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Nonprofit gathering brings new ideas amid tough times

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The first Nonprofit Summit in [Frederick](#) was not focused on bolstering organizations in an increasingly dismal economy.

But with nonprofits relying on volunteer effort, donations and grant money from both public and private sources, the bad economy was not far from anyone's mind.

More than 170 people representing 125 nonprofit organizations attended the conference Wednesday to hear from experts on three topics: volunteer, resource and board development.

The event was sponsored by the Aushman Family Foundation in partnership with Volunteer [Frederick](#) and The Community Foundation of [Frederick](#) County.

"This really gets everybody together on the same page," said Lisa Aushman, co-founder of the Aushman Family Foundation. "It creates hope."

Aushman said she knows of no active [Frederick](#) County nonprofit that has closed its doors yet.

"We know nonprofits need to change," she said.

In 2008 the Maryland Association of Nonprofit Organizations listed 915 nonprofit organizations in [Frederick](#) County.



Photo by Bill Green

Susan Ellis, president of Energize Inc., addresses a group at the first Nonprofit Summit held in Frederick on Wednesday afternoon.

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Among the 767 organizations with 501(c)(3) status, 461 had an annual income of less than \$25,000 and 46 had incomes of more than \$1 million.

Marvin Ausherman, founder of the namesake foundation, said the conference will provide learning opportunities for organizations to improve their services amid increasing pressure.

"All of the nonprofits are finding it an extra challenge to raise funds," he said.

As bleak as the economy is for businesses, the situation may not be as dire for nonprofits, said Susan Ellis, president of Energize Inc., a training, consulting and publishing firm specializing in volunteerism.

"What we found traditionally in any recession is more people volunteering," she said. "You just have this constant recognition that the needs are there."

Ellis, who hosted workshops about volunteer development, said nonprofits are usually six months behind the business community when responding to the economy because of the grant cycle.

The ability to maximize donations can keep many organizations in a better position to survive an economic downturn, she said.

Betsy Day, president of The Community Foundation of [Frederick](#) County, said fundraising for vital organizations such as food banks and homeless shelters has remained equal to the levels of last year.

Other organizations may have to wait for an economic turnaround before seeing numbers jump back to prior levels.

"Until we get confidence back in our economy, donors aren't going to feel secure about charitable giving," she said.



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