



# Turn a Winning Process into Income for Your Organization

## Can you adapt these ingenious ideas for your organization?

By Karen Eber Davis

“Most online calendars are not very good,” says Jonathan Glus, the CEO of the Houston Arts Alliance. “We knew, with our help, that groups could develop great ones.” The Houston Arts Alliance can help any organization, for a fee, to develop a super calendar modeled after the one it sponsors, Artshound. On a recent Saturday, the calendar listed over 140 events that users can sort by organization, venue, location, and start time.

The impetus for the calendar service was an income inventory that revealed that other revenue wasn’t going to provide enough resources for the Houston Arts Alliance to reach its goals. Now the Alliance is well on its way to meeting its goal to raise \$250,000 annually with the calendar service.

“Determine a strong “why” to boost your commitment.”

Likewise, the Health Councils, a community partnership in Florida, realized that seniors with chronic health challenges needed help obtaining prescription drugs. In response, they developed MEDNET, a set of Web tools that help health clinics provide access to prescription drugs for low-income residents. The process also gives the Health Councils a regular, sustainable income.

### What Is The Strategy? How Might You Use It?

What essentials create this strategy? Both income streams began when a nonprofit successfully solved a challenge. Both recognized that others needed similar solutions. By offering the solution to others for a fee, the sponsoring nonprofits increased their income.

Your organization may be able to adapt this strategy if you have — or can envision — a successful process you can market to others. If so, here are some additional considerations.

**Excellence.** Each nonprofit first solved a challenge with excellence:

- Most calendars are clunky. The Artshound calendar allows users to select venues, dates, accessibility, locations, and other relevant client information with ease.
- MEDNET is very efficient at accelerating intake and processing so that health clinics can easily provide low-income seniors with access to free prescriptions from drug companies.

Both these models help nonprofits serve customers more quickly and adeptly. Start with excellence.

**Self-Belief.** Nonprofits create many wonderful solutions. Yet it takes self-belief to announce to others, “It works for us. We can adapt it to make it work for you.”

Both nonprofits tweaked processes to share them:

- Artshound lacked a sports component that the University of Houston needed, so the Arts Alliance added it.
- The Health Councils adapted MEDNET so that it would work in clinics as well as in the MEDNET office.

Believe that your organization can help others at a price that earns a profit.

**Capacity.** Any nonprofit adding a new service will need additional capacity to provide it. You might obtain this capacity with existing staff or new personnel.

You also need capacity to deal with the risk a new enterprise adds. Start-up may take longer than you expect, requiring more money. Identify the capacities you need and how you’ll obtain them.

**Commitment.** Even if you have a great process, strong beliefs about your value, and the capacity to pursue the idea, you still need to determine if the service is a place to invest your resources. One nonprofit that was providing software to others recently decided to stop taking new customers. The effort distracted it from its mission.

Both organizations profiled here have good reason to be highly committed to their new initiatives:

- The Arts Alliance’s commitment rests on the fact that it needs more income to reach its goals.
- MEDNET benefits people in surrounding communities — ones not served by the Health Councils. However, since the counties’ borders are porous, it makes sense for the Councils to expand MEDNET’s reach across those borders. Doing so improves the health of many more people, which helps fulfill the organization’s primary mission. Thus, it has every reason to commit to this new service.

Before you pursue any new strategy, determine a strong “why” to boost your commitment. 

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