

Letter to the Editor 2010

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Peter Theisen, United Way of Whatcom County, ptheisen@unitedwaywhatcom.org, (360)733-8670

UNITED WAY FUND DISTRIBUTION: A COMMUNITY INVESTMENT PROCESS

As the sun begins to shine on the early weeks of spring, we at United Way are busy working to allocate the funds raised in our 2009 campaign to our local Partner Agencies. Many people think of United Way during the fall when we conduct our work-place giving campaigns, but did you know that it takes just as much work to disperse the funds as to raise them?

This important task is put in the hands of the volunteers on our Fund Distribution Committee. While we provide them with the training and guidance to make decisions that positively impact our community, it is their time and dedication that make this process a reality. This group of community volunteers provides the highest level of stewardship and accountability for our donors.

Comprised of about 60 community volunteers, the members on the Committee are a diverse group, ranging from local CEO's to stay at home moms and everybody in between. The Committee is divided into four panels which review our Partner Agencies' program outcomes, grant proposals, and budgets. Each agency we fund is held to the highest standards so we can ensure that funds are allocated effectively. The allocations will ultimately reflect the interests and needs of the community.

Committee members participate in agency site visits to gain extensive knowledge of how the agency operates on a daily basis. Site visits give Committee members the opportunity to meet agency staff, board members and clients. This provides the Committee with an awareness of how the agency is conducting their programs and services for the community.

We train Committee members to critically examine the agencies during site visits. They are instructed to consider a series of questions that provide them with vital information about the agency's staff, services, finances, program outcomes and community involvement.

All allocations are based on the research and reasoning of the panels, supported by statistical data, emphasizing the accountability of the agency. We outline three areas as the foundations of a strong and appropriate allocation decision:

- **Relevancy:** The services provided by the agency must meet a community need.

- **Resources:** The agency has sound fiscal management and program oversight and all other appropriate resources are used in conjunction with funds from United Way to finance services.
- **Response:** The services provided by the agency provide measurable improvements to the lives of recipients and the agency must have the capacity to deliver services in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

After Committee members gather information on the agencies, each of the four panels meet for deliberations. This is a group process that results in specific allocation recommendations for each program seeking funds. Working agency by agency, the panel reaches a decision on a range of allocations for each program and assigns a priority ranking. The final decision must reflect the needs of the community, the specific demands of the agency and the evaluations by panel members.

With the tough economic times from last year still lingering on, we are very excited for the Fund Distribution Committee to begin this process so United Way can continue to support crucial local health and human service needs to improve the health and welfare of Whatcom County residents. Because volunteers raise the funds and volunteers distribute the funds, this is truly a community owned process that helps create opportunities and inspire hope for a better tomorrow.

Peter Theisen, President
United Way of Whatcom County

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