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Nonprofit agencies will get through this

The story is the same no matter where you go.

Directors of nonprofit agencies around the country give this short, simple answer when asked how the economy is affecting them: The needs of our clients are soaring while contributions are dropping with a sickening thud.

A recent report issued by Civic Enterprises, a Washington, D.C., public policy firm, says that the nation's nonprofit sector is "facing a triple whammy" caused by the evaporation of charitable contributions, budget cuts by local and state governments, and increased needs for nonprofit services. More than 14 million Americans

(11 percent of the workforce) are employed by or volunteer full time for nonprofit agencies such as Literacy Action — more than in the auto and financial industries combined. Therefore, it's not only our clients who are impacted when we are unable to raise the funds we need. It's also our staffs.

This isn't a complaint. We work in the "human needs" arena because we want to, because every day we see the suffering of others and the complexities of those who have so much less. Many of us follow the mantra of Atlanta

community leader Sue Wieland, who oft repeats the motto of her Virginia girls' school: "What you keep you lose, and only what you give away is yours forever."



VIEWPOINT
Emily Ellison

In the long run, I believe that we'll all get to the other side of this financial crisis by working more efficiently and effectively. Nonprofits must be more creative, recruit more volunteers, partner with other agencies and eliminate redundancies of service. We're asking our donors to consider multi-year commitments so that we expend grant-writing hours for one proposal instead of for two or three.

We will get through this. I am determined. We have to, for our clients who do not have the voices or the skills to navigate these times alone.

In the meantime, I beseech everyone to dig deep this year and next and to remember that only what we give away is ours forever.

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Ellison is president and executive director of Literacy Action Inc.