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Technical Writing for Nonprofits

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Technical Writing for Nonprofits

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Abstract

Nonprofit organizations are only as successful as their communication—how well they convey critical needs and persuade constituents to help answer them. Experience of development personnel at Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity suggests technical writing techniques can assist nonprofit organizations to communicate more effectively with their constituents. Though technical writing is virtually unheard of among nonprofits and literature addressing both topics is almost nonexistent, existing literature on technical writing, nonprofit management, and fundraising combine with the documentation portrayed in the following case study to clearly show that technical writers have much to offer the as yet untapped nonprofit sector.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The business environment in the U. S. and the world has changed for nonprofits, and they must adapt or die. While relationship-building is as important as ever for nonprofits, the nature of the process has changed. Nonprofits must keep up with technological expectations of their audiences. What looks like a fad one day (e.g. Twitter) suddenly becomes absolutely necessary for nonprofits to understand and use to continue connecting with some constituents. This phenomenon, combined with the increasing number of nonprofit organizations vying for each charitable dollar, is forcing nonprofits to move to a more business-like model.

A study of the experiences of the development staff at Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity from 1997 to 2010 yielded lessons in some of the specialized writing needs of nonprofits and a view of what people with technical writing skills could offer this sector beyond obvious grant writing services. Though the field of technical writing has continued to expand in recent decades, it is still largely unrecognized and unutilized in the nonprofit sector. The subject of grant writing is regularly left out of the post-secondary curriculum and is seen not so much as a form of technical writing but as a separate and specialized skill to be learned in workshops as needed. Technical writers possess specialized skills that allow them to focus a variety of communications persuasively on the end user. Those skills are critical now for nonprofits to survive amidst increasing competition in a changing economy, and they will become ever more critical as time goes on.

A growing body of literature exists regarding technical writing; however, almost none of it addresses how technical writing impacts nonprofits. Research is needed to prove that nonprofits will benefit from technical writers.

Thesis Argument

Nonprofits—as much as, if not more than, other types of business—depend on effectively documented communication with all of their constituents in order to survive. Nonprofits are constrained, however, by cost factors and perhaps by ignorance of what might be available to best serve them, so they often hire staff lacking the specialized skills required for communicating effectively with the broad range of stakeholders who support their missions. Certainly no less than industry or science, nonprofits require the highest level of skills in both writing and document design that technical writers can bring to support every facet of the business. Nonprofits should begin considering technical writers, in addition to people educated in marketing or experienced in grant writing, as having the potential to meet their needs effectively. Nonprofits will benefit from seeking and hiring technical writers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The National Center for Charitable Statistics reported more than 1.6 million U. S. nonprofits in 2010, up a third since 2000 and accounting for 9% of all wages and salaries paid in the U. S. in 2009 ("Quick Facts," 2011). Anheier and Salamon's (2006) study of "the current state of knowledge about the nonprofit sector globally" found the United States' nonprofit sector to be the fourth largest in the world, encompassing 9.8% of its workforce. Only the Netherlands, Belgium, and Ireland had larger nonprofit sectors (p. 96).

Where the literature was almost nonexistent 20 years before, Anheier and Salamon found that:

> [T]he field of comparative nonprofit sector studies has grown from one of widespread neglect to one of extensive contestation, with multiple definitions and concepts of what the field encompasses competing for attention. . . . [D]ata coverage frequently remains patchy. (2006, p. 89)

The size and impact of this growing sector demands much more study yielding more comprehensive, systematic data. These future studies will support more definitive conclusions concerning sector comparisons and best practices for nonprofits.

Another issue in discussing these organizations occurs in the terminology. The terms "nonprofit" and "not-for-profit" are frequently used interchangeably. To many people, they mean the same thing. Brinckerhoff (2002), however, differentiates between the two, asserting that not-for-profits are indeed businesses and must operate much like for-profit businesses in order to sustain their mission. "No money, no mission" (p. 31). Though the more common term "nonprofit" is generally used in this paper, Brinckerhoff defines a nonprofit as “an organization that loses money” (p. 3). Not-for-profits, on the other hand, while not motivated to profit from their mission, use many techniques of the for-profit world to be good stewards of their resources and most effectively utilize their supporters’ investments (p. 2). This is an important distinction for nonprofit managers to understand, particularly as competition increases among nonprofits and between nonprofits and for-profits. In the following study, the “not-for-profit” motivation will be applied generally to all “nonprofits.” As any for-profit would, nonprofits must certainly hire highly skilled professional staff at competitive wages where needed to maximize their effectiveness.

Hecht and Ramsey (2002) posit that nonprofits today are facing changes brought about by availability of technology and new resources that must be attended to in order to survive (pp. 1-5). Increased competition requires nonprofits to be “customer-centered” and to “bring a business discipline to everything [nonprofits do]” (p. 10). Hecht and Ramsey also insist that “a ‘people first’ attitude with fair pay and benefits, opportunities for personal and professional growth, and a quality work environment” (2002, p. 10) are absolutely necessary for nonprofits to overcome outdated, limiting syndromes and operate in new ways to achieve their mission.

Hiring skilled writers is becoming more critical than ever because fundraising and foundation grants have become “much, much more competitive in the past few years as governmental resources stayed static in the face of growing demand” (Brinckerhoff, 2002, p. 21). Skills in fundraising and grant writing, Brinckerhoff warns nonprofit and not-for-profit leaders, must be improved dramatically to avoid falling by the wayside.

> [A more competitive environment] is the biggest single change that you will see during the rest of your career, whether you are 20 or 60….You are, or will be, competing for clients, students, patrons, or parishioners; for funding from traditional sources and for funding from new sources; for donations; for United Way dollars; for visibility; for donated services such as airtime and advertising; for volunteers and for staff. (2002, p. 22)

Limitations in staff writing skills represent blocks to fundraising effectiveness.

Foundations and other donors are no longer as concerned with nonprofits being unique service providers as they are with effectiveness.

> [Grantors are looking] for the best productivity, the most mission for the money. Volunteers are looking to spend their time wisely. Quality staff want to work with organizations that are financially viable as well as state of the art in terms of service (Brinckerhoff, 2002, p. 24).

This competition between growing numbers of nonprofits providing like services, as well as for-profits competing with nonprofits, means nonprofits need the best writing skills available to give their organizations enough edge to succeed. Results of the 2010 Nonprofit Collaborative Survey showed that when nonprofits invest resources in fundraising staff and infrastructure, strong fundraising results were more likely (Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2010, para. 1).

The Profit/Nonprofit Wage Gap

The wage gap between for-profits and nonprofits continues to somewhat limit nonprofits' ability to hire the best writers; however, that gap is slowly closing. Amy Butler of the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008) used 2007 National Compensation

Survey data to compare wages for all full time workers in both sectors while also looking at several specific segments of the total population, including Management (which includes Business and Financial Operations occupations), Professional (which includes Technical Writer and Computer and Mathematical Science occupations), and Office and Administrative Support. Surprisingly, when comparing the average hourly wages of *all full time workers* in both sectors, Butler found little difference between wages for nonprofit workers and those of for-profit organizations around the country; in fact, nonprofits seemed to pay slightly more. This initial illusion of equality, Butler explains, is “due in part to differences in occupational composition among the sectors” (2008, All Full-time Workers section). The nonprofit sector typically has smaller organizations with fewer employees, and managerial and professional positions represent a higher proportion of its overall labor. Though nonprofits pay these management and professional positions less than their for-profit counterparts, the for-profit sector’s much larger number of non-managerial positions balances out the more highly paid managerial positions in that sector, making the average across both sectors look similar.

Butler’s 2007 national data showed nonprofits paying a number of Management and Professional occupations significantly lower average wages than for-profits (2008, All Full-time Workers section). Only Office and Administrative Support roles were earning about the same as their for-profit cohorts. She did not look at Technical Writer wages specifically. Likewise, Laura Leete’s (2006) study of Independent Sector data from U. S. IRS Form 990s found similarly that, “taking into account differences in distribution of occupations, industries, [and] worker characteristics between the sectors . . . nonprofit wages are significantly lower than those earned in other sectors” (p. 161).

Still, salaries of nonprofit managers (Chief Executive Officers/Executive Directors, Chief Operating Officers, Chief Financial Officers, and Development Directors), while less than in the for-profit sector, rose significantly from 2007 through 2009 according to a 2010 study presented in *Nonprofit World Funding Alert* ("Survey," 2010, para. 1). Data over time suggests that more highly educated and professional positions are still being paid below their for-profit counterparts, but that the wage gap between for-profits and nonprofits *is* decreasing. Nonprofits should expect to pay increasingly more competitive wages for the highly skilled, customer-focused writer(s) they need to help fulfill their mission.

What nonprofits may lack in wage equality, however, they can potentially make up for with other benefits. Not only are more nonprofits offering paid benefits similar to those of for-profit organizations—some 88% offering medical insurance and 68% offering retirement benefits to full time employees ("Survey," 2010, para. 1)—nonprofits may also offer writers the mission satisfaction that they cannot find in the for-profit world.

Leete (2006) presents several hypotheses that attempt to explain "differences in pay between nonprofit and for-profit organizations that are producing otherwise identical products" (p. 161), such as the "donative labor" hypothesis which suggests that a worker may consider the wage differential his or her "donation" to the mission their work supports, one in which they find intrinsic value. Another explanation may be that nonprofit workers may benefit from other "observable or unobservable differences in the characteristics of for-profit or nonprofit firms, workers, or their jobs" (Leete, 2006, p. 161-2).

Leete (2006) found the literature on nonmonetary benefits and job characteristics to be almost nonexistent due to lack of data; however, one study done in 1990 of 1977 Quality of Employment Survey data found that:

> [W]omen in the nonprofit sector had more schedule flexibility (paid sick leave and the ability to take time off for personal matters) and were more likely to report that their work promoted skill development, was less repetitive, and offered more chances for promotion. (p. 166)

Hohl (1996) later found 85% of 156 nonprofit organizations surveyed offering one or more of eight different flexible work arrangements such as flex-time, part-time, or telecommuting—slightly lower than that found in a similar survey of large for-profit firms . . . but higher than the comparable economy-wide figure estimated by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics for 1991 (p. 74). Most of the organizations surveyed cited multiple reasons for offering work schedule alternatives which included satisfying operational as well as employee needs (Hohl, 1996, p. 78).

By 2010, Matz-Costa and Pitt-Catsouphes found similar options for flexible work schedules available in for-profits *and* nonprofits:

> This suggests that despite the additional vulnerabilities that nonprofit organizations may be facing (e.g., significant resource constraints, increased demand for services, reduced federal funding), they are still investing resources in their workforces by offering a scope of flexible work options similar to that of for-profit organizations. (p. 76)

Indeed, these economic pressures are forcing nonprofits to respond just like for-profits…like *businesses* rather than like charities of the past! No longer can charitable missions survive on the efforts of overworked, underpaid workers, dedicated though they may be. Today's competition will quickly burn them out. Effective nonprofit leaders are realizing that meeting more staff needs equips them to undertake the additional efforts required to be more productive than ever—lessons learned from the for-profit world.

Corporate priorities, of course, determined the extent to which nonprofits would accommodate staff needs. Four predictors—

> . . . having top managers, administrators, or other top-level officers who are 65 and older; being committed to employee participation in decision making; considering business ethics/corporate social responsibility to be a highly important strategy; and linking organizational effectiveness to workplace flexibility (Matz-Costa and Pitt-Catsouphes, 2010, p. 77)

—seemed to most affect whether nonprofits would offer flexible work arrangements. All of these predictors seem to follow a common thread—that of placing people first.

Nonprofits are certainly not at the disadvantage they used to be in attracting good writing talent. What some nonprofits might still lack in high salaries and some benefits, they may make up for in mission satisfaction. Their success depends on the efforts of nonprofit leadership to respond to changes and opportunities presented by today's marketplace.

Necessary Writing Skills – Usability and Document Design

Where a technical writer working in an industrial or scientific setting might typically be asked to create documentation of relatively few kinds, such as procedure manuals, white papers, and online help texts, a writer working for a nonprofit needs a wider range of motion. He or she will frequently be called upon to create these and a variety of other documents directed to numerous audiences including clients, various types of donors, volunteers, other staff, board, vendors, or other stakeholders. Nonprofits need highly skilled writers who can design and compose persuasive documents that support mission objectives *and* connect various end users to what they need from the mission.

Usability: Technical writers' focus on usability for the end-user or receiver is what for-profits value and what nonprofits need. Nonprofits are uniquely equipped to help supporters meet *their* needs—to give back, to connect with others in the larger community, and to make a positive difference. If nonprofit organizations are just asking for support and then saying thank you, they are missing opportunities to build real relationships with supporters who are recognized and treated as integral partners. Therefore, nonprofits should use all tools at their disposal in coordination to meet the needs of the donor and/or volunteer by connecting them as completely and as consistently as possible with the organization's mission and the difference they are making in people's lives.

Rubin and Chisnell (2008) define usability as "the absence of frustration in using [a product or service]. . . . When a product or service is truly usable, the user can do what he or she wants to do the way he or she expects to be able to do it, without hindrance, hesitation, or questions" (p. 4). Attributes of usability include the product or service being useful, efficient, effective, satisfying, learnable, and accessible (Rubin and Chisnell, 2008, p. 4). Nonprofits often have little trouble communicating the "satisfying" element of their missions; however, added focus in these other areas can make an enormous difference in our increasingly competitive business environment.

Usefulness concerns the degree to which the nonprofit opportunity enables a donor or volunteer—a partner—to achieve his or her goals in participating. *Efficiency* is the quickness with which the partner's goals can be accomplished accurately and completely and is usually a measure of time. *Effectiveness* refers to the extent to which the partner's participation *satisfies*, or meets, his or her expectations. *Learnability* is part of effectiveness and has to do with the partner's ability to "operate the system," as Rubin and Chisnell (2008) put it, or in nonprofit terms, to understand what he or she is getting involved with and how the mission works. Learnability answers questions and fosters a comfort level and trust. "Accessibility and usability are siblings" (Rubin & Chisnell, 2008, p. 5). They concern having the access to whatever tools are needed to accomplish the partner's goal. The skill and ability of writers can provide this access and ease of use to help the nonprofit reach the next level.

Three traditions inform academic thinking and beliefs in writing and design today—the Craft Tradition, the Romantic Tradition, and the Rhetorical Tradition (Schriver, 1997, pp. 55-58). The Craft Tradition focuses on writing correctly, i.e., using proper grammar, style, and structure. College English students will certainly receive training in writing craft; however, business and marketing students will most often not. Proponents of the Romantic Tradition see writing ability as an individual gift to be encouraged, typically through creative, experiential writing training, received by most college students in their basic required composition class and by English students studying creative writing. The Rhetorical Tradition focuses on meeting the reader's or hearer's needs and designing responses, persuasive or otherwise, that answer those needs. Clean, correct writing (craft) is still important, but relaying needed information, both textual and graphical, to users in the format, order, and language that best benefits the users, is paramount. It is this latter focus that best serves business writing. Most college business students do not receive specific training of this nature. Indeed, many college English students will not receive rhetorical or technical writing training either, unless they pursue a degree track that requires course work in rhetoric and persuasive, user-focused writing.

A poll of four major Oklahoma universities—University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State University, University of Tulsa, and University of Central Oklahoma—confirmed that no courses in rhetoric were required for undergraduate English or Business Management or Marketing degrees. Technical writing, however, was offered by OU, OSU, and UCO as an elective option in certain cases. The University of Tulsa actually *does* require Technical Writing for Business/Marketing and Engineering students; it is not, however, required for English undergraduates. It is noteworthy and indeed encouraging to find that technical writing courses are offered by all four of these institutions and available, at least as an option, to meeting business communication and/or writing requirements. This is an improvement, showing a trend toward exposing undergraduate college students to the principles of technical writing.

As with for-profit businesses, nonprofits are often concerned with messaging that will elicit a specific response. They, too, must address multiple audiences in ways that anticipate and answer end user needs. Rhetorical tradition challenges writers to accommodate those needs, considering what material users will look for and the order and terminology that will be most effectively understood. Those writing for business purposes need to assume a “rhetorical stance,” identifying and connecting with their readers' needs, desires, knowledge, attitudes, language, and points of view (Shriver, 1997, p. 69).

Many will say this is the goal of marketing. One definition of *marketing* is "the business activity of presenting products or services in such a way as to make them desirable" (Marketing, 2007). Another is "the total of activities involved in the transfer of goods from the producer or seller to the consumer or buyer, including advertising, shipping, storing, and selling" (Marketing, n.d.). *Encarta* defines *advertising* as "the public promotion of something such as a product, service, business, or event in order to attract or increase interest in it" (Advertising, 2007). Good technical writing techniques can and should inform and underpin the marketing and other messaging that nonprofits communicate. By focusing communication on the end user or receiver, nonprofits move beyond simply trying to elicit support and instead offer real connection, inviting donors and volunteers to be mutual members of the mission's community. Schriver (1997) says that:

> [Technical writing or d]ocument design is the act of bringing together prose, graphics (including illustration and photography), and typography for purposes of instruction, information, or persuasion. Good document design enables people to use the text in ways that serve their interests and needs. While documents must also meet the requirements of their clients, the reader's needs should drive design activity. In this way, document design is different from advertising in that advertising focuses on writing and visualizing in order to promote the goals and values of organizations rather than to promote the goals and values of readers. The challenge for document designers lies in developing courses of action that

> will change existing situations into preferred ones for the people who make use of our work. (1997, pp. 10-11)

By recognizing, understanding, and honoring a nonprofit audience's goals, values, needs, and preferences, one treats them not as just a means to an end but as real people who matter every bit as much as the mission. People will respond.

Document Design: Today's technical writers are actually involved in the field of document design, defined by Schriver (1997) as "the field concerned with creating texts (broadly defined) that integrate words and pictures in ways that help people to achieve their specific goals for using texts at home, school, or work" (pp.10-11).

> The words "document design" are a deliberate choice because they convey the complexity of the field. The terms "clear writing" and "plain English" are not sufficient because useful, understandable documents entail more than easy words and simple sentences. The organization and format of a document may be just as important as its language. The degree to which the document is matched to the capabilities of its users and the setting of its use may affect comprehension as much as clearly written sentences. The broader term "document design" encompasses these added complexities. (Schriver, 1997, p. 10)

Though "technical writing" might arguably be an inadequate descriptor for this field, the term "technical writer" is now commonly used to seek personnel qualified to document industrial processes and write technical information in more understandable language for end users. Schriver prefers the term "document design" to technical writing or technical communication "because it suggests the *act* of writing and designing—the process of bringing together words and pictures" (1997, p. 10).

Changes since the 1940s and 1950s in consumerism, science, technology, and preservation of the environment have driven a trend toward specialization among technical writers (Schriver, 1997, pp. 14-55). For-profit businesses now often require technical writers to have a Bachelor of Arts degree in writing or design in addition to knowledge in a specific domain, such as energy, government contracts, or information technology (IT). The growing nonprofit sector represents another sizeable area of new demand for writers trained and skilled not only in promoting the needs and values of the nonprofit but also in assessing end users' needs and values and creating and positioning documents in ways designed to answer those needs most effectively.

Document design needs among nonprofits range from promotional pieces and various fundraising applications to process documentation and other standard types of business reports. Table 1 below contains a partial list of such documentation requirements.

Table 1

Types of Nonprofit Documentation

PROMOTIONAL	FUNDRAISING	PROCESS	BUSINESS
• Advertisements • Brochures & pamphlets • Websites • Newsletters	• Solicitation letters & other direct mail pieces • Proposals • Grant applications • Project reports & articles • Thank-you letters	• Policies & procedures • Statements of standards • Training documents • Safety requirements • Tool & material lists	• Letters • Project budgets • Development plans • Production schedules • Progress reports • Organizational documentation

Many of these same document types are used in for-profit business; however, many nonprofits will look for people educated in marketing or for English majors with grant writing experience to meet most or all of these needs. Persons with marketing or English education may still lack a sufficient understanding of the nature of nonprofits and charitable giving and of the need and potential for nonprofits to build relationships with their supporters. These writers may still lack the skills most needed by nonprofits—those in persuasive writing focused on the end user's needs.

Analyzing Audiences: The first technical writing technique to employ when designing any document is to consider the audience who will read it. Schriver (1997) describes three basic types of processes writers, or document designers, use to analyze audiences: "(1) *classification-driven,* (2) *intuition-driven,* and (3) *feedback-driven*" (p. 155).

Classifiers "classify audiences by identifying their features," using brainstorming and/or research to build a model of the intended reader (Schriver, 1997, p. 155). This model definitely promotes "think[ing] about the needs and expectations of different groups for…documents" (Schriver, 1997, pp. 155-6); however, it can lead to "a rather narrow and static view of readers…focus[ing] on the similarities within reader groups and [ignoring] their diversity" (Schriver, 1997, p. 156).

Intuitors, alternatively, tend to "*imagine* the audience and draw on their internal representation of the audience as a guide to writing and design" (Schriver, 1997, p. 156).

> The strength of intuitive models is that they capture, in ways that other models do not, the phenomenon that skilled communicators are good at[—]"doing things with words and pictures" that get the audience's attention and keep it—that good communicators are sensitive to visual and verbal rhetorical moves that resonate with readers. (Schriver, 1997, p. 159)

This method can, however, encourage a writer to accept his own judgment as accurate and adequate without actually comparing it to real readers. Though this method often works very well in writing fiction, consideration of and comparison to real readers is necessary and much more effective in nonprofit writing.

A *feedback-driven* audience analysis model is driven by listening. Using this method, document designers will expose actual readers to an example or draft document and listen to their responses, using that information to advise their final effort. The strength of this method is that the end result is "likely to be much more oriented toward real people reading and comprehending" (Schriver, 1997, pp. 161-2) than with the other models; however, so much data can be generated that it may be difficult to interpret it into a cohesive audience model.

Schriver (1997) suggests that, in practice, writers will internalize a combination of these approaches, sometimes leaning more towards one or another (p. 155). She also calls attention to the need for writers to consider their own "knowledge, values, and beliefs" (p. 163) in relation to the words and graphics being employed and how those might differ from the audience's.

> A comparative analysis can put document designers in a more informed position to make visual and verbal decisions that may bridge the gap between themselves and their audiences….By exploring differences between themselves and their audience, document designers can become more reflective about the biases that can be created by knowledge and values. (Schriver, 1997, pp. 163-4)

Writers need to avoid using language that "talks over" their audience (or the reverse) and avoid using terms, references, or graphics that might actually be offensive to end users or simply create disconnect. Usability testing with volunteers, especially those who are not already intimately familiar with the subject nonprofit, can provide writers with unbiased feedback with which to test a document's effectiveness. Nonprofit writers should also avoid assuming that their audience will draw conclusions from a document based on the same values or beliefs that the nonprofit holds. One should, instead, lead the reader to the desired conclusion by making a cohesive, sufficient argument or explanation. That being said, verbosity is certainly to be avoided. Herein lies the craft of technical writing.

Document designers must also, of course, balance the reader or end user's needs with those of their organization (Schriver, 1997, p. 201). These organizational needs may include laws, regulations, corporate policies or politics, requirements for anonymity, finances, or other factors that limit writers' ability to plan and craft documents. Two of the most common limitations are lack of training and time. In the rush to get things done in insufficient time, taking time to consider audience needs and fine-tune documents often goes by the wayside. In nonprofit environments, as well as others, however, several constituent audiences can typically be identified and their characteristics, needs, and desires mapped. It is crucial to make time periodically to do this, and nonprofits may have a ready resource among volunteers.

Typography and Space: Use of typography and space greatly affects legibility—even whether the end user reads a document at all. Schriver (1997) observes that these design elements work together to:

- Set the mood, look, and feel of a document (e.g., formal or informal, urgent or relaxed).

- Make the structure of a document apparent (e.g., hierarchy, part-whole relationships, clusters of related ideas).
- Invite readers to scan and navigate the document in certain ways (e.g., top-to-bottom, left-to-right, column-by-column).
- Give clues about the type of document, that is, its genre (e.g., the graphic clues that distinguish a business letter from a bus schedule).
- Suggest how to interpret and use the text (e.g., take this seriously or not, use it in procedural fashion or not, keep it or throw it away).
- Reveal what the designer and/or editor thought was important (e.g., amount of space devoted to certain items, the position and emphasis given to certain words and pictures, the amount of graphic contrast used to set off certain ideas). (p. 250)

Whereas business majors and many English majors receive little or no instruction on these document design elements, technical writers have the benefit of being trained in document design. They learn to maximize readability by adjusting margins, typefaces, headings, space between lines (i.e., leading), line length and justification, and other design elements. Where making these kinds of adjustments can be extremely time-consuming and burdensome for writers untrained in document design, technical writers incorporate these kinds of adjustments automatically.

Schriver (1997) advocates writers developing a test document, or heuristic, containing all the elements a particular type of document will need (e.g., long and short text paragraphs, various headings, graphics, any special characters or symbols commonly used in the organization, footnotes, page numbers, etc.). Typefaces, sizes, spacing, captioning, etc. can be experimented with and adjusted and the sample document printed out to see it exactly as the end user will see it. Two or more examples can be compared for legibility and overall aesthetics. In this way, writers can compile and use a "master" set of consistent parameters for all such documents without trying to rely on inconsistent memory (pp. 272-3), combining consistency with maximum time savings.

Words and Pictures: Technical writers combine skills in writing and design that are frequently not required subject matter for college marketing and English majors. Using the right words and crafting them to be concise and follow a logical persuasive flow is critical to achieving maximum success in fundraising, as is selecting effective graphics and using them judiciously and with a cohesive design plan that anticipates and answers readers' needs. Without such a plan, Schriver (1997) warns, writers can "[open] the door to interpretations they [do] not intend" (p. 440). Writers need to help readers:

- Search for the information they want in prose and graphics.
- Make sense of it once they find it.
- Construct a coherent interpretation of the prose and graphics.
- Generate connections between the words and pictures.
- Put the information to personal use. (Schriver, 1997, p. 440)

Where to start and stop, how much detail to include, how to segment information so as not to overload the reader, how to connect words and graphics, when to use redundancy or complementary elements to emphasize a point or relay a theme, how to make a connection with the reader—these are just a few of the design skills that nonprofits need and can find in technical writers that may not exist in business and most English majors.

Usability testing: A writer "taking the reader seriously" makes a real difference in how their documents impact readers (Schriver, 1997, p. 444). Getting feedback through reader testing is a most effective way to resolve unintended gaps in connection with end users. Krug (2006) differentiates between a "focus group" and a "usability test." A *focus group* is a small group of people asked to react to ideas and/or designs shown them. As the name suggests, it is a group process and is an excellent means of "determining what your audience wants, needs, and likes—in the abstract" (Krug, 2006, p. 133). A *usability test*, on the other hand, involves one person at a time being shown a particular thing, such as a web site or page, and being asked "either (a) [to] figure out what it is, or (b) [to] try to use it to do a typical task" (Krug, 2006, p. 133). Krug specializes in web design and adamantly advises that usability testing be done to test the effectiveness of web design. In addition, nonprofits can and should use focus groups, even very small ones, to test the readability and impact of brochures, direct mail pieces, etc. Volunteers can help minimize cost, and as for time . . . this is something for which nonprofits can really no longer afford not to make time.

One of the most important design points Krug (2006) makes is to "omit needless words" (p. 45). His "Third Law of Usability" instructs writers to "[g]et rid of half the words on each page, then get rid of half of what's left" (Krug, 2006, p. 45). Though this may at times be a bit excessive, Krug's admonition that readers "don't need to know everything" is advice writers should take to heart (2006, p. 6). The ultimate goal in eliciting reader feedback on documents should be to determine just what information needs to be relayed and whether that information was clearly and effectively relayed. The rest should be cut out.

Fundraising Solicitations

Solicitation letters and other direct mail pieces must necessarily benefit, as well, from Krug's instruction to eliminate unnecessary verbiage. Other effective conventions used in fundraising communications include:

- Including a suggested donation amount (Weyant & Smith, 1987, p. 399)
- Personalizing persuasive appeals by use of the potential donor's name (Turner & Yeakel, 1994, p. 26)
- Positively framing your message (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981, p. 458)
- Referring to specific donors whose participation might be a motivation to others (Reingen, 1982, p. 117)
- Portraying the problem as less extensive and of relatively short duration (Warren & Walker, 1991, p. 334)
- Including factual and/or statistical and some narrative experiential information to support one's argument (Smith & Berger, 1996, p. 227)

Vriens, van der Scheer, Hoekstra, and Bult (1998) found that an optimal letter would contain a detached payment device, no brochures or illustrations, and would not use bold print to amplify specific aspects. It would contain a postscript summary and would be signed by a highly respected person (Vriens et al., 1998, p. 336). This last aspect is an example of a credibility appeal strategy, which Goering, E., Connor, U. M., Nagelhout, E., and Steinberg, R. (2011) found to be more effective than either a rational or emotional appeal (p. 241).

Goering et al. (2011) also found linguistic elements to be important in solicitations, such as:

- using “clear, engaging, and personal language;” (p. 233)
- using “you” more frequently than any other word;
- using compact powerful words, colloquialisms, and familiar words—even clichés;
- avoiding similes and metaphors; and
- avoiding highly technical language, adjectives, first-person plurals, big words, abbreviations, and foreign phrases. (p. 233)

Although Goering and her partners assumed a low reading level would elicit better response, a higher level (12.5 on the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level) was more successful, perhaps because the particular audience tested was more highly educated than the public at large (2011, p. 233). Interestingly, Goering et al. found no significant results due to visual factors, i.e., how the communication looked or was arranged; however, follow-up interviews produced praise for bullet points. The bullets “made the letters ‘easier to read,’ ‘helped to draw attention to the kinds of things that support is needed for,’ and made the letter ‘friendlier’” (Goering, et al., 2011, p. 241).

Utilizing all of the suggestions noted above should improve response to fundraising solicitations. Vriens et al. (1998), however, point to the selection of targets as “the most important element to improve the response rate” (p. 337). No amount of skill in writing or design can motivate donation where there is absolutely no interest or where recipients’ charitable dollars are already otherwise committed. A good mailing list, therefore, is of first and foremost importance. Beyond that, writing and design skill makes the difference.

Grants

A great deal of literature exists on the subject of grant writing, which is the form of technical writing most solely the purview of nonprofits. It is not typically taught as part of general collegiate English curriculum; nor is it generally a part of current introductory technical writing curriculum. Training in this specialized writing form is most often to be found in workshops and training seminars sought by those needing this specific skill, and these are abundantly available. For the purposes of this thesis, suffice it to say that audience focus is paramount. While always telling your nonprofit's specific story and presenting factual needs and numbers, several techniques will help a nonprofit writer remain focused on the end user's needs and desires.

- The grantor needs and wants to grant funds to organizations that need its help, align with its funding interests, and meet its requirements. Most grant applications are available online now and are accompanied by instructions and guidelines. Always read the instructions and guidelines in full, since they convey the grantor's funding interests and requirements.
- The grantor's time is valuable, as is yours. If your nonprofit clearly does not meet a particular grantor's funding interests and/or requirements, do not waste their time or yours with a doomed application. If, however, it is questionable whether your organization would be a fit, either call and talk with the grantor's program manager or other representative to ask for clarification, or send a letter of interest to see if your project/program fits within the grantor's scope of funding. Try to anticipate questions the potential funder might ask,

and have answers prepared. Be sure to have clearly in mind why you think your program or project might be a good fit for that funder.

- The grantor is looking for applicant organizations that fit its funding priorities and requirements. As you complete any grant application, address every one of the grantor's funding priority's which your organization's proposal fits, using the grantor's language wherever possible in your answers.
- The grantor wants to help people overcome specific problems, not just give money to a charity. Connect the grantor to the people they will help, showing them how your organization can help the grantor change and improve lives in the way they desire.
- The grantor states in its grant instructions what it wants to know. Give the information that is requested—no more, no less.
- The grantor wants to be taken seriously, as do we all. Carefully proofread before submitting any application. Is your spelling and punctuation correct? Have you answered all the grantor's questions clearly, accurately, and fully, without over-explaining? Do your answers flow well and make sense?
- The grantor wants its contributions to be appreciated. If the grant is awarded, always send a thank you letter. Always be sure to thank the grantor in any specific way(s) requested or promised, i.e., in your newsletter, on your website, on event signage, etc.
- The grantor will want to work again with organizations that make life easy for them. Take note of any required progress reports and put them on your schedule. Don't make the grantor ask for them—get them in on time.

Process Documentation

Process documentation is classically associated with technical communication. Advances in technology, science, and industry have made documenting complex processes in those sectors absolutely necessary and have stimulated formation of technical writing as a specialized discipline. Nonprofits may have simpler, smaller processes; however, they likely repeat their processes over and over, and some of those will require consistency, accuracy, and accountability. Particularly when they are young and small, nonprofits usually spend few resources on documenting processes beyond what is absolutely required. As they grow and develop, however, they indeed find it necessary to document processes, particularly when they begin undergoing annual audits and if they utilize government funding.

Procedural documentation is not likely to require full-time attention; however, organizations will certainly benefit from a technical writer's expertise in drafting an organized, comprehensive, cohesive body of policies and procedures that are easy to update and keep current. When procedures do become necessary, significant amounts of staff time can be invested in documents that are haphazard, inconsistently written, and part of no document control system. They are used once and tucked away, becoming outdated. Good documentation and quality control measures in place from the beginning can save significant time and money by making documents consistent, effective, easy to access, and useful for developing training material and by reducing the need for time-consuming updating at inopportune times.

Bell and Evans (1998) advise designating a document controller as early as possible, someone who tracks documentation, guards its integrity, and makes it accessible to those who need it. That person's goal is not to restrict information, but to ensure that it remains accurate and that relevant information gets to all those who need it (Bell and Evans, 1998, p. 67). The document controller and information system administrator should work together to set up an appropriate system that provides accessibility to information yet protects the integrity of the contents.

Internet Utilization & Web Design

Use of the internet is pervasive today in business, nonprofit or otherwise. We use it for everything, from performing daily tasks to researching potential donors to connecting with and informing constituents. Brinckerhoff (2000) encourages nonprofit leaders to pay close attention to technical advances and to upgrade periodically, "not to say that you always have to have the newest of the new, shiniest of the shiny" but to take advantage of opportunities to save money and/or further your mission. He goes so far as to advise that nonprofits need "a CIO either full or part time, and you need that person yesterday" (Brinckerhoff, 2000, p. 119). Brinckerhoff also advises investing in technical training for staff so they can fully utilize hardware and software assets and to have technical personnel talk with program people frequently so each knows what the others are doing. "The more people know, the more they will pay attention to technological advances and understand their implications for your organization" (p. 119).

There is a tremendous amount of literature available focusing on design of web sites, pages, interfaces, and content. Some of the most commonly referenced contributors include Janice Redish, JoAnn and Bill Hackos, and William Horton. In a 1995 article, "Are We Really Entering a Post-Usability Era?," Redish focuses on usability in document design for computer use and points out that “most users don’t explore” (p. 20).

> [Users] don’t want to spend time navigating through illogical menu structures or hunting through unclear help or documentation. They want precisely what technical writers and usability specialists have been trying to help developers give them: as short, obvious, and easy a path as possible to getting their tasks completed. They want [web sites] they can jump into, grab information from, and get out of as quickly as possible. (Redish, 1995, p. 20)

Nonprofits’ websites are ever more critical links to their constituents, and well considered design will bring support in the door.

Social Media

Most nonprofits face a constant challenge to expand their support base, and the relatively new platforms of Facebook and Twitter address a particular segment of supporters who are technologically savvy, often professional, and largely younger than the historically typical philanthropic support base.

Dryer (2010), an expert in media law, says that social media has:

> democratized information and empowered ordinary citizens with the ability to organize, share information, and be heard like never before in our history. Social media is word of mouth on steroids and is beginning to morph from a fun and easy way to stay socially connected with friends into a dynamic and interactive way of doing business . . . . Businesses must now interact with their customers and other stakeholders in an entirely different way. (p. 16)

He suggests four areas of risk for organizations using social media for business purposes and suggests legal input to avoid unintended missteps:

- Federal and state laws may apply when using social media for advertising purposes.
- "Inadvertent liability may result . . . if there is any 'material connection' between a company and a blogger or tweeter" commenting favorably on the organization or its products, and that relationship is not clearly stated. Employees doing so "may be deemed an 'endorser' . . . and subject to [disclosure] guidelines.
- Organizations must use care in drafting their organizational pages and monitoring content placed on them by other users.

> Company branded pages on Facebook, YouTube, and other social media sites generate a whole host of legal issues relating to the monitoring and removal of content, trademark and copyright infringement, and privacy and publicity rights and require care in drafting appropriate privacy policies and terms of service. Of critical importance is whether the social media site is company operated, e.g., a blog, or operated by a third party, e.g., Facebook. It is much easier to regulate content on the former than the latter. When a company's social media platform is operated by a third-party, the company is dependent on the terms of service of the hosting site insofar as regulating content is concerned. The terms of service provisions vary widely depending on the social media site. It is easy to start a

conversation about the company or its products on social media platforms, but it is very difficult to control that conversation. (Dyrer, 2010, p. 17)

- Companies need to educate employees and establish firm policies about employee use of social media and potential consequences for employer organizations, defining clear lines between private and professional use. Issues such as "maintaining corporate reputation and good will, preservation of trade secret information, and concerns over harassment, discrimination, and privacy" all need to be researched, discussed, and documented.

Dryer admonishes companies to diligently monitor their social media sites for inappropriate content and/or misuse of trademarks, copyrights, intellectual property, or other issues that could negatively impact their organization or brand (p. 16-17).

The Facebook platform allows users to have a web presence without having to build a website of their own and facilitates account holders' connection and communication with each other, going beyond simple messaging and serving as a repository for demographic and profile information, photos, videos, and links. Accounts allow users to "friend" and follow other account holders, with a running list of communications appearing on the page "wall" ("Facebook," 2008).

Organizations can use their Facebook pages and Twitter accounts to promote their causes and encourage participation; however, as *The Economist* points out in a 2012 staff article "One thousand points of 'like,'" that "social media are no gold mine for do-gooders" (p. 2). A recent survey shows nine of every ten U. S. nonprofits with a presence on Facebook; however, fewer than half surveyed received more than $10,000 a year from Facebook activity, "and only 0.4% reported raising $100,000 or more" ("One Thousand," 2012, p. 2). Those that do raise a lot from Facebook have huge followings of 100,000 or so—more than 15 times the average. They invest a great deal of time in seeking out and linking with potential contributors. The article quotes Katie Bisbee of DonorsChoose as pointing out that informative "fan pages are good for relationships, but for fund-raising the most lucrative tool is to get donors to share news of their donation on their own Facebook page" ("One Thousand," 2012, p. 2). To be effective at generating significant contributions, short-staffed nonprofits may need to utilize the help of a few specially-trained volunteers to shift some of the time burden away from technical writing staff.

Twitter bypasses extended information giving and focuses on brief, frequent communication between communities of connected users. Twitter's Head of Corporate Social Innovation and Philanthropy, Claire Diaz-Ortiz (2011), explains in her book *Twitter for Good: Change the World One Tweet at a Time* the importance of this form of communication for organizations, saying this "open real-time information network . . . allows one to share with anyone" to motivate positive social change (p. 1-4). Her five-step T.W.E.E.T. model (Target, Write, Engage, Explore, Track) guides organizations to most effectively use Twitter to "help change the world" (Diaz-Ortiz, 2011, p. 8).

Targeting refers to clearly identifying reasons for having a Twitter presence—most commonly 1) seeking to be an information hub about a particular topic, 2) putting a personal face on their organization, and 3) opening new doors for funding and support. Though the latter might appear to be the most obvious for nonprofits, many organizations establish information accounts to interact in a meaningful way with their constituents, to listen and monitor their brand, and to share information about events, products, etc. while also sending information relevant to personalizing their account or raising funds (Diaz-Ortiz, 2011, p. 13-22).

Even with organizational information accounts, some amount of personalization seems important in Twitter strategy, because it both provides additional perspective beyond the official organizational voice and contributes to authenticity. Creating a separate personal account for a founder or well-known leader is one way to personalize an organizational information account; another is to incorporate personal elements into the information account, such as listing contributors in the sidebar. Twitter is based on individuals and, as Alec Ross, senior advisor for innovation to the Secretary of State, said, "[P]eople tend to follow individuals rather than institutions, and if an individual voice sounds overinstitutionalized, it comes off as inauthentic" (Diaz-Ortiz, 2011, p. 25).

Nonprofits might instinctively be drawn to set up fundraising accounts. Fundraising accounts, however, should not be overused and should only focus on specific events or initiatives, providing a vehicle for supporters to volunteer and contribute financially to that particular need. Diaz-Ortiz (2011) cautions organizations unable to decide on a single target to "immediately eliminate the option of creating a fundraising account. A fundraising account should be a goal for only those organizations with a clear and present need and the urgent drive to carry it out" (p. 33).

Success with the second step in Diaz-Ortiz's (2011) model—writing—hinges largely on getting the right person(s) to do it. The person(s) must buy into the organization's Twitter target and be able to write with the "voice" of the organization (Diaz-Ortiz, 2011, p. 66-7). Consideration should be given to what the audience needs and wants to hear, as well as to what the organization wants to say. Then, one has to just get started Tweeting—"no matter what the Tweet" (Diaz-Ortiz, 2011, p. 49). Don't over-edit, and incorporate multimedia in your Tweets whenever you can. "In the beginning, it's important to send out more information rather than less, and to be more personal than you might like. Erring on the side of overexuberance is a good bet for your first few days or weeks on Twitter" (Diaz-Ortiz, 2011, p. 49). Send out, within reason, everything you have and see what your followers respond to.

John Carnell, CEO of BullyingUK advocates CEOs or some other senior person actually sending the Tweets, whether or not they actually write them:

> Twitter users expect a reply within fifteen minutes if they can see you're online (you sent out a Tweet recently); if you fail to reply or give some excuse about needing to get advice from a higher-up, then you have really lost the magic of Twitter—the ability to very quickly respond and react to the general public on their terms, not ours . . . [I]f the CEO won't or can't tweet, then it should be a senior PR person or someone from the volunteer coordination team. It must be someone with experience of the general public and who has a clear passion for the subject matter. If all else fails and [the responsibility] has to be given to a junior member of the team, then that person should have the full backing of the organization. They are, after all, your *voice* on Twitter. You gave them the power, so you can't blame them if they mess it up on your behalf. (Diaz-Ortiz, 2011, p. 68)

Tweets should go out as often as possible and be practical, without overburdening the audience.

It isn't enough to reach potential supporters—nonprofits must *engage* them, "bringing [them] into the conversation when they otherwise might not have found their own way in" (Diaz-Ortiz, 2011, p. 88). Diaz-Ortiz (2011) suggests making the most of all of Twitter's built-in functionality, including using hashtags, lists, @replies, and retweeting, or passing on a preferred Tweet. Promoting useful products on Twitter and connecting users with needed information and resources are other ways to generate and enhance interest and participation in causes, as are sending out Tweet-ups, which call supporters to meet in person for a specific purpose (p. 76-95, 114).

Hashtags—words or short topic- or theme-related phrases with a pound sign in front of them, e.g. #twitter4good—connect Tweets to others interested in similar subjects. One can search #twitter4good, for example, and pull up all the Tweets that have been sent including that hashtag. Hashtags should be specific and relevant to your mission. Never include more than two in a Tweet, as they will clutter up the already short communiqué and obliterate the actual message. And, if using hashtags created by someone else, "make sure you understand the context of those hashtags so you're not mistaken as spamming (Diaz-Ortiz, 2011, p. 80-1).

Diaz-Ortiz (2011) says that every Twitter user should be using lists to find those who might be interested in our cause:

> They are a great way to find relevant accounts and information and position yourself well in front of those interested in your cause. Lists aren't static directories of Twitter handles, but rather living Twitter streams from individuals you choose. Not only can you use lists to organize the people you follow into

> relevant groups, but you can also follow the relevant Tweets of people on lists—even if you aren't following those individuals. (p. 84-5)

Public lists allow people to know you have placed them on your list to follow; private lists allow you to follow activity of persons of interest and respond when they send out a relevant Tweet, building relationships that can lead to further professional collaboration (Diaz-Ortiz, 2011, p. 86-88).

Exploring on Twitter includes searching on your own organization to see what is being said—and perhaps responding to educate—and continuing to look for potential influencers who might help your organization and contribute new ideas and approaches to promoting it (Diaz-Ortiz, 2011, p. 117-121). Tracking, finally, is necessary to measure progress toward goals and to identify areas for improvement (Diaz-Ortiz, 2011, p. 139).

Twitter provides an unparalleled medium through which an organization can communicate directly with people to draw them into further connection, involvement, and relationship.

Utilizing Service Learning Students and Other Volunteers in Writing

The pool of recruits available to nonprofits today is frequently underprepared to meet the writing needs of nonprofits. New hires often have no experience with nonprofits or they bring marketing training to the table, which answers only part of the need. If technical writing talent is unavailable, or for nonprofits still unable to afford hiring full or part time technical writing help, a service learning partnership with technical writing students may be the answer.

H. L. Addams, Woodbury, Allred, and J. Addams (2010) studied education literature and put forth a paper discussing client-based learning and its subcategory, service learning. They described overwhelming benefits of client-based service learning for all stakeholders—students, donor companies, faculty, and the schools—over theory-based practice. They recommended two persuasive writing assignments to help undergraduate business students more fully develop their writing skills. The first assignment has students research a company's philanthropic history, assess a charitable organization's needs, assess effective bases on which to appeal to the for-profit company, and write a letter to that company soliciting contribution to the charity (Addams, et al., 2010, p. 284-85). The second assignment allows students to write a solicitation letter to alumni on behalf of their own business school, asking for help with actual needs (Addams, et al., 2010, p. 286-87). Both of these client-based service learning practices develop the precise writing skills non-profits require and "can increase student understanding of the important role nonprofit organizations play in the economy and society" (Addams, et al., 2010, p. 285).

Students, they found, were "motivated to perform well because they were given realistic assignments that made a difference both to them and to the organizations they were serving" (Addams et. al, 2010, p. 285). This kind of practice would indeed prepare students to better meet the writing needs of nonprofits when they enter the professional business world. Addams et al. (2010) found that the overall literature supported educators connecting students to real world business scenarios through client-based class assignments, noting that students "perceive client-based assignments to be more challenging, interesting, and valuable than traditional theory-based assignments" (p. 283).

McEachern (2001) studied university client-based service learning projects with *business* students assisting nonprofits. His study of the literature and of his own academic experience pointed to a number of helpful insights regarding the nature of both nonprofit organizations and the differences in writing training English and business students typically receive.

> Composition courses seem to place a greater emphasis on the 'reflective' aspect of service learning than do professional writing courses . . . . The literature in service learning and professional writing tends to focus (as might be expected) on more practical issues such as setting up programs, working with nonprofit agencies, and avoiding problems . . . and the courses . . . are geared toward the practical experience students receive as much as they are toward reflecting on that experience. (McEachern, 2001, p. 213)

Where composition courses look for students to give service and then write reflectively about their experiences, "In professional[/technical] writing courses, students' writing and editing become the acts of service themselves" (McEachern, 2001, p. 213).

McEachern (2001) discusses five important typical characteristics of nonprofit organizations that impact service learning projects utilizing university students—passion for mission, chief executive wearing too many hats, atmosphere of scarcity, individuals with mixed skill levels, and participation of volunteers. These same characteristics affect a nonprofit's search for skilled writing staff. McEachern's discussion references "Eight Characteristics of Nonprofit Organizations" (2000) by Mike Allison and Jude Kaye of CompassPoint Nonprofit Services and "Unique Nature and Struggles of Traditional Small Nonprofits" (2000) by Sandra Larson, published by the Free Management Library (McEachern, 2001, p. 216).

The *passion for mission* characteristic boils down to values receiving more focus than the bottom line (McEachern, 2001, p. 216). Searching for a development person who believes strongly in the mission tightens the market of available writers. Nonprofits need writers who share passion for the mission *and* who are willing and have the skills to write persuasively with the "voice" of the organization's leadership so consistent, cohesive messaging can be achieved.

Chief executives wearing too many hats can overburden writers with non-writing secretarial tasks, resulting in burnout for both and instability due to subsequently higher turnover. And, if the CEO's too many hats are a result of "control issues" as opposed to lack of resources, a writer's passion for the mission can be severely strained. A mutual spirit of collaboration between leadership and writer is imperative (McEachern, 2001, p. 216-17).

Scarcity of resources is perhaps the most generally anticipated nonprofit characteristic. McEachern's (2001) viewpoint that lack of time and money make service learning projects attractive is applicable whether nonprofits have the funds to hire sufficient professional staff or not. In addition to the obvious cost savings—The National Center for Charitable Statistics estimated the value of a volunteer hour at $20.25 in 2008—service learning projects utilizing skilled volunteer writers can also help alleviate the problem of tunnel vision created when one writes about the same thing month after month, year after year. Students doing service learning bring in new ideas and opinions as to how to describe, discuss, and approach the same goals differently (McEachern, 2001, p. 217-18).

The downside of *utilizing students or other interested volunteers* as writers or to test usability of various documents, while providing fresh ideas and welcome insights free of charge, can be its cost in terms of time. Volunteers are often inexperienced and may require significant amounts of training time. They may also not have the same level of commitment to outcome or stake in the success of a project piece as a staff member who will be responsible to rewrite any piece done poorly or left undone altogether. Such wasted time heightens the potential for staff to find meeting deadlines extremely difficult or impossible. Alternatively, staff failure to communicate respect and reasonable appreciation to otherwise dedicated volunteers can poison the experience of those volunteers. The outcome is largely dependent on the individuals involved, both volunteer and staff (McEachern, 2001, p. 219-20).

Perhaps the most limiting characteristic of nonprofits in terms of finding and maintaining skilled writing is that of *individuals having mixed skill levels*.

> According to Allison and Kay, nonprofit organizations, because of their limited resources, cannot always hire experienced managers or adequately train their staffs. The people they hire are usually good at what they do, but are often asked to do jobs for which they may not have training. The "mixed skill" most relevant to professional writing service learning projects would be nonprofit personnel's often limited skills in writing. (McEachern, 2001, p. 218)

Louise Rehling (2000) points out that "Social services professionals sometimes do not have training in business communications more common among managers educated for business specializations" (p. 86), and she further states that "Because few staff may have the time or skill for writing tasks, commonly such work goes undone (or is done less than professionally). Typically, student interns at nonprofits encounter a multitude of needs for their skills" (p. 81). This same erratic mixture of skill levels among non-student volunteers can result in unexpected amounts of time spent involving and supervising contributions of those volunteers.

Organizational knowledge and ability to maintain records and other aspects of the organizational system can also be missing with students, new volunteers and, of course, new staff and can take months to acquire. This reason and others stress the importance for nonprofits to attend to the matters of employing the appropriate level of writing skill in their development staff and of designing an associated volunteer experience that is manageable and beneficial for the organization. The Association of Fundraising Professionals stated in their 2010 Nonprofits Research Collaborative Study results that "strong fundraising results were more likely when organizations invested resources in fundraising staff and infrastructure, including volunteer management" (para. 1).

Chapter 3: Case Study – Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity

Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity ("Central Oklahoma Habitat" or "Habitat") provides an excellent case study through which to view several types of writing critical to nonprofits and how techniques in technical writing can enhance their success. This particular nonprofit is "an ecumenical, Christian housing ministry working in partnership with God and the community to build simple, decent, affordable housing, and to provide hope for responsible, hard-working, limited income families living in substandard conditions" (Habitat for Humanity, 2011, p. "Home"). As such, it functions simultaneously as a charity, a construction company, and as a mortgage company because it does not typically sell the zero-interest mortgages executed on its homes but carries them internally.

Central Oklahoma Habitat is an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International (HFHI), autonomous yet subscribing to HFHI's basic philosophy and core commitments. This particular affiliate is exemplary, ranked among the top 20 most productive among more than 1,500 affiliates in the nation. Chartered in 1987, Central Oklahoma Habitat began operating year-round in 1990 and has since developed into an extremely effective, well-run housing leader in Oklahoma. Through its strides in incorporating cutting-edge plan design and energy efficiency improvements into "affordable" housing and the input of its leadership into strategic decision-making and formation of best practices at HFHI's U.S. Council level, Central Oklahoma Habitat is making a positive impact on affordable housing at a national level, as well.

This case study consists of a description of Central Oklahoma Habitat's writing staff, various audiences, and communication media. Analysis will follow in the next chapter of Habitat's past and current strategies for writing and communication and of what other nonprofits might take from their experiences.

Staff

As is the case with many well developed nonprofits, several staff members contribute to Central Oklahoma Habitat's public communication. One development person is typically responsible for writing grants, and that person and an administrative assistant both contribute to donor correspondence. A third person does most of the website, newsletter, and social media writing in addition to other duties, with the development person assisting as needed. Many smaller, lesser developed nonprofits may have two persons, or even just one, doing the bulk of the writing for the organization. Such dependence on writing skills justifies generous investment in staff with fully developed writing skills.

Audiences

As with many organizations, both for- and non-profit, Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity's documentation targets a wide range of audiences. For the purposes of this paper, discussion will be limited to audiences typical of nonprofits—donors and clients—as identified in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Various Audiences for Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity Documentation

DONORS	CLIENTS
• Individuals • Businesses • Foundations • Churches • Schools & Civic Groups	• New Home Construction • Rehab • Critical Home Repairs

Care must be taken in every document or other communication to focus on the specific intended audience(s), to assess their exact needs, and to address those needs as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Donors: Donors, in the case of Habitat, include individuals, businesses, foundations, and other organizations contributing money or in kinds (material, equipment, supplies, etc.), as well as volunteers contributing their time and talents. It is a well-known maxim in fundraising that individuals can or should provide up to 80% of cash donations for a nonprofit. This benchmark is often used as a goal and as a tentative criterion for evaluating fundraising effectiveness. Modes of communication utilized to reach individuals include, but are not limited to, direct contact, solicitation letters, advertising, newsletter, and website, all of which inform and nurture relationships, and social media, which also nurtures relationships and drives individuals to the more informing website. Central Oklahoma Habitat has identified donors as a group with which to strengthen and expand its fundraising efforts. More attention will be given to analyzing Habitat's donor communication in the Analysis chapter.

Many Oklahoma businesses, churches, schools, and civic groups find building homes for limited income families with Central Oklahoma Habitat to be a fulfilling and effective outlet for giving back to the community, providing funding and/or manpower. Partnerships with these groups are often initiated by direct contact with organizational representatives and/or by letter proposals. Occasionally, businesses will have some type of application format which must be completed as part of the process.

Foundations provide a good deal of support for Central Oklahoma Habitat, as well, and documentation of these relationships typically begins with a grant application.

For the purposes of this paper, discussion of grants is limited to the information found in the Literature Review.

Central Oklahoma Habitat is fortunate to have a wealth of volunteer support—on the board and on committees and in the field and the office. Most communication takes place via telephone, email, or in person, and Habitat's website informs interested persons and accommodates volunteer registration.

Clients: The second major audience Habitat addresses are potential clients for any of its several programs—new construction for sale to owner-occupants, rehab of existing owner-occupied homes, and critical repair to existing owner-occupied homes. Clients for all of Habitat's programs typically earn less than 80% of the median income for their area, and the vast majority work full time at one or more jobs. They are the "working poor." Documents addressing clients must ideally connect with clients' needs and inform them in a clear, persuasive, and reassuring manner how they can address their needs. At the same time, the document must anticipate and remove clients' perceived roadblocks to their successful application for assistance. Indeed, this is the greatest challenge for Habitat writers.

The voice used to speak to clients must be different than that used to inform and persuade donors and volunteers. While communication with donors and volunteers concentrates on presenting a critical need experienced by clients that most would find unacceptable, documents directed to potential or existing clients must recognize and preserve their dignity as productive, hardworking citizens. Portraying them to themselves as too needy and pitiful can be offensive and counterproductive. In fact, Habitat is careful to present the hardworking nature of its clients to donors and volunteers, as well, since this characteristic is one that appeals to most of Habitat's supporters.

Communication Media

Central Oklahoma Habitat uses an assortment of available media to address its various constituencies, including but not limited to letters and letter proposals, website, social media, advertising, newsletter, and promotional handouts. All of these involve writing frequently done by nonprofit staff that can be enhanced by utilizing technical writing techniques.

Solicitation letters: Central Oklahoma Habitat typically sends out one general appeal letter each year to its entire base of some 18,000 supporters. These letters are usually one to two pages in length and ask for specific help, present the case for need, describe Habitat's answer to that need and benefits of the donor's participation, and conclude by asking again for help and thanking the donor for their consideration. An occasional second appeal may be sent out when there is a special need. These additional appeal letters may be a bit longer and target specific groups of supporters who are likely to be interested in the specific need.

In addition, Habitat issues multiple letter proposals each year—more detailed, comprehensive project proposals no more than four pages in length. These target specific individuals or organizations identified as potential major donors, including all the same elements in the appeal letters while also outlining specific projects and options for involvement.

Website: All the organization's primary audiences, with the exception of staff, are addressed through a fairly extensive website located at www.CentralOklahomaHabitat.org. The ad hoc services of an IT expert are contracted under a monthly retainer to develop and maintain the organization's computer system and internet functionality.

Prior to 2009, staff used Front Page to edit the website, which was resident on the organization's in-house server. The staff members maintaining the website were self-taught in the software and never learned to fully utilize the software's capability. Below, Figure 1 shows an example of the website's home page prior to 2009.

Figure 1

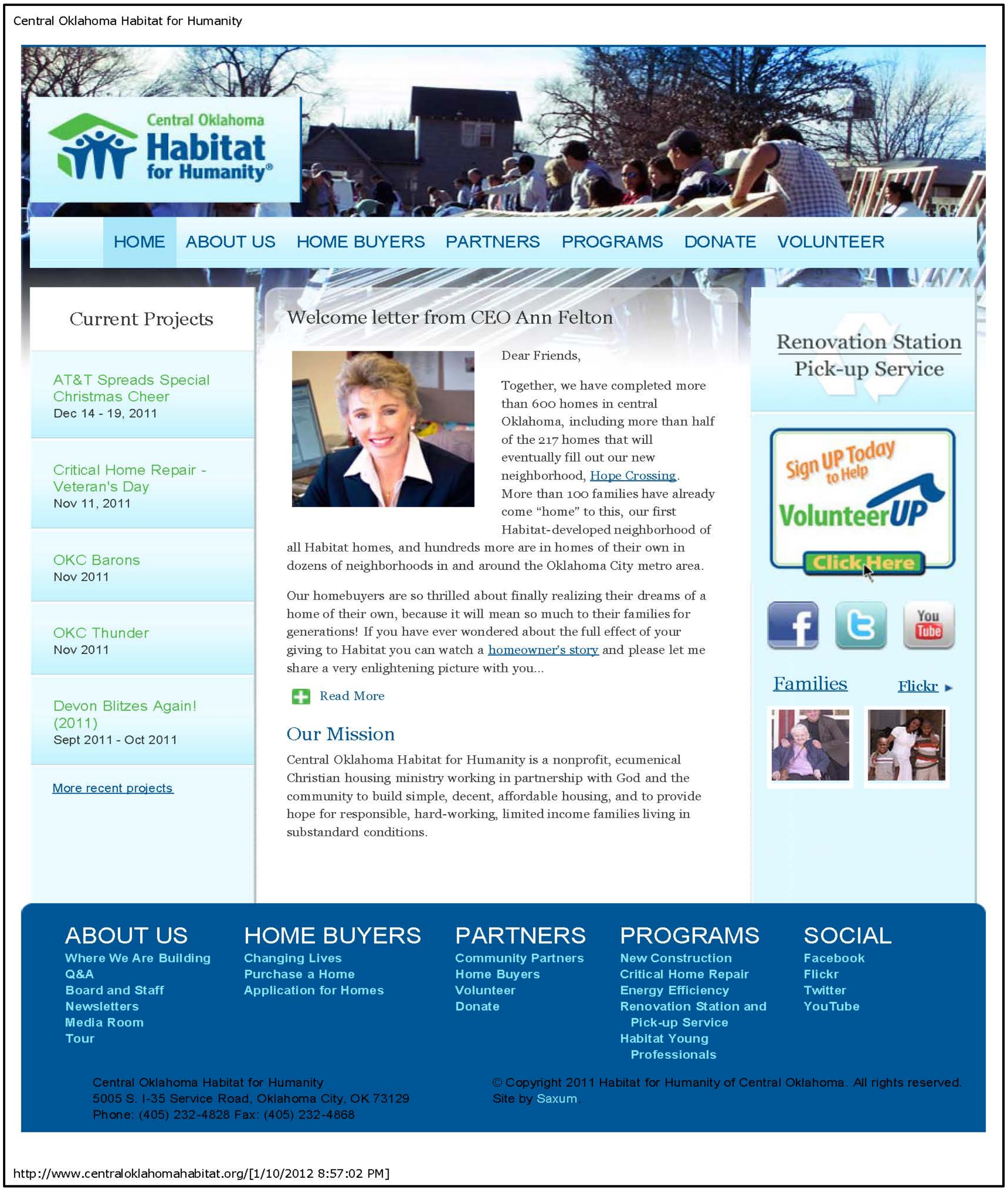
Former Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity Website Home Page (partial)

A basic header and navigation were designed by a public relations firm around 1999, and staff began maintaining the website from that time. Layers were used to incorporate text, available graphics, logos, and lots of photos, with fonts and color used for emphasis. Only the top portion of the index page is shown above, since the full length of the page is too much to represent here.

In 2009, Central Oklahoma Habitat's website was redesigned by Saxum Strategic Communications of Oklahoma City and transferred to an online host server. Several staff members were trained to begin using a content management system (CMS) to maintain it. Below, in Figure 2, is an example of the organization's new home page.

Figure 2

Revised Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity Website Home Page



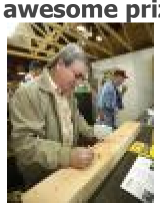
Social Media: Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity jumped into social media with Facebook in early 2008, adding Twitter in late 2008/early 2009, and has continued to develop a coordinated presence on both. The organization is using these platforms to connect with tech-savvy supporters and to enhance support relationships with a younger demographic.

Habitat established Facebook pages for both the nonprofit itself and for its owned and operated retail outlets, the Habitat Renovation Station stores, where routine updates include plenty of photos and invitations to participate. Staff does a good job of posting and regulating entries on their accounts and responding to all comers. Though the conversation is almost always positive, negative posts are occasionally made, which is one of the risks of social media communication. An example of an entry on Habitat's Facebook page is shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3

Sample Habitat Facebook Entries

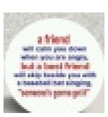
Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity
Still plenty of boards left to be signed! Stop by the Centennial Bldg at the Home & Garden Show and leave your wishes for Lynette & Devyn. We also have some awesome prize drawings going on.



Oklahoma well-wishers leave special messages for single mom
newsok.com
When Lynette Johnson moves into her new home, messages of hope will be hidden inside her walls.
January 21 at 4:16pm · LikeUnlike · · Share ·

Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity
Rose State Volunteer Fair! Come by and see how you can make a difference in your community.

February 8 at 10:35am near Midwest City · LikeUnlike · · Share · 5 people like this.



Chris Gibson Why volunteer? I've volunteered and never have I heard a word from this organization. I get tired of calling and being ignored. Maybe instead of a fair you could check your messages on occasion!

To the complaint shown above in Figure 3, Habitat staff responded positively within a few hours.

Habitat's social media strategy includes using Hootsuite, an online social media dashboard service, to manage multiple social profiles, schedule messages and tweets, and track and analyze social media traffic (http://hootsuite.com). Two Habitat Tweets are shown below in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Examples of Habitat Tweets

COHFH Central OK Habitat

Congratulations Dani!! We're lucking to have you! http://bit.ly/z5QyIX Thank you **@cmtonecountry**

9 Feb **Favorite** **Retweet** **Reply**

»

COHFH Central OK Habitat

Been meaning to signup to volunteer? Come see us TODAY @ the Rose State Service Learning Fair.

Advertising: Central Oklahoma Habitat advertises to potential donors and volunteers to help meet funding and manpower needs and also to potential clients to let them know about the opportunity Habitat offers them. Additional ads target potential customers for its retail outlets. Television, radio, and print ads are all part of Habitat's media plan, and professional assistance from a public relations firm helps the organization coordinate its messaging and utilize money and staff time most effectively.

Many smaller nonprofits find advertising on any regular basis unaffordable. Larger organizations, however, often find that putting their cause before the public via some kind of regular advertising has similar payoffs as with for-profits. They will often find special sponsors for this kind of activity.

Newsletter: Central Oklahoma Habitat's newsletter informs and recognizes donors and volunteers, which include clients. Major gifts and special projects are highlighted, as are outstanding volunteers, and supporters are introduced to homebuyer families (clients) so that they may form a connection with those they are helping with their contributions.

In its early years, Central Oklahoma Habitat used a 10-12 page, two-color, 8 ½ x 11" format for its newsletter. In 2000, it changed to an 11 x 17" format resembling a newspaper in size, on a 70 pound uncoated offset (comparable to a 28 pound bond) heavy enough not to show printing through to the back side. In 2011, the organization enhanced that format with a four-color process. The newsletter is published three times per year and typically contains eight pages of articles on current sponsorships and other happenings, upcoming projects, volunteer highlights, short biographies on partner families, and donor recognition listings.

Figures 5, 6, and 7 below compare the front pages of Habitat's newsletter over the three time periods: Figure 5 shows the letter-size newsletter format used until 2000. Figures 6 and 7 show use of the larger format with two-color and four-color processes, respectively.

Figure 5

Front Page, Winter 1999 Newsletter, Central OK Habitat for Humanity (8 ½ x 11" two-color)

CENTRAL OKLAHOMA HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Winter 1999 2915 Classen Blvd., Suite 460 • Oklahoma City, OK 73106 (405) 524-7151

All Souls' Episcopal Church blitz-builds first home!

By Gail Driskill

Pam Wartchow and her four sons had what will probably be their most unforgettable Christmas ever. It was spent in their own new home.

The family's four-bedroom house at 425 SE 23rd Street was "blitz built" by members of All Souls' Episcopal Church and other volunteers in only eight days. Members of Habitat for Humanity's professional crew were project overseers.

The Wartchow family's house, the 98th Habitat dwelling to be built in Oklahoma City, is a realized dream for All Souls' Church as well as the happy new homeowner.

"Our people responded generously and quickly," said the Rev. Patrick Bright, All Souls' rector. He said the Habitat blitz grew out of the momentum created during the parish's 50th anniversary. During this time, the church launched a major building program, including a chapel.

The Habitat house, financed not out of the church budget but the generosity of church members, is "a continuation of our thanks-giving to God for all His blessings. We've done something for ourselves, and now something for the greater community," Father Bright said.

Father Bright and the Rt. Rev. Shannon Mallory, pastoral assistant, traded their clerical garb for work clothes and joined more than 80 parishioners in the October blitz.

All Souls' members have sponsored in part and worked as volunteers on several other Habitat houses, but this was the church's first fully sponsored house.

Directing the All Souls' crew was parishioner Scott Georgi. His wife, Claudia, also spent countless hours working at the job site.

"For my parish family to fully fund and blitz-build a house was exciting," said church member Ann Felton, who also is chairman of the board of directors for Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity. She also is proud of the fact that the All Souls' crew set a local record for getting the walls up: two hours and 20 minutes. "I just can't say enough for the men and women in our parish for rallying around and stepping out into the community."

Also expressing her delight is Habitat staffer Pam Felactu, who also is a member of All Souls' Church. "The thing I looked forward to the most for our church in undertaking this project was the experience of blitz building the house together. There is just nothing like it!" Scott and Claudia Georgi are "people who gave unselfishly of their time and energy to keep everything moving," she said. "They were fantastic."

(Continued on page 8)

Far left: *All Souls' parishioners start day one of this 8-day blitz build by constructing the wall components.*

Above: *The first wall is erected mid-morning.*

Left: *Prospective homeowner Pam Wartchow and All Souls' parishioner Charles Ming supply decking to the workers on the roof.*

Figure 6

Front Page, Spring-Summer 2009 Newsletter, Central OK Habitat for Humanity (11 x 17" two-color)

Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity®

1025 N. Broadway Oklahoma City, OK 73102 • (405) 232-4828 • Fax (405) 232-4868 Spring/Summer 2009

Dear friends,

I am struck by Albert Einstein's reminder that "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity." The damage done by the recent economic wrenching is all too evident; however, after assessing what we can do differently for the future, we must move forward. For my part, I choose to do so with hope and optimism. God has seen us through bad times before, and I have complete faith that He will do so again.

Ann M. Felton

If there is a silver lining for Central Oklahoma Habitat in this dark economic cloud of late, it is that land prices are coming down to more reasonable levels. For some time, we have been searching for land in the southwest Oklahoma City metro area where we can build homes for limited income families who live and work close by, but prices have been prohibitive. Now we have a chance to acquire land that will enable us to reach out to more families in need with the unique opportunity that Habitat and its supporters can offer for changed lives.

My great hope is to find the right opportunity to create another neighborhood like Hope Crossing in the southwest Oklahoma City metro area – to be able to provide limited income families with the same kind of attractive, peaceful, secure, and healthy living environment for adults and children that we are currently developing in northeast Oklahoma City. The zero-interest Habitat loan combined with the energy efficient homes we are able to build will put money back into families' pockets, allowing them to invest more of their hard-earned dollars in their families instead of down an empty hole.

Our new Brush with Kindness program is another ray of hope that will provide some of the poorest homeowners in our community with the materials and helping hands they need to keep their homes in livable condition. I am so pleased to be able now to offer this much-needed service to families who previously could not connect with the Habitat program because they already owned a home. The more families we lift up, I firmly believe, the better for us all as individuals, neighborhoods, and the community at large.

Please join us this spring and summer! Put your faith and hope into action by

(Continued on page 8)

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Okla. City, OK
Permit No. 815

Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity
1025 N. Broadway
Oklahoma City, OK 73102

OG+E and Habitat help communities experience A Brush With Kindness

Our ever-faithful partners at **OG+E** are helping Central Oklahoma Habitat make a difference in lives of more Oklahoma families with our new revitalization program, **A Brush with Kindness.** The program allows qualifying low income homeowners in older metro neighborhoods to receive assistance with weatherization improvements, lowering their energy costs and bettering living conditions.

With additional funds raised in the community, volunteers are also able to take care of accessibility issues, exterior painting, clean-up, and other minor repairs that go a long way to increase quality of life. With a contribution of $3,000 to $5,000, churches, civic groups, individuals, and others can help disabled and other low-income homeowners in need remain in their homes affordably while also aiding in the recovery efforts in existing older neighborhoods.

Just like Habitat's new construction program, *A Brush with Kindness* is staffed primarily by volunteers, so we need you! If you have been looking for a way to make a difference and would like to become involved in this new program, contact Volunteer Coordinator Steve Musch at (405) 232-4828.

Installing a new door to help keep the outdoor elements outdoors.

A day's work and a fresh coat of paint breathe new life into an older home.

Habitat is going to the dogs

Central Oklahoma Habitat is very excited about a special project this summer with **Oklahoma City Summer Classic Dog Shows** – comprised of the Oklahoma City and Mid-Del-Tinker Kennel Clubs – called **Habitat for Canines.** Through Habitat for Canines, 75 Habitat homeowners and their canine companions are receiving dog houses built by OKC Summer Classic Dog Shows and other volunteers in a special May 2 workday, together with educational material on dog health and responsible dog ownership. The Oklahoma City Summer Classic Dog Shows is one of the top dog shows in the country and will be televised nationally from the Cox Convention Center at the end of June.

The dog house-building workday is just the first part of the Habitat for Canines project! The second part – a **Dog House Design Contest and Auction,** will take place **Saturday, August 1** during the Canine Experience/Junior Achievement Challenge event at State Fair Park. Funds raised will benefit the Central Oklahoma Habitat mission.

You won't want to miss the Dog House Design Contest and Auction on August 1! Dog houses to be auctioned are being built by local builders, architects, students, and anyone else who thinks they have what it takes to be the next doggie design star. Log on to www.CentralOklahomaHabitat.org to find entry information for this fun and fascinating event!

Many thanks to event sponsors **Home Depot** and **Sonic** for providing materials, and radio station **KJ-103** for kindly providing volunteers for the May 2 dog house build along with on-air coverage, contests, and of course music! And, we could not do anything without the dog "house plans" generously donated by students from **Francis Tuttle Technology Center.** Hammering and painting works up quite an appetite, so the great lunch provided by the **Oklahoma City Metropolitan Association of REALTORS®** is just the ticket! Guinness World Records has been petitioned to add a *Most Dog Houses Built in One Day* category in honor of the 75 dog houses being built on May 2 by some 150 volunteers. We're still waiting to hear back!

Just a few finishing touches needed before Fido and Fifi become the newest Habitat homeowners.

Habitat Happenings

Chaparral Energy Build
May 1–June 27 • Hope Crossing

Maxwell Supply Blitz Build
May 9–30 • Hope Crossing

Arvest Bank Blitz Build
June 6–26 • Hope Crossing

Hudiburg Blitz Build
June 13–July 11 • Hope Crossing

Capital Distribution & Henry Hudson's Blitz Build
July 18–August 22 • Hope Crossing

Figure 7

Front Page, Christmas 2011 Newsletter, Central OK Habitat for Humanity (11 x 17" four-color)

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. – ACTS 6:8

Dear friends,

We are winding up another wonderfully productive year, despite the record summer heat, with 41 more families in new homes, nine families in rehabbed homes, and more than 50 families in safe, secure homes through our Critical Home Repair program. A great many thanks to all who contributed time, talent, and treasure to make things better at a very basic level for all these families and their surrounding neighborhoods.

Ann Felton Gilliland

We all want to make a difference, but how often do limitations make us say, "This would take a miracle?" That's what one of our recent single mothers thought it would take to get her family out of their substandard, crime-ridden apartment into a safer, more secure and affordable place of their own. On the day she received the keys to her beautiful new energy-efficient Habitat home, she stood there speechless, trying to find the words, and finally just said, "This is a miracle. Thank you, God."

Habitat is all about miracles! It's a miracle that one individual sends a gift because they want to reach out and change things. It's a miracle that another person comes out to a Habitat work site and finds so many others of like mind. It is a miracle that together we can build these life-changing homes. And, it is truly miraculous to see evidence just a few years later of changed lives and changed minds – changed ideas of what is possible.

In 2012, we will begin building the first of 31 homes in Blanchard, some of which will put victims of recent tornados in that area back into stable, secure homes. We first built in the Tri-City area following the devastating May 1999 tornados and found the people there to be among the best – hardworking, resilient, and a great pleasure to partner with. We look forward to working in Blanchard, as well as in Hope Crossing and Las Rosas in northeast and south Oklahoma City, respectively, where we have been building for some time, and we will begin work on developing our new parcel of land just east of Mustang.

(Continued on page 8)

Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity®

5005 S. I-35 Service Road • Oklahoma City, OK 73129 • (405) 232-4828 • Fax (405) 232-4868 Christmas 2011

Voices inspire at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

Gospel group **Voices** embodied the spirit of Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity's Christian housing ministry at the **18th annual Volunteer Recognition Dinner** on Tuesday, October 18, at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. More than 800 volunteers and donors came together to share an evening of fellowship, food, and fun! It is these generous donors and volunteers who made it possible for COHFH to build 41 new homes and renovate nine more in the new construction program, and to complete repairs and weatherization for some 50 limited-income existing homeowners through the *Critical Home Repair* program in 2011.

The crowd listened intently as Chairman and CEO Ann Felton Gilliland expressed her gratitude for the continued partnerships of long-time donors and new benefactors. She spoke of her continued appreciation for the businesses, organizations, churches, and individuals who return each year to give of their time and talents through volunteering on the construction sites and for the homeowners who contribute to the program through their mortgage payments. She also shared her enthusiasm for the potential to improve the lives of others in the coming year by providing more decent, affordable housing and completing weatherization and repair projects for limited-income families in 2012.

Voices gospel group entertains audience at the 18th annual Volunteer Recognition dinner.

Inspiration Award winner Dwayne Thornton shares the moment with Chairman & CEO Ann Felton Gilliland and fellow Board member Carolyn Roberts

It is such a pleasure to be able to say thank you in some small way to those who contribute their time, talents, and resources each year. We are truly grateful to the sponsors who made this year's celebration possible: **The Aldridge Foundation, MidFirst Bank, Hall Estill, Attorneys at Law,** and **Sen. Jim Inhofe.** We also greatly appreciate veteran Volunteer Recognition Event emcee and local KWTV News 9 anchor **Robin Marsh,**a nd welcome newcomers **Voices**and pianist **Grant Stevens** who contributed to the enjoyment of the evening. We also appreciate **Trochta's Flowers & Greenhouses** for their generous donation of the lovely table decorations, and **Red Stiletto Photography** for providing us with visual memories of the event.

Heartfelt thanks go out to all of our Central Oklahoma Habitat volunteers and donors for the successes of 2011!

(Continued on page 3)

Devon puts their energy into building a new home

A quick glance at the downtown Oklahoma City skyline provides a reminder of the impact that **Devon Energy** has had on the state. As the newest structure in the downtown landscape grows daily, dwarfing its existing neighbors, the significance of this Fortune 500 company's presence is clearly visible.

It's a big building. They are a big company. Fortunately for Central Oklahoma Habitat, they have a big heart for the community in which they operate. Devon is involved in several community ventures, including the continued support of the COHFH mission to provide affordable housing through their generous donation of time, talents, and treasure. October found Devon employees on the construction site once again, their sixth trip, swinging hammers and raising walls. In addition to providing the manpower to ensure that George and Josephine H. have a stable environment in which to raise their two young sons, they also fully funded the new home.

Although the big new building gracing the skyline is something for all to see, COHFH is grateful to Devon for putting their energy into something that may be less visible from a distance, but with an impact that will last a lifetime.

Thank you, Devon, for all of your community efforts!

The possibilities for the cause of this shared laugh are endless. Maybe someday they'll let us in on their little secret.

Devon volunteers prepare to raise some walls.

Habitat Happenings

COHFH at the OKC Home & Garden Show
Jan 20–22 • Oklahoma State Fair Park

Canadian Students
February 2012

Collegiate Challenge
March 2012

OU Physicians
April 2012

Thank you to IBC BANK for sponsoring this newsletter!

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5005 S. I-35 Service Road
Oklahoma City, OK 73129

Promotional Handouts: These are used to present a brief informational picture to specific audiences and will include important points and sufficient detail to give a basic understanding and to direct an interested reader to more information. Central Oklahoma Habitat produces several brochures targeting specific audiences; two are described here.

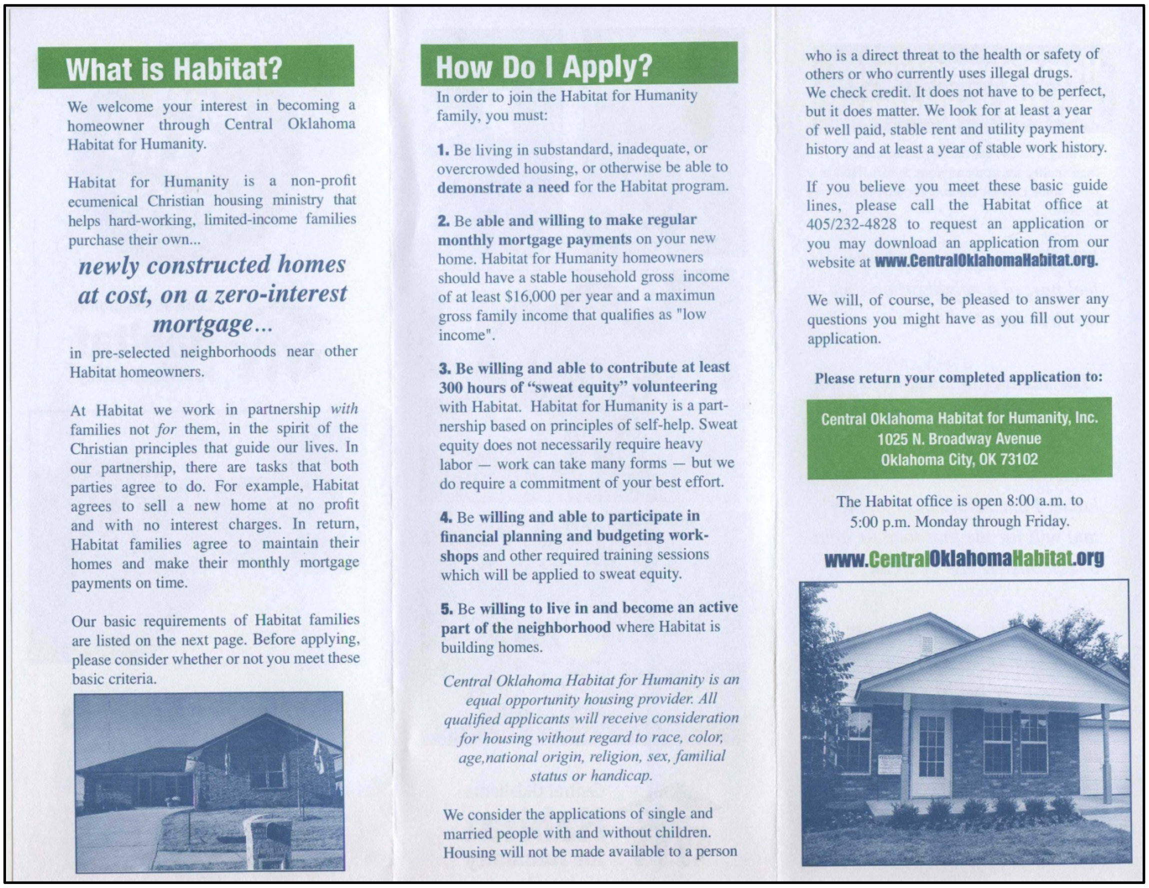
Program brochures inform clients *and* potential supporters on how a program works. An example of Central Oklahoma Habitat's application brochure is presented in Figures 8 and 9 below. Clients are the primary audience; however, supporters and any other interested party may request and read this document.

Figure 8

Application Brochure – Central OK Habitat for Humanity (outside)

Figure 9

Application Brochure – Central OK Habitat for Humanity (inside)



What is Habitat?

We welcome your interest in becoming a homeowner through Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity.

Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit ecumenical Christian housing ministry that helps hard-working, limited-income families purchase their own...

newly constructed homes at cost, on a zero-interest mortgage...

in pre-selected neighborhoods near other Habitat homeowners.

At Habitat we work in partnership *with* families not *for* them, in the spirit of the Christian principles that guide our lives. In our partnership, there are tasks that both parties agree to do. For example, Habitat agrees to sell a new home at no profit and with no interest charges. In return, Habitat families agree to maintain their homes and make their monthly mortgage payments on time.

Our basic requirements of Habitat families are listed on the next page. Before applying, please consider whether or not you meet these basic criteria.

How Do I Apply?

In order to join the Habitat for Humanity family, you must:

1. Be living in substandard, inadequate, or overcrowded housing, or otherwise be able to **demonstrate a need** for the Habitat program.

2. Be **able and willing to make regular monthly mortgage payments** on your new home. Habitat for Humanity homeowners should have a stable household gross income of at least $16,000 per year and a maximun gross family income that qualifies as "low income".

3. Be willing and able to contribute at least 300 hours of "sweat equity" volunteering with Habitat. Habitat for Humanity is a partnership based on principles of self-help. Sweat equity does not necessarily require heavy labor — work can take many forms — but we do require a commitment of your best effort.

4. Be **willing and able to participate in financial planning and budgeting workshops** and other required training sessions which will be applied to sweat equity.

5. Be **willing to live in and become an active part of the neighborhood** where Habitat is building homes.

Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity is an equal opportunity housing provider. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for housing without regard to race, color, age, national origin, religion, sex, familial status or handicap.

We consider the applications of single and married people with and without children. Housing will not be made available to a person who is a direct threat to the health or safety of others or who currently uses illegal drugs.

We check credit. It does not have to be perfect, but it does matter. We look for at least a year of well paid, stable rent and utility payment history and at least a year of stable work history.

If you believe you meet these basic guide lines, please call the Habitat office at 405/232-4828 to request an application or you may download an application from our website at **www.CentralOklahomaHabitat.org.**

We will, of course, be pleased to answer any questions you might have as you fill out your application.

Please return your completed application to:

Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity, Inc.
1025 N. Broadway Avenue
Oklahoma City, OK 73102

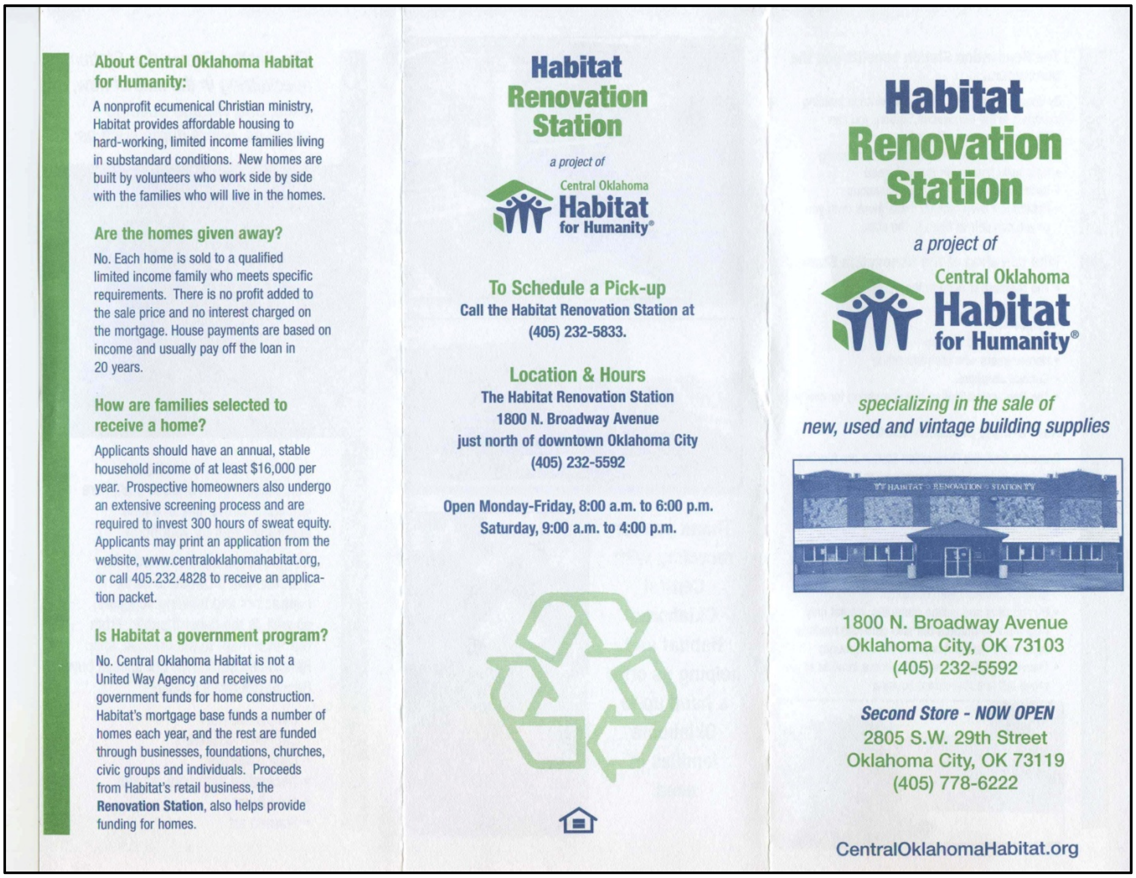
The Habitat office is open 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

www.CentralOklahomaHabitat.org

Another brochure explains the Habitat Renovation Stations—their purpose, locations, and general types of stock. Potential customers looking for building or remodeling materials or supplies are the target of these brochures. They may have no other strong interest in the Habitat ministry itself. The outside and inside of one of these brochures are shown below in Figures 10 and 11.

Figure 10

Habitat Renovation Station Brochure (outside)



About Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity:

A nonprofit ecumenical Christian ministry, Habitat provides affordable housing to hard-working, limited income families living in substandard conditions. New homes are built by volunteers who work side by side with the families who will live in the homes.

Are the homes given away?

No. Each home is sold to a qualified limited income family who meets specific requirements. There is no profit added to the sale price and no interest charged on the mortgage. House payments are based on income and usually pay off the loan in 20 years.

How are families selected to receive a home?

Applicants should have an annual, stable household income of at least $16,000 per year. Prospective homeowners also undergo an extensive screening process and are required to invest 300 hours of sweat equity. Applicants may print an application from the website, www.centraloklahomahabitat.org, or call 405.232.4828 to receive an application packet.

Is Habitat a government program?

No. Central Oklahoma Habitat is not a United Way Agency and receives no government funds for home construction. Habitat's mortgage base funds a number of homes each year, and the rest are funded through businesses, foundations, churches, civic groups and individuals. Proceeds from Habitat's retail business, the **Renovation Station**, also helps provide funding for homes.

Habitat Renovation Station

a project of

Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity®

To Schedule a Pick-up

Call the Habitat Renovation Station at (405) 232-5833.

Location & Hours

The Habitat Renovation Station
1800 N. Broadway Avenue
just north of downtown Oklahoma City
(405) 232-5592

Open Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Saturday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Habitat Renovation Station

a project of

Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity®

specializing in the sale of new, used and vintage building supplies

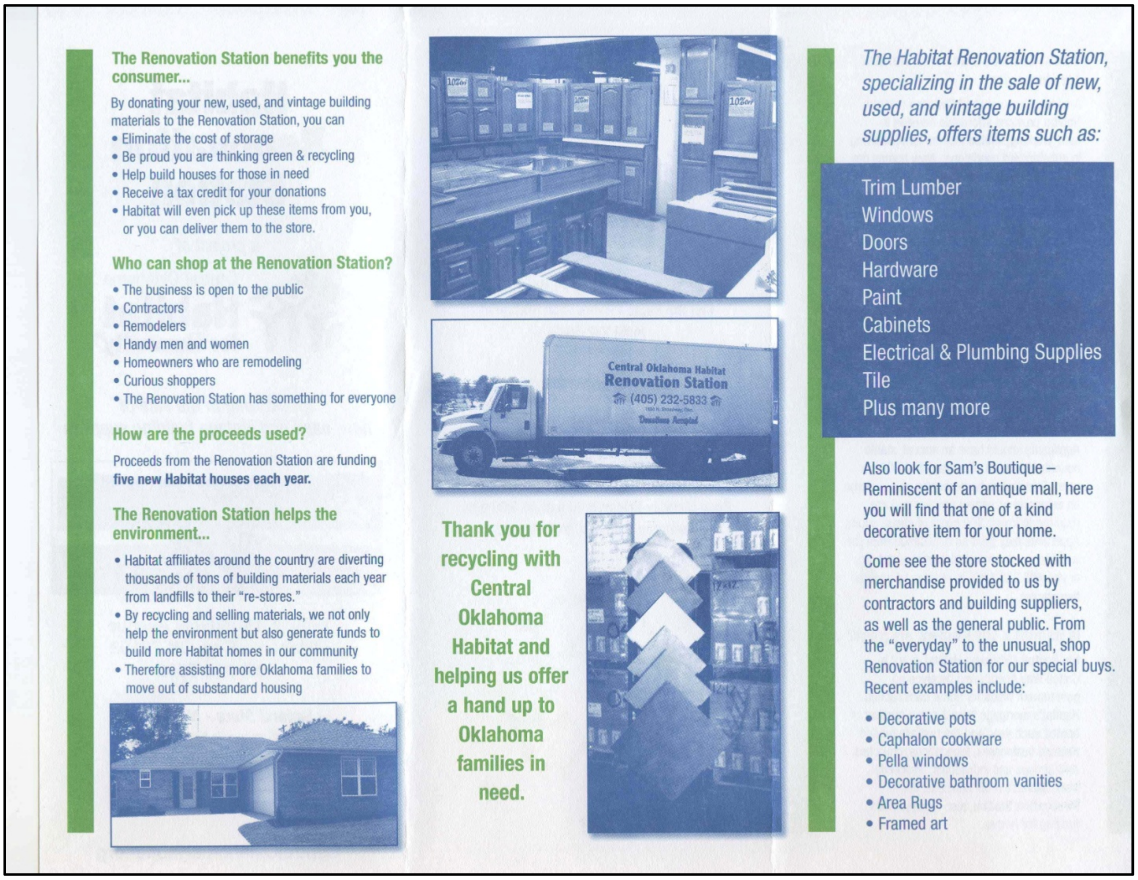
1800 N. Broadway Avenue
Oklahoma City, OK 73103
(405) 232-5592

Second Store - NOW OPEN
2805 S.W. 29th Street
Oklahoma City, OK 73119
(405) 778-6222

CentralOklahomaHabitat.org

Figure 11

Habitat Renovation Station Brochure (inside)



Sponsorship brochures inform potential supporters of available sponsorship opportunities. The Habitat development staff personalize and distribute small numbers of this brochure to organizations with potential interest in partnering with Habitat so they can consider the information and decide what mix of volunteer and monetary contributions best suit them. Habitat works with potential sponsors to schedule building projects at times of the year convenient for sponsor groups. Figures 12 and 13 depict an example of Habitat's sponsorship brochure, circa 2010.

Figure 12

Sponsorship Brochure – Central OK Habitat for Humanity (outside)

All cash donations made to Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity, unless specifically given for another purpose, go 100% to the direct costs of building homes: materials and necessary contract labor. Volunteers do the rest!

* * *

Central Oklahoma Habitat has constructed more than 508 homes since 1990 and will complete at least 45 homes in 2009, located in all four quadrants of Oklahoma City.

Habitat accepts no government funding for construction of homes.

Administration is partially funded by earned income from sales of articles donated to the **Habitat Pick-up Service** (733-0272).

Sales at the **Habitat Renovation Station**, located at 1800 N. Broadway in downtown Oklahoma City, go directly into Habitat's construction budget, funding four to five houses each year.

An ideal resource for professionals or the do-it-yourself-er, the Renovation Station (232-5592 – 1800 N. Broadway, downtown OKC) is a discount outlet for construction and remodeling supplies and materials, open to the public, specializing in new, used, and one-of-a-kind items.

Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity is part of a world-wide, non-profit, ecumenical Christian housing ministry which **provides *zero-interest* mortgage loans** to qualified hard-working lower-income families. "Our philosophy is 'a hand up,'" says board chairman Ann Felton. "Habitat offers a true partnership arrangement by which families in the lower income ranges can attain their goals of home ownership."

Donations from private individuals, companies, churches, foundations, and civic groups are pooled and used to construct **solid, insulated, energy-efficient homes** that are then sold for the **cost of construction.**

Donated land and volunteers contributing their labor help to keep the house cost down. A new four-bedroom, two-bath home is currently selling for an average of $75,000, plus the cost of land.

To qualify for the Habitat program, applicants must demonstrate a **need** for the Habitat program, the **ability to make a regular monthly mortgage payment** ($16,000 minimum annual income), and be **willing to partner** with Habitat. Habitat looks for at least one year of stable work history and rent/utility payment history. Credit is reviewed: it does not have to be perfect, but does matter.

No down payment is charged, and **affordable monthly house payments** are based on 25% of the homebuyer's gross monthly income at the time of closing.

All families approved for the Central Oklahoma Habitat program contribute 300 hours of **"sweat equity,"** working on others' homes as well as their own, prior to purchasing their Habitat home.

Mortgage payments go back into Habitat's construction budget to build more homes for more qualified families. This **recycling of funds** is what attracts many people to give to Habitat for Humanity.

Central Oklahoma
Habitat for Humanity®

and

YOU!

PARTNERS IN NEW HORIZONS

for

Families and Communities

1025 N. Broadway
Oklahoma City, OK 73102

Tel: (405) 232-4828 Fax: (405) 232-4868

Visit us at

www.CentralOklahomaHabitat.org

Figure 13

Sponsorship Brochure – Central OK Habitat for Humanity (inside)

Donors and volunteers are truly the lifeblood of Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity.

In 2009, Central Oklahoma Habitat will build at least 45 basic, quality, affordable new homes *together* – as partners – with qualifying limited-income families in need of better housing as well as with hundreds of donors and volunteers.

WE NEED YOU!! With your help, working together, we can help a hard-working, responsible, lower-income family to make a better life for themselves and their children.

One in ten families in the Oklahoma City metro area still lives below the poverty level – *one in three* if the householder is a single mother, as some 70% of our homebuyers are. No matter how hard they work, the vast majority of these families will not be able to achieve home ownership – *ever* – without the opportunity offered by Central Oklahoma Habitat and all of its supporters.

Quality affordable housing for owner occupants stabilizes and invigorates neighborhoods, and contributes tremendously to the health and vigor of our economy. Neighborhoods that have higher ownership rates are statistically safer, more stable, with higher property values, and less crime.

The quality, energy efficient new home that you help Central Oklahoma Habitat build will open the door to a whole new life of stability and security for its family, increasing quality of life and helping to break the cycle of poverty, allowing its members to achieve additional life goals beyond those of mere survival and subsistence living.

And, your original investment will continue, as this family pays back the cost of their home for years to come – at cost, and with no interest – to help more deserving low income Oklahoma families each year to enter basic new homes, enjoy safer, healthier lives, and realize greater possibilities for their children.

Come and join in the fun and fellowship!

Together we can make simple, decent, affordable housing available to hard-working, limited income Oklahoma families in need!

Reap the benefits of working together to build simple, decent, affordable housing:

- **Team building**
- **Personal satisfaction**
- **Investment in health of community**
- **Better quality of life for families**
- **Safer, more stable neighborhoods**
- **Increased property tax base**
- **Improved area economy**

SPONSORSHIP

Please choose the sponsorship level that fits you best! Send your tax-deductible contribution today directly to Central Oklahoma Habitat for Humanity at the address on the front panel.

- **Full house – $70,000, or $56 per square foot**

OR

$ 25 *Framing Hammer*	$1,000 *Range/Refrig*
$ 50 *Box of Nails*	$2,000 *H&A Unit*
$100 *Window*	$2,500 *Roof*
$150 *Kitchen Sink*	$3,500 *Plumbing*
$300 *Front Door*	$5,000 *Framing Lumber*

$10,000 *Foundation*

CONSTRUCTION

- Volunteers will be needed for framing & decking, sheathing & siding, door & window installation, exterior painting, handing sheet rock, interior painting, landscaping, and *food support!*
- ***No experience necessary!!***
- Call Central Oklahoma Habitat at (405) 232-4828 to schedule your work group.

Everyone deserves a simple, decent place to live! Thank you!!

The examples of nonprofit documentation and other communication presented in this chapter represent those most frequently used by Central Oklahoma Habitat and by many other nonprofits, as well. All organizations must communicate with their constituents, and most organizations have multiple constituent groups. In the next chapter, Habitat's documentation will be used to discuss application of technical writing techniques to increase effectiveness of each document in reaching and persuading its intended audience.

Chapter 4: Analysis

Located in a large metropolitan area (Oklahoma City), Central Oklahoma Habitat is fortunate to be close to a wide range of resources in terms of funding, manpower, land, and materials. Success is not automatic, however, but is married to the ministry's ability to communicate and connect with supporters. Nonprofits doing business in smaller urban or rural settings need first to understand what their resource limitations are and then to focus their efforts on the resources at hand and/or on overcoming those existing local limitations.

Habitat coordinates a wide range of communication tools to communicate with multiple groups of stakeholders. But communicating is not enough by itself. Connections must also be made. Central Oklahoma Habitat uses printed, electronic, and broadcast media very effectively to connect with supporters, and their copious productivity proves their effectiveness at engaging supporters in a common partnership. This chapter will cover several ways in which Habitat excels at this communication and connection goal and will offer a few ways to improve from which any nonprofit should benefit. Certainly, one of Habitat's many strengths has always been the willingness and desire of its leadership to keep moving forward, pushing the envelope and looking to try new things.

One thing that ties a number of Habitat's communication efforts together is a having an underlying development plan. That plan, which is often a regular fixture in larger nonprofit development offices, will include grant submission deadlines, reminders to make major gift contacts, mail dates for e-communications, newsletter and other direct mail solicitations, and any other communication details needed. With days so full of competing priorities and countless details, it is extremely easy to overlook grant deadlines and other communication timeframes, so having a plan is an absolute necessity.

Another argument for having a development plan is to be able to show all the communication activity going on. Nonprofits are famous (or infamous) for long hours and over-work, but as changing times continue to require nonprofits to operate more like for-profit businesses, planning work more effectively and recognizing employees' needs to balance work with home life will aid in job satisfaction and retention of quality staff.

Solicitation Letters

Central Oklahoma Habitat frequently states in its appeal letters and other documents that 100% of a donor's cash gift goes directly to helping build a home unless otherwise designated. This is a true statement. However, Nutkis (2008) called statements of this nature into question in an article published in *Chronicle of Philanthropy* which made a logical argument that all nonprofits must incur costs of manpower and materials. "When nonprofits claim that none of the funds collected will be spent on overhead, they do their supporters—both donors and those whom they serve—a disservice," she said (Nutkis, 2008, p. 44). Nutkis forgets, however, that more nonprofits are now finding ways to *earn* income in order to cover overhead, freeing contributions to go directly to their stated mission. Central Oklahoma Habitat is one such organization.

A portion of Habitat's annual mortgage income on previously built homes funds its operations—the rest of Habitat homeowners' principal payments build future homes for other families in need. Habitat also owns and operates two for-profit Habitat Renovation Station retail outlets in Oklahoma City that sell new and recycled building supplies and materials at discount prices to the public. The stores' proceeds add from five to eight more homes each year to the ministry's building capacity. This kind of effort to work toward self-sufficiency is characteristic of today's changed reality for nonprofits.

In light of Nutkis's article highlighting the potential for reader misunderstanding, any nonprofit making this 100% claim should include a brief explanation of the mechanism by which overhead is covered when it is not coming out of donor contributions. Central Oklahoma Habitat's promotional material typically includes an explanation similar to the one in the paragraph above.

Website

The days of an organization working to its maximum effectiveness without a website are largely over. Almost any kind of business of any size is helped by having even the simplest website to facilitate communication with constituents. It is also important, though, to consider end users' needs and ease in finding desired information when designing and maintaining the website. Our first thoughts are often filled with what we want to tell our clients and supporters. It is quite another thing to look in the opposite direction for what readers of our website want to read.

Somewhere around 2000, Central Oklahoma Habitat's first website appeared, created by a public relations firm who worked with staff to develop an attractive site that navigated well. The site was populated with information provided by Habitat staff, and several staff members were trained to maintain the site, which was hosted on an in-house server. It was a very good starting point. Over time, however, the organization continued to grow, new program content was added, and the site became "leggy," with lengthy pages and unclear navigation. The time came when the site really needed to be revamped.

By 2008, three major problems existed: 1) staff limitations in using the web editor, Front Page, resulted in almost all information being added in "layers;" 2) bright colors were used to draw attention to various pieces of information, resulting in a busy, patchwork look; and 3) pages were too long, requiring readers to scroll down to find what they were looking for. Given the research observation that most readers will not scroll down for long (Redish, 2007, p. 70), we can assume that much information was "lost" in the long pages.

Habitat hired another public relations firm to redesign its website, and staff concentrated on breaking up the long pages of information, "chunking" them into concise, relevant pieces. The new website has a much more peaceful, cohesive color scheme, and a more extensive navigation menu has been added consistently to the bottom of every program page to make it much easier for readers to find what they are looking for. The site is hosted online, and a content management system (CMS) maintenance process brings consistency to the site by forcing staff to use one of a few types of templates when creating new pages. The result is a consistent, integrated website with harmonious graphic appeal, shorter chunks of information with sufficient white space, and clear navigation.

The outgrowing of an aging website is perhaps a natural occurrence for an organization; however, it is one that nonprofits can anticipate and avoid by continually considering user needs. Periodically asking users new to one's website to give feedback on its effectiveness and ease of use is a wise move.

Social Media

Social media presents an unparalleled opportunity to draw supporters into a more personal-feeling relationship with charitable organizations. Central Oklahoma Habitat has created attractive Facebook fan pages for both its charitable programs and retail outlets. The content and timing of its messaging works to connect and build relationships with constituents. Habitat might benefit significantly from additional focus on attracting more followers (Diaz-Ortiz, 2011, p. 117-137). The organization currently has 1,800+ followers on its main Facebook fan page at this writing, 1,200 on its Renovation Station page, and 526 on its Twitter account. Rebuilding Together OKC, another popular housing-related Oklahoma City charity, has more than 2,300 Facebook followers. Feed the Children, albeit a much larger organization with many more staff, has more than 25,000 followers. Interestingly, Infant Crisis Services, a very popular Oklahoma City charity, has only 1,100 supporters following it on Facebook.

Organizations or individuals can now measure their social media effectiveness through a new web-based service called KLOUT. KLOUT measures social media influence in terms of three dimensions—true reach (how many people influenced), amplification (how much they are influenced), and network impact (the influence of one's network). A KLOUT score can range from 1 up to 100 (KLOUT, 2008). Organizations must first establish a KLOUT account and then link their various social media sites to it so their activity can be measured.

Habitat's KLOUT score at this time is a low 19. Habitat for Humanity is one of the most valuable, respected, and well-known nonprofit brands in the world. With some 8,000 volunteers on their construction sites each year and hundreds of donors contributing to programs, Central Oklahoma Habitat could conceivably push up their follower numbers and KLOUT score considerably by revising their social media strategy to elicit more responses such as Retweets and Reshares, mentions, comments, posts, likes, etc. Each message sent out should ask for a specific response.

Researching and utilizing Twitter lists also holds potential for improving the effectiveness of Habitat's social media efforts. The organization already mentions its web address in television and other promotional media, asking viewers to log on. Adding social media addresses to advertising wherever possible could also help increase Habitat's social media activity.

Social media is "free" in that one does not pay postage, printing, or airtime. What it does cost, however, is time—staff time. And social media can gobble up a great deal of staff time. At some regular interval, i.e., annually or semi-annually, nonprofits need to attempt to measure their return in order to see if their social media efforts are worthwhile. Diaz-Ortiz (2011) offers excellent suggestions for metrics to track organizational progress with Twitter, such as number of Tweets per day/week/month and other potential *Writing* metrics, number of followers and other *Engaging* metrics, and number of lists following and other metrics to evaluate *Exploring* (p. 141-2). One danger, however, is that the cost in time will prove intimidating to short-staffed nonprofits, and they may decide to terminate their social media efforts without having fully utilized it. All nonprofits experimenting with use of social media would do well to read *Twitter for Good* to be sure they explore this medium fully before deciding whether or not it is cost effective for them.

Advertising

Advertising is directed to specific target audiences yet is visible to all. For instance, Central Oklahoma Habitat advertises to solicit support from potential donors and volunteers, working to present the needs of its clients—limited income families in need of better housing—without casting them as pathetic or in an otherwise undignified light. Habitat clients are hardworking people and certainly do not want to be portrayed as pathetic.

The organization also advertises for clients who need its programs, informing lower-income renters and homeowners about the opportunities Habitat offers them. These ads necessarily have a different tone than the donor solicitation ads, one that addresses people not as overly needy but as socio-economic equals who will appreciate the best possible deal available on home ownership they seek. Great care is taken to reach that optimum place in the middle where the messaging across both ad types respects potential clients as equals while acknowledging their need for basic, quality, affordable home ownership and the answer that Habitat and its supporters can provide. The image of this optimum place is that of a "partner." Habitat is a partnership between God, the community, and client families.

Additionally, ads soliciting potential homebuyers must be worded so as not to put off donors/volunteers who might ask, If they have to advertise, how much need can there be? The answer here is to present a clear and compelling picture of the very real need. Habitat's means in this regard include using hard-hitting statistics, alluding to the instinctive need for shelter we all share, and attributing a shared sense of the importance of "home" to all audiences.

A third type of Habitat ad is the most frequently used of all—soliciting customers in need of building and remodeling supplies and materials at discount prices. The Habitat Renovation Stations are for-profit retail outlets open to the public. Customers may have no philanthropic motive whatsoever in patronizing the stores. The tone of these ads, therefore, is very like that which any for-profit hardware store would use.

All the ads are seen by all viewers, and their messaging must be consistent and cohesive in terms of referencing Habitat for Humanity's purpose, or at least not conflict with that purpose. Ads for the Renovation Station focus on store locations, available merchandise, and pricing, as this information is pertinent to retail customers. No mention of the Habitat mission is necessary in those ads. Advertising media is too expensive to explain the purpose of the Renovation Stations in ads. All Habitat ads across all media, however, drive audiences to the organization's website where more information can be found.

Newsletter

Central Oklahoma Habitat's newsletter is its primary communication with its support base. Published three times a year, down from four up until about 1995, the newsletter is where Habitat informs constituents of its activities and recognizes supporters. The content is relevant and timely, including short biographies of its family partners to provide a sense of connection for donors and volunteers with the recipients of their contributions. Habitat includes articles written by volunteers or donors—participants in Habitat work—wherever possible to add energy and to allow those persons' experiences to attract others to the work. Newsletter staff also typically includes within at least one issue each year an informative, expert-authored article on planned giving.

For many years, the newsletter was laid out in a conventional 8 ½ x 11" two-color format. In 2000, the organization revamped the document to an 11 x 17" format, still two-color, which looked and felt more like a newspaper. Costs of publication rose about 25%; however, recipients seemed to like this change. The organization absorbed the additional cost, leaving its newsletter sponsorship constant.

A decade later, Habitat went to a four-color process that further livened up the already attractive missive. The bigger sheets add interest, and the newsprint likeness adds a sense of timeliness and credibility that many associate with news. The four-color process adds the benefit of color photos; however, the newspaper-style size of this organizational newsletter is its most outstanding physical feature.

Promotional Handouts

Care must be taken to assess characteristics, needs, and sensitivities of each target audience and to address those harmoniously. A number of years ago, Habitat set about redesigning its various program brochures to give them a more cohesive look. Now, the organization's logo embellishes its website and all other public documents, using consistent color schemes.

The application brochure shown in Figures 8 and 9 and the Habitat Renovation Station brochure shown in Figures 10 and 11 have a harmonious appearance on comparison with one another. The sponsorship brochure pictured in Figures 12 and 13 is colored similarly; however, its design could be configured more closely to its partner brochures. Additionally, it is so crowded that it may appear overwhelming to readers.

Shortening the text and including more white space may result in a more effective document.

Where Does a Nonprofit Find Good Writers?

The practical answer to finding necessary writing skills to communicate and promote a nonprofit's mission and build its support base is to advertise like any for-profit business would—on the internet, in newspapers, by referrals, and/or through employment agencies—abiding by federal and state law. Nonprofits may also be able to utilize specialized job information websites sponsored by local nonprofit alliance or advocacy groups for little or no cost. Advertising for a writer, grant writer, or technical writer will give appropriate weight to the need for well-developed writing and editing skills. Additional job and skill requirements will be added, of course; however, the emphasis should be on the all-important writing skills which are too often understated in the job ads, lost in a long laundry list of requirements, and overstated by applicants. Writing samples should always be required, and it is important to remember when examining them that they will likely be the applicant's very best work. There are never any guarantees, but seeing up front what someone means by "I can write well" is invaluable and can save all parties involved a great deal of time, disappointment, and money if it helps bring about a better fit in hiring.

Utilizing Service Learning Students and Other Volunteers in Writing

Over the years, Central Oklahoma Habitat has maintained relationships with Oklahoma City University, which has a campus chapter of Habitat for Humanity, and with the University of Central Oklahoma, whose student organizations regularly volunteer with Habitat. Periodically, students studying business management have contacted Habitat to solicit internship opportunities. Experiences have been mostly positive for the organization—the students have typically exhibited professional behavior, interest in learning, and excitement for the organization. In terms of productivity, results have been inconsistent. Successful results were dependent on project variables such as how complicated the subject matter was (i.e., fundraising vs. managing volunteers on construction sites) and how long the student was able to work with the organization.

Two female interns worked separately with Habitat over one semester, visiting with various departments to get a sense of the scope of nonprofit management. In these cases, staff spent time orienting students, assigning light tasks for them to complete. In the fundraising department, staff feeling already stretched had difficulty finding work that the intern could undertake without extensive training. In hindsight, one potentially productive exercise the student might have been well-suited to attempt would have been to try drafting a direct-mail piece for the organization. Alternatively, a previous piece could have been given to the student to review and revise. In this way, the student's fresh perspective could have been utilized to the organization's benefit.

Chapter 5: Conclusions & Recommendations

Nonprofits employ some 10% of all U.S. labor, and their numbers are growing. Although much good literature on nonprofit management exists, almost none explores technical writing in nonprofits. Since clear, persuasive communication and relationship building are central to the missions of the vast majority of nonprofits, they have an inherent need for technical writers. However, technical writers are still primarily utilized in technical, scientific, and industrial settings. Direct research is needed to further prove the clear benefits of applying technical writing techniques to nonprofit communications.

Barnum and Carliner (1993) define *technical communication* as "the process of translating what an expert knows for an audience with a need to know" (p. 3). Nonprofit audiences want to participate in and give back to their communities in meaningful ways. Nonprofits, therefore, need expert writers on staff who are skilled in persuasive communication and effective document design—i.e., technical writers—to inform constituents about opportunities they offer to meet those giving needs.

As time progresses, more technical writers will find the nonprofit sector meeting their employment needs on all levels and will begin filling this virtually untapped market for their services. Increased competition is forcing nonprofits to operate increasingly more like for-profit businesses. As a result, most nonprofits are now offering competitive benefits and the nonprofit/for-profit wage gap continues to narrow. These benefits, combined with the intrinsic values nonprofits offer, will certainly attract technical writers for the same reason they have historically attracted others. Technical writing may have begun with technical, scientific, and industrial subject matter; however, it must surely spread to nonprofit and other areas of the economy where its specialized techniques are needed.

Institutions of higher learning would do a service both to students and to their future employers in any sector to require rhetoric and technical writing education for all undergraduates as part of their English requirements. Technical writing is being offered to undergraduates focusing on English and business majors; however, it is most often optional. Rhetorical training, however, is typically confined to specialized English tracks. Additionally, post-secondary English and business curriculum frequently teaches students to write experientially rather than rhetorically. When hiring development and communication personnel, nonprofits should consider looking at technical writers, whose training and experience emphasize the needs of the receiver of communications. Technical writers will often be looking for higher salaries; however, the intrinsic values and mission orientation found in many nonprofits may compensate some for moderately lower wages. Nonprofit leaders must look for the right fit. Offering competitive benefits should be a priority for nonprofits in today’s economic landscape.

The first thing to establish when screening applicants is, of course, writing skills. Always require multiple writing samples, knowing that these will represent the absolute best writing of which the applicant is capable. Where needed, consider sending staff for additional training in technical writing, grant writing, and document design. Building such skills in development staff will generate benefits for the organization far outweighing the initial investment.

Next time you, as a nonprofit leader, wonder what more you can do to improve response to your organization’s solicitations, to enhance relationships with your constituents, and to maximize the effectiveness of your mission, look in the direction of technical writing! You'll be glad you did.

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