

Need a CPA at Little or No Cost?

Five Ways to Find Help

Here's how to find the right accounting professional to volunteer for your organization.



By Carol Topp

Certified Public Accountants (CPAs) offer valuable experience, but how do you find the best CPA for your organization? You want someone who's knowledgeable, passionate about your mission, has time to spare, and is willing to volunteer for you or work at a reasonable fee. Try these proven methods to find the professional assistance you need at a cost you can afford:

Start with Your Current Supporters

The first place to look for professional accounting help is in your own circle of support. Survey your member and donor lists for accountants. Ask your staff (paid and volunteer) and board members to look to their friends and neighbors.

It was through a volunteer contact that one organization found me when I was starting out as a CPA. My daughters were active in an nonprofit scouting organization. Their troop leader knew I had just passed the CPA exam but that I was intending to be a stay-at-home mom. She also knew the scouting organization was looking for a volunteer to do their bookkeeping. The troop leader connected me to the organization's director. I met with the director and explained that I was a brand new accountant needing experience but willing to help. They let me learn on the job while I volunteered my time.

Use Your Newsletter

By reading a newsletter, I learned that a local charity was looking for a volunteer treasurer. I had sup-

ported the organization financially for several years and admired their mission. When I called the director about the treasurer position, she was enthusiastic and grateful to hear from me. I visited the office that week and attended a board meeting to see if I wanted the responsibility. It turned out to be a perfect fit.

Peruse the Net

Don't bypass the Internet. Start with your state CPA Society Web site. State societies maintain a database of CPAs with nonprofit experience. You should be able to request a few referrals in your local area. TaxSites.com lists all state CPA societies at www.taxsites.com/cpa-societies.html.

Network on the Web

Online social networking sites, such as LinkedIn.com, can be very useful. Through such sites, you can join a nonprofit group or a group specific to your industry or city, find CPAs compatible with your organization, and get your questions answered. If you post a request, be specific in stating your need, such as, "We need a review, not a full audit, of our nonprofit organization's finances for the past two years. Our annual gross revenues are under \$500,000." Avoid vague requests such as "What does an audit cost?"

Get Matched with a Volunteer

Some nonprofits, unable to pay

for a CPA, are being matched with volunteer accountants on the Web. Accountants for the Public Interest offers a matching service to nonprofits at http://www.geocities.com/api_woods/api/apihome.html.

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Top Tips for Finding a CPA

- Ask your state CPA Society for leads.
- Create a profile and join groups on LinkedIn.com.
- Check out BoardNet USA at boardnetusa.org. It's an excellent resource.
- Post your needs on a Web site for volunteer accountants.
- Consider doing some of the accounting work on your own to keep fees low.

FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT: A SAMPLING OF RESOURCES

Check out these *Nonprofit World* articles at www.snpo.org/ members for tips on using good accounting practices for organizational success:

How to Find the Perfect Auditor (Vol. 22, No. 3)

Analyze Your Finances to Ensure Your Mission (Vol. 19, No. 5)

Create a Budget that Works for You (Vol. 15, No. 4)

How to Have an Audit without Breaking the Bank (Vol. 20, No. 4)

Are You Financially Empowered? A Quiz (Vol. 15, No. 1)