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Points to Ponder on Sustainability from Kathi Lowe, program director of Ecumenical Faith in Action in Abingdon, Virginia

- Be open to opportunities – never say no!
 - Work with – not against – other agencies. Collaborate, collaborate, and collaborate!
 - Be available and prepared! Keep a bag packed with brochures, posters, volunteer applications, etc. so you can do a presentation at a moment's notice.
 - Look for other ministries you might be able to join with. Why compete for funding or volunteers when you can join together to share the resources?
- Develop a strong board of directors. Hang in there – it will happen!

Be Open to Opportunities

One of the first opportunities was the offer of free staff through Experience Works, www.experienceworks.org. This is a government agency that places older workers at sites willing to train them. Experience Works pays the salary and the host agency provides the training. When I was the only staff person, a free secretary was a real gift. We have been blessed with four outstanding employees through this program. Other programs like Welfare to Work, Youth in Training, and the Food Stamp Community Service Program have all placed workers at our site with the same arrangement as Experience Works. Some programs hesitate to take on these workers because of time involved in training, but it usually is mutually beneficial. The same is true for Community Service Workers, Service Learning Programs, and Community Scholars programs. The greatest benefit is that all the people who participate in these opportunities become aware of the good work we do and they tell others. We have received more individual donations from people who volunteer (or their friends) than we have from congregations.

Work with other agencies

Collaboration is essential! We started by being willing to write letters of support for agencies who were applying for grants, offered extended services to their clients, got to know their programs and staff, and asked for lots of advice. (If you're not as dumb as I was – pretend like you are). When other agencies know they can trust you, they will do what they can to help you. We are serving more than 3,000 individuals every month, are housed in two facilities, yet have not had to purchase the first piece of equipment, office furniture, or building because other agencies have been so generous in sharing with us.



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Be available and prepared

If you really believe in what you're doing, make yourself available to anyone who wants to hear about your program. Many times, a reporter will call in need of a last minute story. Don't worry about not being dressed or made-up for the occasion – just do it! If a civic group needs a last minute speaker, just grab your previously prepared bag and go! Know your story well! Memorize your mission statement. Talk about a person – not a program.

Work with other ministries

Don't be too proud to join with other ministries. When we were really struggling financially, we looked at other ministries who were struggling also and decided to join together. This made it easier for congregations to support one ministry instead of three, we were sure we didn't duplicate services, and resources were used wisely. This step also opened more opportunities for volunteers. If one wasn't comfortable doing volunteer caregiving, they could work in the food pantry or with the medical mission, etc. And again, the more volunteers who know the work you do, the more they tell their friends and the more individual donations you'll get.

A strong board of directors

Most of us have had to beg people to serve on our Boards initially. I've dragged many an acquaintance to the Board. Teach them what they need to know. Most people don't know what a Board member is supposed to do (I didn't know either). Rely on the resources available through the Extranet for training Board members. Make sure they know that all the good things that happen with the ministry are a direct result of their service on the Board. The conversation might go something like, "Ms. Virgie's doctor said she would have gone into a coma if the volunteers hadn't come to visit. See what your service on the Board has made possible for Ms. Virgie." Try to be patient. It takes a long time to get just the right combination of Board members. We now have people on a waiting list for our Faith in Action Board of Directors.

To sum things up, I think patience, perseverance, willingness to learn, and belief in what you're doing are the most important assets. Appreciate everyone! Give everyone an opportunity to help. One of our volunteers picks up the mail every day. That's the only job he wants to do. Seems like an insignificant job, but he knows how much money is or isn't coming in and he'll go to his friends and ask for donations when things get a little tight.

Remember – you can't do this alone! (And even if you can, you shouldn't do it alone) Let others enjoy the gift of being able to help you.