



## VCCF's Center for Nonprofit Leadership provides assistance

By Hugh J. Ralston  
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- The economic contraction hits Ventura County's nonprofit sector in three ways I call "beyond the perfect storm":

- Endowment distributions dropped, some significantly.

- Foundation, corporate and individual donors are stretched thin and reducing contributions.

- At the same time, demands for services are increasing, sometimes dramatically.

The choices nonprofits now face are difficult: Consolidating what we had hoped to grow; adjusting to lower budgets; and preserving the core of our mission for another day.

The truth is, some of our colleagues may not survive this, which translates into a loss of important services for communities. And while the "market" may adjust in time, the disruption will be real.

The good news is that nonprofits really are not alone, even though it is easy to feel stuck in separate silos.

At the Ventura County Community Foundation's Center for Nonprofit Leadership, we have been investing in board and staff training for years, with an emphasis on strategic planning, mission articulation and sustainability.

The center provides the local nonprofit community with not only access to an outstanding faculty and up-to-date information, but also the chance to learn from each other as we navigate these more challenging times.

At the center's Camarillo campus, we provide access to the following:

- Courses to strengthen board leadership — a critical element of success and survival. Clear mission goals and strategies, working together to leverage the talents of every board member and assisting the staff in its responsibilities goes a long way toward working through the change buffeting our region.

— Technology works for nonprofits opens the door to more effective use of high-tech tools — from the simple act of scheduling charitable events to avoid conflicts to using modern software for everything from budgeting to communicating with donors.

— Fundraising strategies that are both time-tested and subject to evolution and technological innovation. From our popular Meet the Grantmaker to a host of sessions on how to improve grant writing, how to develop marketing materials and how to use the tools for more effective fund raising online and in person.

— Strategies for connecting with key stakeholders — whether through updating marketing materials, developing donor-cultivation strategies or honing the organization's message. These are important disciplines that can be learned.

— Innovative approaches to strategic planning that challenge nonprofit boards and staff to ask the tough questions that donors are already thinking.

— The expertise to create planned and deferred giving programs that provide wealth transfers from donors who care about a nonprofit and its impact in the community. Our Planned Giving Institute will help the board and the entire organization as it develops and practices the strategies to seek these lifetime gifts that cushion an organization in times of economic toil and trouble.

— Board chair roundtables provide a chance for peer-to-peer learning, as does the Nonprofit Leadership Council, which facilitates discussions between local nonprofit leaders.

— Other designated trainings under way include a series of workshops for local arts organizations under ArtsLIVE in Ventura County, a three-year initiative to enhance the arts in our region.

— Keynote speakers who inform and inspire — and remind nonprofit workers why their efforts matter to society.

Even with the good fortune of consistent and generous donors, we still need to earn our reputation as good stewards for the future of our mission, our organizations and our donors' passions.

The Center for Nonprofit Leadership was set up to provide access to the tools needed to work through these challenges. Please let us know how we can tailor resources to help the nonprofit sector not only survive, but continue to ensure its important work is sustained in times when what it provides is so sorely needed.

— *Hugh J. Ralston is president and chief executive officer of the Ventura County Community Foundation.*

*(This is the final commentary in a three-part series written by Hugh J. Ralston regarding nonprofits. His first commentary, “Nonprofits focus on long-term investments,” ran June 7. His second, “Nonprofits facing high demand, tough choices,” ran June 11. — Editor)*

### **Center information**

For more details on the offerings at the Center for Nonprofit Leadership, visit <http://www.vccf/> and click on Center for Nonprofit Leadership, or contact Dena Jenson, vice president and director.



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