

Making stakeholder investment dollars count in 2013

Written by Scott Gray, President/CEO
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Nationally, the economy is going through a fundamental restructuring, and the non-profit sector is certainly being affected by these changes as well. In recent years, boundaries between public (government), private (business), and social (non-profit) sectors have become blurred as more commonly there is an apparent blending of social, human development, economic and environmental aims with business approaches.

Expanding needs from within communities and shrinking resources have made it apparent that the best chance of achieving sustainable social impact is through collaborative partnership and the use of sound business practices.

Demonstrating recognition of this shift, the Minneapolis Urban League in 2012 proactively commenced a transformational journey from a disappearing social services approach to the emerging social enterprise approach.

A Non-Profit's Value: Just Survive or Thrive

Nell Edgington, President of Social Velocity, one of nation's innovative nonprofit management consulting firms states, "If [nonprofits] don't dramatically change the way they do business they're not going to be able to survive and thrive. The status quo where nonprofits can hide behind the benevolent shield of charity no longer exists. Nonprofits have to make some significant changes if they want to survive in this new reality. Forget the traditional ROI and think about a social return on investment (SROI). It's not enough to say we are doing good work and we're helping people. You now need to start to prove that. That's a real movement in the sector and I think that's exciting."

Every day the Minneapolis Urban League is striving to transform itself in response to these changing stakeholder challenges and elevated expectations regarding outcomes. MUL is proactively retooling both its program and operational processes. MUL is shifting to become a social innovation organization. Social innovation is about creating new and unexpected approaches to resolving some of society's biggest challenges often from unlikely sources. True social innovation is not just seeking to address a problem using the band aid approach; it is about drilling down to identify the root cause of that problem and applying a sustainable, replicable, scalable solution.

Money Matters: Making Leveraged Dollars Count

If you could invest \$75,000, see it leverage additional funds, and then witness it exponentially have a social return on investment (SROI) impact of some \$6,469, 450, would you? Seeing this type of individual benefit and community impact multiplier effect, would you be willing to invest even more?

During 2012, MUL workforce solutions programming, providing talent development, job readiness and placement services for jobseekers, entry level to industry specific professional, achieved such an SROI and the impact continues to mount. Through programs such as our Labor Education Advancement Program (LEAP), Big Step Building, Construction Trades and Highway Heavy Apprenticeship Program; Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Program; Renewable Energy Network Empowering Workers (RENEW); and Business Employment and Solutions Training (BEST) Program executed in collaboration with our city, county, state, corporate and

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foundation partners, from July 2012 to now MUL has enrolled 155 job seekers into its programs, placed 88, and 67 have attained a certificate.

As we usher in 2013, MUL is positioning itself to achieve more as it works to build its programmatic and financial capacity and continue its organizational transformation.

In its role as an innovation organization, MUL merged best practices, career pathway demand driven workforce development and intentional collaborative partnerships to create sustainable change and find jobseekers jobs.

MUL is on a journey to redesign its program service delivery model and to shift its funding strategy so that as an organization it can further expand its SROI here in the Twin Cities. MUL through intentional partnership, integrated programming and innovative practices, makes every dollar invested count resulting in measurable outcomes.

We live in a new world, a new economy, a new community that requires our organizations and our community members to continually grow and thrive in order to survive. We thank all of our stakeholders and funders for continuing to invest in what is now the new normal. Join us in 2013 as we continue to strive to transform our organization and this great community.