



I've been the Executive Director of the Orange County Citizens Foundation for 15 years and have worked for nonprofits over 20. I volunteered for charities prior to joining the staff of one in the 1990s. My son, who just became the Philanthropy Chair of his fraternity, reminded me that I enjoyed the same role in my sorority during my own college experience. Suffice to say, I live and breathe community development, and it's been an incredibly tough year.

As I lay in bed this morning, after enduring another sleepless night worrying about the financial woes of the nonprofit I run, I was consoled only by the notion that I am not alone. This is traditionally the time for year-end giving. The number of appeals I've received with the same pitch I've developed for my own organization, is unprecedented – "Please be generous with your giving this year. We've had to cancel our fundraisers, personal and corporate giving has declined, and we are desperately trying to keep our services and staff intact. Our programs are more vital than ever, and we need you."

I co-lead a cohort of local Executive Directors who meet on a regular basis to learn from each other, share resources, and generally commiserate. During our Zoom this month, I decided to lay it all out – my sleepless nights, our precarious finances, and my intermittent feelings of burnout and hopelessness. Turns out, a lot of my counterparts feel the same.

While leading a non-profit is similar to owning a business, a major difference is that we are truly dependent on the charity of others to keep our doors open. Without donations from community members and businesses, or contracts to provide public services, we cannot survive. All of that is in jeopardy as government funds are cut and remain uncertain, business profits are down, and people continue to lose their jobs and fear for their own futures. And the truth of the matter is, no matter how hard we try to keep cash reserves and rainy-day funds, most nonprofits, like most small businesses, operate on razor thin margins.

We have tried innovative ways to raise funds this year – we've pivoted and it's worked to some extent (by the way, "pivot" should be The Word of 2020 that we never hear again). But we recognize that while we have eked out survival this year, 2021 will be even harder and we're not sure how much more financial stress our organizations can take.

In 2021, the Citizens Foundation will mark its 50th anniversary – 50 years of open space preservation, land use planning, transportation and infrastructure advocacy, education, developing new organizations, community revitalization. We will continue to fight, advocate, and plan for our communities, but I must ask each and every one of you to make a significant year end pledge to help in these endeavors.

I will say it as plainly as I can. Your giving, your memberships, and your participation in new, and sometimes weird, fundraisers is truly vital to nonprofit survival and our community's well-



being. If your company is doing ok, if your investments have done well, if you have any extra money this year, please invest in your community. Buy a raffle ticket or a membership as a stocking stuffer, make a donation in someone's name, purchase a ticket or sponsor a fundraiser. No donation is too small. They are all needed and more important than ever. We all thank you for your past support and hope we can rely upon you in the next year or two, which are sure to be tough, but may prove to be the years in which we shine brighter because of your help.

Nancy Proyect
President, Orange County Citizens Foundation