

# Program Reductions Are Mandated — What Can a Nonprofit Do?

No one likes cutting programs, but sometimes it's necessary. Here's what you need to know.

By Eugene Fram

**T**he board of directors has decreed there will be program cuts. Regardless of the rationale, be it financial or mission-related, the proposed loss is a common challenge. Here are some key issues you need to face and steps to make the process easier.

## YOU MUST CHOOSE WHICH PROGRAMS TO CUT AND WHICH TO SAVE.

**Use your mission statement** as the ultimate measuring stick. The mission statement should provide the overarching values and purposes by which you measure each program's efficacy.

**Evaluate each program** in terms of its benefits to clients and its projected revenues and costs. Even with some financial loss, you can justify a program's retention if it's uniquely qualified to serve users who can't access it elsewhere.

**A push to identify new funding sources** may help prolong the life of a program that is at risk.

**You may be able to save some programs** by modifying them.

**Before cutting a program entirely, see if you can partner** with other organizations to keep the essence of the program going.

## UNDERSTAND THAT ELIMINATING A PROGRAM IS A PUBLIC RELATIONS CHALLENGE.

**If you must eliminate a program, prepare a statement** that puts the cut into context and emphasizes all the good you'll still be able to accomplish. Be sure all board and staff members stay "on message" with regard to the reduction process.

**Alert funders and other stakeholders** about the reduction well in advance of the public announcement.

**Designate the CEO or a qualified board member** to respond to media inquiries. Emphasize that everyone else should refer the media to this spokesperson.

“Emphasize all the good you'll still be able to accomplish.”

## BE PREPARED FOR A STORM OF PROTESTS.

Program reduction is divisive. Stakeholders get angry; there may be resignations of both board and staff members. Clients may move to other organizations in protest. However, if the action is well conceived and presented, a positive board/management consensus will promote the organization's stability and allow opportunities for reasoned growth in the future. 

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## Making the Cut

Keep these articles (NonprofitWorld.org) in mind as you review your programs:

**Kill or Keep? Score Your Programs** (Vol. 21, No. 5)

**You've Got to Know when to Hold 'Em, Know when to Fold 'Em** (Vol. 17, No. 1)

**Negative Publicity: Do Nonprofits Have a Plan?** (Vol. 18, No. 6)

**Staying Healthy after Expansion** (Vol. 15, No. 3)

**Ideas for Evaluating Your Programs** (Vol. 12, No. 5)

**When Reality Becomes Image: Dealing with the Media** (Vol. 12, No. 5)