

GROUNDWORK GROUP

Nonprofit brings technology expertise to other nonprofits

CONSULTING, TECHNICAL SUPPORT and board service are among the organization's services.

BY JILL McCULLOUGH | FOR BUSINESS FIRST

As problems go, Eddie Harrell had a good one on his hands.

As president and CEO of Columbus Urban League Inc., a civil rights organization and educational and housing service provider, Harrell had to decide how best to handle a growth spurt made possible by a \$6.1 million federal grant to launch a pre-kindergarten Head Start program in southern Franklin County.

The grant was awarded in February 2007, and the nonprofit quickly added nearly 1,000 children to its client base and more than doubled its staff.

"We went from a 40-person organization to a 100-person organization in a short time, which meant that we had to find a way to strengthen our infrastructure," Harrell said.

The organization decided Columbus-based GroundWork Group could help plan its technical infrastructure, make recommendations and implement procedures to increase capacity and bandwidth, Harrell said.

"(GroundWork Group) even did an analysis of our projected growth and determined our needs," Harrell said. He said had it not been for GroundWork, the Urban League would have been unable to effectively manage its growth.

Harrell's only other option would have been to hire an IT consulting firm, said John Hrusovsky, GroundWork Group's CEO.

"(Harrell) didn't have the ability to solve his technical problems (internally), and consulting firms don't focus on small nonprofits," says Hrusovsky. "We were able to put the fires out, Columbus Urban League now has a much more stable environment from a technology perspective; we continue to work with the organization so that it can continue to (operate) as effectively as possible."

Founded in 2005, GroundWork Group helps nonprofits in Central Ohio overcome IT challenges that stand in the



GroundWork Group CEO John Hrusovsky, left, and his organization, which provides IT support and consulting to nonprofits, helped the Columbus Urban League and CEO Eddie Harrell, right, when the Urban League more than doubled in size last year. GroundWork analyzed the organization's technology needs and planned its infrastructure.

way of growth and efficiency. In January, the group merged with Civic Solutions, another technology firm, to further serve the nonprofit community.

"We were started because a need was identified: There are thousands of nonprofits in Franklin County ... that don't have the (technical) resources they require," Hrusovsky said. "Many of these

organizations are struggling because they can't afford what they need or don't fully understand

technology in general. We were created to help bridge the gap and help them offer their services in a more effective way using technology."

Supported by such organizations as United Way of Central Ohio, the Columbus Foundation, Nationwide Mutual Insurance, National City Corp., Huntington Bancshares Inc., Microsoft Corp., Cardinal Health Inc. and the city of Columbus, GroundWork Group serves about 140 clients, Hrusovsky says.

But the potential is much

greater than that.

"So far, we have only touched about 10 percent of the nonprofit community. We need the business community to help us step it up," Hrusovsky said.

"There is nothing like us in Ohio," he said. "The concept of a 501(c)(3) that is solely focused on (nonprofit technology) is a new concept."

GroundWork Group has three core competencies: Technology solutions that range from planning to project management; educational services designed to leverage ability and build capacity; and application programs that run the gamut from fundraising to client administration.

In addition to the group's central pillars of service, Hrusovsky said the organization has recently rolled out an outsourcing solution called IT in a Box.

"It is (an option) for organizations that want to have technology as a utility and want us to run it for them. We came up with IT in a Box because we believe that there are a lot of nonprofits out there that need a

cost-effective way to access the right services," Hrusovsky said.

GroundWork Group also works to put IT professionals on the boards of its clients to offer even more support.

"These professionals are part of our educational programming. They help nonprofits understand at the board level the effectiveness of technology. So far, we have placed nearly 60 individuals in this regard, and a lot of these folks come from local corporations," he says.

In addition to in-kind and financial support from the business community, GroundWork Group relies on earned income in the form of membership dues and service fees, which make up a little more than half of its \$850,000 annual budget.

Hrusovsky said he expects the organization's 2009 fiscal year budget to be in excess of \$1 million.

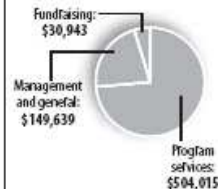
"We are growing pretty fast; we plan to be a self-sustaining nonprofit by the end of our fifth fiscal year," he said.

JILL McCULLOUGH is a freelance writer based in New Albany.



GROUNDWORK GROUP

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Revenue FY2006: **\$961,711**Expenses FY2006: **\$684,597**

Mission: To strengthen the impact of nonprofit organizations by enhancing their ability to achieve their mission through sustainable and affordable information management, education and technology solutions.

Executive staff: John Hrusovsky, CEO; Brenda Grosse, vice president of operations and administration; Stephanie Neighbour, vice president of information technology; Tom Guy, vice president of member services; Dale Abrams, executive advisor; and Bryan Butler, vice president of civic offerings.

Board members: Doug Spence, chairman; China Widener, chairwoman-elect; Tony Wells, treasurer; Steve Van Heyde, secretary; Shireesh Annam; Russ Austin; Nancy Bantner; Scott Caine; Alex Deak; Joe Gallo; Thelma Harris; Karen Beebe; Angelo Mazocco; Ronald Motgan; Cheryl Nelson; Maicy Samuel; Dan Shelly; James Situntz; Rick Wanetik; and Sherill Williams.

Paid staff: 12

Volunteers: More than 150

Annual fundraisers: Annual Members Conference, October