gave remarks at a funders' panel led by Jimmie Alford, founder, The Alford Group, on the concluding day of the Axelson Center's BootCamp for New Nonprofit CEOs. Here are a few choice tips. They may seem ordinary, but sometimes we overlook some of the basics. Who knows, one of these tips could prove invaluable... (Read more at

Two hard-to-find resources helped me:

- 1) Examples of great (or even good) elevator speeches for nonprofits (NOT companies)
- 2) A simple process that will nudge me in the right direction

After much internet digging, I did find these sample elevator speeches for nonprofit organizations... (Read more at [www.chicagonow.com/blogs/non-profit-chicago](http://www.chicagonow.com/blogs/non-profit-chicago).) ■