

Upfront

Hidden at Home

**What do you get when you ask nonprofit executives
and the public the same question about pressing
social issues? Different answers**

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A family chooses groceries at the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank.

crime/neighborhood safety as the most significant problem, nonprofit executives rated it fourth. Nonprofit executives, meanwhile, rated hunger as the second most serious social ill; the public at large ranked it last.

What does it all mean? “The message about the need for services is not getting out,” says John Chapin, who wrote the report for Campos, a market research firm retained by Forbes. “People feel those problems cannot exist here.”

The results surprised Joyce Rothermel, CEO of the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, a network of 350 affiliates that serve 120,000 people each month. Rothermel says that one of every four children in Pittsburgh lives in a family that is uncertain whether it will have enough food each day. “It’s not as if hunger is a well-kept secret,” she says. “A big portion of the population volunteers, donates, or has a relative who is involved in some way. It’s almost as if people think that food pantries are an OK way to eat.”

The survey was based on telephone interviews with 300 residents and 53 executives of human service agencies in Allegheny County. The survey also found that nonprofits and the public had stunningly different perceptions of what needed to be done to help nonprofits. Asked to identify the biggest challenges to accomplishing their mission, nonprofit executives rated lack of funding first and second. Fifty percent of them said that having more people donate money would do the most to help their organization’s cause. In contrast, residents thought that volunteering at nonprofits would be the best way to help, and that donating money would be the least effective.

Forbes recommends that nonprofits work to increase visibility of community problems by creating a human services needs index that would provide a statistical snapshot of the poverty rate and other indicators, and track dollars and volunteer hours spent addressing those problems.

—Matthew Scheurman

COMMUNICATIONS

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What do you get when you ask nonprofit executives and the public the same question about pressing social issues? Different answers

When a national survey last year revealed big differences in what nonprofit practitioners and the public regard as the most pressing social problems, the Forbes Funds expected that its neighbors in Pittsburgh would be different. With a strong civic culture, public-private partnerships, and four graduate programs in nonprofit management, Pittsburgh residents would be much more likely to appreciate the severity of these concerns in

their community, Forbes thought.

However, in a report released in August, Forbes researchers found that the same trends identified in 2003 by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change held true for Allegheny County (chart, below). Those surveyed were asked to rate five social problems – quality of education, hunger, affordable housing, crime/neighborhood safety, and illiteracy – in order of seriousness. While the general public rated

NONPROFIT EXECUTIVES AND THE PUBLIC DON'T SEE EYE TO EYE

	NONPROFIT EXECUTIVES	RESIDENTS
Quality of Education	1	2
Hunger	2	5
Housing	3	3
Crime/neighborhood safety	4	1
Illiteracy	5	4

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE GREATER PITTSBURGH COMMUNITY FOOD BANK