

New scheme to link welfare groups to professional services

CHARITIES requiring services in finance and accounting can look forward to the Charity Council's Shared Services pilot initiative, which will be launched later this year.

The council is appointing third parties to provide professional financial and accounting services to charities which subscribe to the new scheme.

This will help groups which are "not huge enough to hire the right level of people", said Charity Council chairman Fang Ai Lian.

Outsourcing accounting functions or the generation of financial reports will take the administrative burden off charities and allow them to focus on delivery of core services, she added.

It will also provide "economies of scale, efficiency, effectiveness and better governance", she said at a press conference yesterday.

One example is the Council for Third Age (C3A), a charity which promotes active ageing. It outsourced its accounting services when it was first set up in 2007. This saves costs, especially for smaller organisations which "do not have enough volume to keep one book-keeper occupied all the time", said C3A chairman Gerard Ee. The charity has since grown and now has its own finance team because it has to deal with larger sums of money.

Mr Ee added that for small charities, outsourcing may be a better option than volunteers who may not be as efficient as they may not have time to deal with the accounts promptly.

Ms Chee Wai Yee, the executive di-

ADDING VALUE

"We feel there is a lot of potential in this area. It's a matter of how to get the professionals and the charities to connect. We should make professionals feel that they have provided value to the organisation."

Mrs Fang Ai Lian, Charity Council chairman

rector of the Children's Cancer Foundation, said that while there are charities which outsource services, this is not a centrally organised arrangement. "If the council can identify a company and have a few charities riding on their services, this is good news," she said, agreeing that some organisations are too small to engage someone to look at their accounts full-time.

This year, the council also plans to reach out to professional associations and ask them to offer their services to charities. Already, there is an in-principle agreement with the Law Society to twin law firms with charities so that the firms can provide free assistance to groups with legal needs.

"We feel there is a lot of potential in this area. It's a matter of how to get the professionals and the charities to connect," said Mrs Fang.

She adds that more will be done this year to develop networks among charities so that they can share best practices.

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Groups commended

WHILE giving out grades to charitable groups yesterday, the Charity Council singled out several organisations for their good practices and for others to learn from. Among the charities which have enhanced governance and management practices are:

Singapore Children's Society

What it does:

Helps to protect and nurture children and youth of all races and religions, especially those who are abused, neglected or from dysfunctional families.

Good practices:

- Developed and published its own Code of Conduct on its website in 2007. This is a yardstick to guide its activities and operations.
- Measures qualitative outcomes of its programmes through surveys and reports. For example, children living in the home are asked for feedback on programmes.
- Is proactive in board renewal and succession planning. For example, new committee members go through an orientation process where they are taken to different centres to gain more knowledge of how the organisation works.



A heart-attack simulation was held in conjunction with the "Go Red for Women" roadshow. ST PHOTO: ASHLEIGH SIM

Singapore Heart Foundation

What it does:

Promotes heart health and aims to prevent and reduce disability and death due to cardiovascular diseases and stroke.

Good practices:

- Conducted an Online Board Assessment Survey, which helped identify areas of satisfaction and areas for development. The survey also helped create awareness among board members on their performance.
- Invested in resources and used funding from the VWOs-Charities Capability Fund (VCF), a fund that charities and Institutions of a Public Character (IPCs) can draw from to build governance and management capabilities, and to purchase accounting software to help in its financial reporting.

Students Care Service

What it does:

Helps students maximise their potential. Provides services such as counselling, educational assistance and special learning support.

Good practices:

- Board members, staff and volunteers attend workshops and training which generates awareness of the need for good governance and