



As the current economic downturn reduces the incomes of households, it also puts a strain on nonprofits. Since most nonprofits run mostly on donations and volunteers, the economic recession makes it harder for people to donate their time and money.

Media Objective: To earn front-page coverage about the effects of recession on local nonprofits—especially the Ronald McDonald House of Akron.

End-User Objective: To generate an understanding among citizens and encourage them to help (volunteer and donate) with the RMH Akron.

Media Audience: Exclusive story to Jim Mackinnon, business and economy reporter for the Akron Beacon Journal. He covers the topics of the economy and local businesses.

End-user Audience: Readers of the Akron Beacon who are interested in volunteering with nonprofits (especially the RMH Akron).

Media Outcome Measure: Did the Akron Beacon run the story? Was it on the front page? Were the key messages conveyed in the story? Did the media photograph anything about the Ronald McDonald House?

End-User Outcome Measure: Did the story raise public awareness and knowledge of the issue presented? Did the story encourage readers to act? Did people respond to the story? If people donated money, goods, wish list items or their time, the story did what it was suppose to do.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Current Problem

Last year, the Ronald McDonald House of Akron had two living-room-sized rooms full of donated goods such as toiletries, non-perishables and beverages. The refrigerator was always full, and the organization was never short on wish-list donations (a list of extra goods needed to make special treats). The money donations were more than enough to pay the bills, and there was an abundance of volunteers. This year is the exact opposite. The organization is struggling to prepare meals for the families who occupy the rooms because they are short on donations.

“We run on the goodness of people’s hearts,” volunteer coordinator Beth Plaznek, said. “We understand that people are struggling to meet the necessities at home so we’re getting by.”

Stifling Economy

This problem is becoming more common with nonprofits worldwide. As economic downturns lower household incomes, nonprofits struggle. Most nonprofits' incomes are falling during the recession. Incomes from donations are especially declining.

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Donations and contributions also decline because individual households, local corporate businesses, and foundation donors are not able to donate. Donations have decreased by 40 percent in 2010.

From June 2008 until present, donations from individual donors are down from what they used to be. With 80 percent of support to non-profits coming from 20 percent of the people in America, any reduction in giving can have a significant impact on non-profit groups.

Money donations is not the only aspect affected by the economic downturns. The recession also puts a strain on nonprofits' already dwindling resources. Nonprofits run on volunteers and during the recession, they depend on volunteers more than ever. However fewer volunteers are inclined to donate their time because they are concerned about their own household incomes, and do not willingly give their time to nonprofit services.

More Than Donations

During economic downturns, nonprofits tend to lose staff. As organizations reduce their payrolls in response to funding losses, the organization may be inclined to lay people off. Those employees and volunteers who remain with a nonprofit experience higher stress due to more responsibilities and longer hours. The Akron Ronald McDonald House only has 8 full-time staff members so losing even one could put a strain on the organization

Budgets for routine activities are reduced significantly. Business maintenance such as ageing property is less effectively maintained or replaced, and public outreach are cut so that the money available can be focused more directly into client services. The

Akron RMH is in the process of trying to gather the funds to build a new home for their residents.

According to Bridgestar Survey, 58 percent of nonprofits reduced services, 50 percent froze hiring and 38 percent had layoffs. Some organizations are forced to make major changes in their organizations strategy and others need to soon.

Tangible aspects are not the only problem for nonprofits. There's also the problem of keeping a good reputation. During economic downturns, It's possible a nonprofit's conduct may come under examination as the overworked staff make errors that attract negative public attention or as clients seek a public forum for imagined or overstressed wrongs, according to Philanthropy News Digest. Allegations of fraud or inappropriate conduct by senior management may be especially damaging to a nonprofit's long-term reputation when it is pressured due to economic conditions.

Competition

The economy also puts increasing pressure on competition between nonprofits. Even with the recession, the number of nonprofits word wide is growing and the difficulty of fund raising methods causes nonprofits to compete with each other for funding. Sometimes, nonprofits also compete for clientele such as local business who donate food or funds.

It is imperative for nonprofits to work harder and smarter to secure the needed funds, staff and volunteer resources to be successful over the long term. With the dwindling economy, nonprofits are forced to alter their attempts in keeping the organization running. In order to maintain donations, volunteers and budgets, nonprofits need to understand the changing donations, demographics and lifestyle to adapt their volunteer recruitment and fund development.

The American Red Cross has recently has reported smaller than usual corporate gifts in 2008 and a drop of at least 30 percent in responses and contributions from new donors, According to nonprofit risk. They are holding more fundraisers to fix this problem. They are also teaming up with more corporate organizations to save money on fundraising.

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The Ronald McDonald House of Akron always accepts new volunteers. For more information visit www.rmhakron.org or call (330) 253-5400.



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Frequently Asked Questions

1. How is the Ronald McDonald house dealing with the economic downturn?
 - The RMH Akron is using resources sparingly. Reducing the number of nonperishable foods used daily is imperative. Instead of tossing out left over food, we try to reuse as much as possible.
2. How is the RMH Akron taking necessary steps to maintain donations?
 - We value our volunteers and the donations we receive. We are making the most of our donations we receive. We have people donate cookies and other baked goods and instead of putting them all out at once, we use them throughout the whole week.
3. Are you worried about the ability to pay the necessary bills for each month?
 - Money is definitely tight right now, but we have enough to get by. We don't have any extra money to buy leisurely items such as chocolate chips or new board games for the home.
4. What is your strategy to recruit volunteers?
 - We are focusing more on local high schools and colleges. College students are looking to build their resume and this is a great way to do that. Some high schools require their seniors to complete so many hours of community service, so we really want to target them.

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5. How do you see your organization changing in the future?

- We are going to focus on more social media communication rather than spending money to print fliers. This way, we can see how many people are following us via social media. We are also changing our volunteer recruitment process. Volunteers are necessary right now so we're going to be taking a more in-person approach.

6. Do you have any plans for the future?

- Every year, we hold a golf outing that's always been successful in the past so we're definitely planning that again. We're also planning on teaming up with local elementary school for "wish list" donations – kind of a competition between classrooms to see which one accumulates the most items.

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The Ronald McDonald House of Akron runs solely on donations. There are eight full-time staff members, but that is not enough to run the house. The RMHA is in desperate need for volunteers to cook, clean and organize.

Twitter Pitches

Desperately seeking volunteers to help with meal cooking this week. Interested? Contact Beth Plaznek at www.rmhakron.org .

We need chocolate chips and hot chocolate for the season. Kids love their hot chocolate!
To see other #wishlist items visit: www.rmhakron.org.

Email Pitch

To: Mike Keefe-Feldman from Nonprofit Quarterly

Subject: Sick Children's families severely affected by economic downturn

Mr. Keefe-Feldman,

After reading your article on what donors want to know about nonprofits, you're going to want to hear this. The Ronald McDonald House of Akron has reached a hardship when it comes to donations and volunteers. After doing more research on this, I've found that numerous nonprofits in the Akron/Canton area are being severely affected. Like your past article said, if donors knew how bad conditions are for nonprofits or what the donated money is going to, they may change their minds to donate more. The issue of the economy needs to be addressed.

Attached are photos from five years ago of our food pantry versus our food pantry now. As you can see there is a significant difference. I've also attached our financial sheet so you can see the struggle.

Please consider this story for your publication. It's a serious matter that people

need to be informed about. Feel free to call me at (330) xxx-xxxx.

Sincerely,

Marissa Eisenbrei