



UCS Human Service Summit, June 9, 2009 Group Discussion of Proposed Actions - Summary

To learn about actions to address the challenges of changing demand for human services and changing availability of resources locally, participants at the UCS Human Service Summit, working in 10 small group settings with a facilitator, proposed actions that they could or should take in their own organizations, as well actions that others might take.

All participants' responses were reviewed and analyzed in two ways. First, responses were reviewed for proposed actions that emerged repeatedly across the majority of small groups. Secondly, all proposed actions in combination were distilled down to a set of somewhat distinct actions. Of these distinct actions, several areas of focus emerged and were represented among both those actions related to changing demand for services and those related to availability of resources. These focus categories included:

- Changes related to staff
- Changes related to program delivery
- Changes related to funding
- Changes related to outreach and/or advocacy efforts
- Changes related to the organization and its priorities, practices

1. *What should you do next to address the challenges of changing demand for services at your organization? What should others do to best respond to these changes?*

Recurring Themes: A broad variety of actions were proposed to address the challenge of changing demand for services, which for most organizations reflected increased demand. Two themes of proposed actions emerged in the majority of group discussions. Six of ten groups discussed the **need to educate and advocate for themselves and their clients with policymakers, donors and the general public to increase awareness**. Often they talked of “telling the story” or effectively translating statistical information into stories of those affected. Half of the groups (5 of 10) specifically talked about the **need for increased collaboration across organizations** in multiple ways, including grant writing, delivery of services, and alignment of limited resources.

Distinct Actions: In conducting the second analysis of the distilled set of distinct actions, the greatest number of actions to address changing demand for services were evenly split between those actions related to program delivery and changes within the organization itself, with each category having six of 17 total distinct actions (35 percent). Actions that were related to program delivery focused on either the **increase or modification of services to serve a greater number and/or type of client**. Also included were services and programs that **build the clients' capacity and skills** in order to reduce need in the long term. Actions related to changes within the organization itself and its practices included **developing stronger networks of collaborative partnerships** among organizations that included data sharing for each group's benefit, collaborating on grant submissions, and considering the efficiencies of duplicative services across agencies and how best to align resources. Also included was the **use of technology** to better serve clients and market the organization and its services.

Actions related to **outreach and advocacy** made up 18 percent (4) of proposed actions and focused on outreach to clients to do the organization's job better, to donors to enhance their connection to the organization and its goals, and to policymakers to help them understand how the increase in demand affects people. Finally, **staff and funding related actions** included increasing the use of volunteers to meet the needs of clients, and encouraging funders to be more flexible in their funding and be proactive in encouraging collaboration among organizations submitting similar applications.

2. *What should you do to address the challenges of changing availability of resources at your organization? What should others do to best respond to the changing availability?*

Recurring Themes: Groups discussing what to do to address the challenges related to the changing availability of resources identified the need for **collaboration and education and advocacy** as they did in the earlier discussion of how to address changing demand in services. Eight in ten groups proposed actions related to **collaboration both within and between organizations**, with more organizations than before, and in more creative ways. Forty percent noted the necessity for more **education of policymakers and advocacy** for their clients and organizations as needed to address changing resource availability.

Two additional themes emerged in five of the ten groups. One was that **staff and volunteers needed to be empowered and rewarded in creative ways**, as often traditional ones (i.e., raises) were no longer possible. Finally, 50 percent of the groups suggested that organizations needed to **expand beyond their traditional funding streams and partnerships** to access new resources.

Distinct Actions: In the second analysis, proposed actions related to what organizations themselves could do differently than in the past dominated the distilled set of distinct actions proposed by participants, with 37 percent (7) of the 19 concepts representing this category. This was predominantly a reflection of participants suggesting how organizations could **collaborate or partner in different ways and with different organizations to reach common goals**. In addition, the proposed actions reflected changes in conducting **organizational self-evaluation**, planning for contingencies, considering restructuring, and evaluating the benefit of current activities.

Twenty-one percent (4) of the proposed actions focused on **increasing outreach activities and advocacy** efforts raising awareness about both the organization itself and the needs it is trying to address. These activities included but were not limited to increasing awareness of challenges among the general public and policymakers, and increasing the dialogues between service providers and local funders. Changes in **how staff are treated** and **program delivery** each represented 16 percent of the distinct actions. Staff related concepts included the need to utilize more volunteers, provide greater support for staff, and reduce training opportunities due to budget constraints. Program delivery related proposed actions included the reduction of services, the refocusing of services based on priorities and evidence of effectiveness, and the elimination of any duplicative services within the organization. Finally, 10 percent (2) focused on funding, including increased fundraising activities and seeking out federal dollars and nontraditional funders.

A note about the data: UCS contracted with KC Consensus to provide facilitators for the small group discussions. Volunteers from local organizations took notes during the 45 minute discussion period. UCS staff transcribed and analyzed the notes that were provided by the notetakers.

Complete List of Distinct Actions Distilled from Notes from the 10 small group discussions.

Focus categories (the number in parentheses denotes the category)

- Changes related to staff (1)
- Changes related to program delivery (2)
- Changes related to funding (3)
- Changes related to outreach and/or advocacy efforts (4)
- Changes related to the organization and its priorities, practices (5)

Proposed actions to address the changing demand for services – each action sometimes reflects multiple responses by participants:

1. (1) Increase use of volunteers to meet increased need.
2. (2) Increase services and supports for clients (e.g., create and post job boards).
3. (2) Focus on education preparation and self-sufficiency programs for long term reduction of need.
4. (2) Modify services to deliver in groups versus individually, use staff with broader expertise for multiple issues to be more effective.
5. (2) Increase capacity to effectively assist the newly poor with no experience with the system or its limitations.
6. (2) Promote capacity of clients to develop their own networks, e.g., other parents, families, etc.
7. (2) Improve and better coordinate response to not only increased demand but also complexity of needs with demand and the SES range of clients in distress.
8. (3) Funders could offer grants with greater flexibility and less paperwork, encourage collaboration across similar applications from different organizations.
9. (4) Increase outreach to reduce barriers to available services and programs, 2-1-1.
10. (4) Tell the story – convert data on emergency assistance, poverty, changing demographics to personal stories, mobilize board of directors to talk about the problems and organizations addressing them, educate lawmakers and local policymakers.
11. (4) Communicate more regularly with donors to keep them connected, improve donor education.
12. (5) Increase networks of collaboration, partnership to share the increased load.
13. (5) Increase collaborative grant submissions to improve the chances of funding to provide additional or reinstate reduced services.
14. (5) Incorporate greater technology in order to market services, identify client resources more efficiently.
15. (5) Increase sharing of data re: demand, unmet need, etc., to aid all organizations in making case for assistance.
16. (5) Constantly review and reprioritize organizational goals and foci as funding streams and demand fluctuates.
17. (5) Review the efficiencies of having multiple agencies serving the same clients with same services – think outside the current box, consider restructuring and/or matching and aligning resources.

Proposed actions to address the changing availability of resources – each action sometimes reflects multiple responses by participants:

1. (1) Increase use of volunteers and their responsibilities, including recruiting youth.
2. (1) Modify training delivery with staff to reduce budgets.
3. (1) Empower/encourage/support staff by finding ways to boost their morale, increase non-monetary benefits, and honor their input.
4. (2) Decrease services provided.
5. (2) Use the current challenging situation to evaluate and refocus activities to those that work, are evidence based, and/or the basics.
6. (2) Eliminate overlapping/duplicative services.
7. (3) Increase fundraising activities.
8. (3) Seek out federal dollars and nontraditional funders for new resources.
9. (4) Educate decision makers of the impact of their decisions, the needs in the community, unequal circumstances and needs.
10. (4) Increase advocacy efforts to raise awareness locally.
11. (4) Increase dialogue between service providers and local funders.
12. (4) Collect/compile personal stories to be used to communicate to others, both externally and internally.
13. (5) Consider merging organizations to reduce costs.
14. (5) Collaborate with like organizations or complementary ones in new ways, e.g., in grant applications.
15. (5) Increase local government and nonprofit collaborations to reach common goals as well as civic and nonprofit alliances.
16. (5) Look for how different groups serving “different populations” (the aging, developmentally disabled, children, mentally ill, etc.) with similar needs (e.g., transportation, housing, employment, etc.) might partner.
17. (5) Consider/plan for using organizational reserves if available; develop a plan a, plan b and plan c.
18. (5) Use this as an opportunity to reconsider a long talked about restructuring.
19. (5) Conduct cost-benefit analyses of programs and systems.