

Non-profits get IT help from NKU

By Howard McEwen • Enquirer contributor • July 23, 2010

HIGHLAND HEIGHTS - Ten local non-profit groups have received an in-depth technology study from two arms of Northern Kentucky University.

Staff and students from NKU's Institute for Non-profit Capacity (INC) and Infrastructure Management Institute working with the United Way and the Leadership Council of Human Service Executives performed the assessment at no cost.

"Having effective IT systems is much like having electricity, it is critical to the operations of any nonprofit," said Dayle Deardurff, director of the INC. "Despite being a significantly critical need, nonprofits are challenged to fund IT hardware and services. These assessments help us see the extent to which support and funding is needed in these operations."

"We knew we needed some direction with our IT and network," said Jennifer Belisle, deputy director of the Northern Kentucky Community Action Commission, which provides comprehensive services to low-income families of the eight counties of Northern Kentucky. "The assessment confirmed some things we knew we needed to work on, and showed us other issues to address as well. It was very helpful in terms of short- and long-term direction, and very, very helpful with system analysis."

Belisle said the commission has already taken steps to implement short-term recommendations from the assessment.

"One basic thing we're working on is coming up with a technology spending plan and budget. Until the assessment we never thought about

tracking technology as a line-item across grants and department budgets, for an over-all agency technology budget."

The biggest obstacle her organization faces, however, is cost.

"Part of that is not being able to afford talented IT staff with the skills we need. Another limiting factor is our ability to learn and integrate new technology."

H.A. Musser, Jr., president and CEO of Santa Maria Community Services, said the assessment gave him "specific direction and technical recommendations."

"We know, based on the IT assessment recommendations, that there are numerous ways we can step up our IT usage for increased efficiency and effectiveness."

He also said cost limitations is keeping his organization from implementing on recommendation of the assessment.

Musser said Santa Maria uses technology extensively. They had recently upgraded their website, which the assessment gave high marks. The service also has four buildings that are networked. Employees are able to work remotely

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from home over the internet. They also maintain internal and web-based databases for client demographic information and outcomes/results tracking.

However, he said they assessment will help them strength two areas he thinks are important.

"I'd particularly strengthen our research/outcomes measurement and communications areas so that we are better able to document our social impact and report it widely to donors and the public."

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Covington, Center for Chemical Addictions, Children Inc., G.L.A.D. House, Jewish Vocational Services, New Perceptions, Power Inspires Progress, and the Urban Appalachian Council also received assessments.

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