

TEN THINGS YOU CAN DO TO RAISE AWARENESS OF THE VALUE OF THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES DURING AN ELECTION YEAR

Over the course of a campaign season, arts advocates should raise community awareness of key arts issues and engage candidates in meaningful debate. *Following are 10 proven strategies.* Please consider doing several of these activities. Some of them can and should be done on an individual basis, while others will need to be undertaken in conjunction with other local organizations.

The purpose of your involvement in a campaign is to heighten awareness of arts issues among both the public and the candidates. If you are acting on behalf of a nonprofit arts organization, make sure you solicit the views of *all* candidates for an office. Do not support, or do anything that may create an appearance of support for, or favoring of, any particular candidate or party. By law, nonprofit organizations are required to be non-partisan, not bi-partisan.

- 1. *Develop a list of tough questions to ask candidates:*** These can be used in a variety of situations, such as town hall meetings, public campaign forums, letters to candidates and face-to-face meetings. (See “Sample Questions for Candidates” on page 11 for suggested questions on federal investment in the arts.)
- 2. *Attend town hall meetings and other candidate forums:*** Publicly raise arts issues by asking all candidates for their positions. Raising arts issues will involve and educate other members of the community as well as congressional candidates. Your local League of Women Voters, or the candidates’ campaign offices will have schedules of these public events.
- 3. *Initiate a letterwriting campaign to all candidates:*** Convey the importance of preserving our quality of life and the need for government investments in the arts. Candidates need to know specifically why they should support such investments. Include statistics and personal stories about how arts programs have impacted the community and the economy. Send letters to the candidates’ campaign headquarters. These addresses will be available from your local voter registration office.

This activity could be proposed to your volunteers, a book club, PTA, civic, or community group. Candidates need to be aware that a large, broad-based constituency is concerned about the arts. Receiving many letters may encourage the candidates to dedicate a staff person to these issues. Provide potential letter-writers with a complete list of candidates and addresses and ask them to write brief letters to each candidate asking for their position on public investment in the arts. A sample candidate questionnaire is included in this packet.

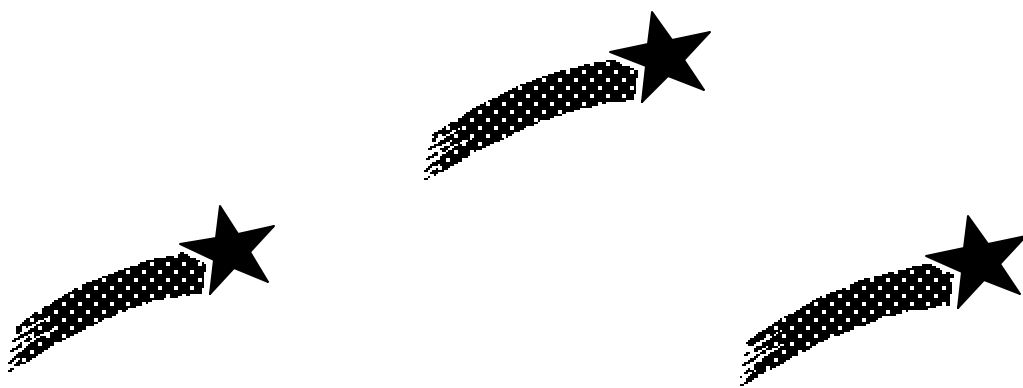
4. **Ask all candidates to support an arts platform:** Draft a platform statement (see enclosed sample) on a broad range of issues, including federal investment in the arts. Write to *all* candidates, and enclose your suggested platform.
5. **Visit each candidate to discuss the importance of the arts:** A visit will give you a chance to educate the candidates on issues and to introduce them to members of the community interested and involved in the arts and humanities. Gather a group of arts advocates, such as a volunteer, student, arts trustee, teacher, businessman, etc. to attend the meeting. Make sure to brief or meet with *all* candidates. You can set up meetings by calling the candidates' campaign headquarters and talking with their schedulers. Send a follow-up letter confirming date, time and place, as well as the attendees, and the issues you plan to discuss.
6. **Find and publicize success stories:** Tell how a federal arts program or programs have made a difference in your community. Share that information with all candidates in your letters or meetings and with the media.
7. **Write an Opinion or Letter-to-the-Editor for your local newspaper:** To highlight the need for a strong public commitment to the arts, consider an editorial or letter-to-the-editor that tells a specific story about how a federally funded program impacts your area. Raise arts issues in a way that will be very visible to candidates and the community. Send a copy of your printed editorial or letter to all the candidates and other influential policy makers. For maximum impact, and to increase the likelihood of its getting printed, an opinion article submitted to local papers should be authored by a well known community figure. It is permissible for these articles to be written for a well known personality as long as he or she clearly gives permission. Letters-to-the-Editor, on the other hand, can come from anyone in the community.
8. **Invite all candidates to tour your institution and attend an exhibit or performance:** Invitations must be sent to *all* candidates. Call or write the candidates' campaign headquarters to get information on where and how to send your invitation. Take this opportunity to demonstrate how the community benefits from your programs and what investments are needed to sustain these vital activities.
9. **Help organize a public forum or town meeting with other interested groups:** The event should feature *all* the candidates and include, among other issues, a discussion of the federal priority for investment in the arts and humanities. For any forum you help organize, it is important to include a broad range of issues of concern to the community, and ask questions in a neutral way. Do not reinvent the wheel. Someone in your community has probably already hosted forums in the past. Contact your local League of Women Voters or Chamber of Commerce, as well as other civic organizations, and see if they are interested in co-sponsoring the meeting. Many of these groups traditionally host candidate forums and can help ensure a successful event.
10. **Organize a voter registration drive at your arts organization:** Registration to vote should be an ongoing part of all arts institutions' civic responsibility. Go to your local election office to get forms and information on local registration laws. Get more people involved!

GUIDELINES FOR INVOLVING NONPROFIT ARTS ORGANIZATIONS IN ELECTION YEAR ACTIVITIES

The following guidelines summarize limits on a nonprofit organizations' ability to become involved in electoral activities. The IRS guidelines on these issues are complex. If you have questions regarding an individual's or a nonprofit arts organization's sponsorship of, or non-monetary contribution to, an event or publication, it is advisable to have it reviewed by your organization's legal counsel.

- ✓ Be aware that arts institutions and organizations that have been classified as educational or charitable under Sec. 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code are prohibited from intervening in political campaigns, which includes engaging in partisan political activity. Therefore, when you are representing such an organization, you are prohibited from engaging in political activity. However, when you are acting as an *individual*, not a representative of a nonprofit organization, you are *not limited* in your right to engage in political activity.
- ✓ Individuals involved in the electoral process must make clear they are acting as individuals.
- ✓ Nonprofit arts organizations must avoid supporting, favoring, or opposing an individual candidate or political party -- that is partisan political activity.
- ✓ Nonprofit arts organizations need to be aware that their statements and activities do not have to be directly expressed to be considered partisan. Implied support of, or favoring a candidate or party, is also considered partisan political activity.
- ✓ Partisanship can be construed when an arts organization provides a benefit to a candidate or party. These benefits may include giving just one candidate an opportunity to speak, noting that one party is "pro-arts," or publicizing the fact that one candidate "agrees" with the arts organizations' vision on arts policy. All of these "benefits" are prohibited.
- ✓ The law requires that a nonprofit organization sponsoring a political event must extend an invitation to *all* viable candidates so that they all have an equal opportunity to have their views represented.
- ✓ If you organize events, or publish materials, issues and questions should be phrased in a neutral way. They must cover -- and allow all candidates to address -- a broad range of issues.

- ／ Both at public meetings and in published materials, a disclaimer should be included, such as: “ ___ does not support or oppose any political candidate or party. These materials and activities are made available to the public, consistent with our responsibility to educate and inform the public.”
- ／ Nonprofit arts organizations cannot align themselves with political parties, nor can they collect or distribute funds for political campaigns.
- ／ A nonprofit organization cannot provide its facility for political fundraising.
- ／ A nonprofit organization cannot give lists of members or subscribers to political candidates.
- ／ Organizations that are tax exempt under IRS 501(c)(3) are subject to legal and monetary limits on their lobbying activities. When planning new lobbying activities, including grassroots and use of media, organizations should consult legal counsel to ensure that the limits are observed.



CONTACTING THE MEDIA

Over the last year, the NEA and NEH nearly fell to the budget-cutting ax. The action of arts advocates nationwide saved these valuable agencies and the services they provide. Now, as the election season heats up, supporters of the arts have a real opportunity -- and responsibility -- to raise the issue of public investment in the arts, and ensure that needs of the arts community are heard.

You can help by drawing attention to the federal programs that are making a real difference. Explain the successes of these programs, and of the benefits to your local community. Highlight the difference it would make to your community if that program were *not* available to the community. The media can be important partners in this work. The media not only informs, it forms opinions.

Important Reminder: If you are speaking on behalf of a nonprofit organization, it is important not to endorse or favor, even indirectly, a particular candidate. This is especially important during an election season. Stick to the issue and the facts in all your communications.

F Three Basic Ways to Get Out Your Message:

- 1. Newspaper stories.**
- 2. Opinion editorials (op-eds), and letters-to-the-editor.**
- 3. Talk radio and local television news.**

Communicating successfully in all three of these areas *requires honing your message*; especially when you are calling a reporter or radio show. *Give some thought* as to what you want to say and how you want to say it. *Gather the facts* about the impact of federal programs on your local community. *Write down what you think* are the strongest points, crossing out statements that are too complex, or defensive, and underlining those that are clear, direct, and compelling.

Newspaper Stories: Getting in Print

Read your local newspaper to find the name of reporters most likely to be interested in the topic you want to suggest. Since many newspapers have a regular arts and cultural affairs beat reporter, call the reporter to discuss your idea. *Be concise, specific, and factual.* It also helps to provide written information that describes what you want to convey. When writing about a national story -- the importance of federal

investment in your community, for example -- present details about the local impact. Be sensitive to newspaper deadlines and style.

Opinion Editorials & Letters-to-the-Editor: Writing it Yourself

You may want to write the story yourself, as a letter-to-the-editor or an opinion editorial, or even as a feature story. All papers print letters-to-the-editor, so long as they are short (under 300 words), well written, and timely. Letters-to-the-editor provide a lively forum for discussion in the community and can help shape public opinion. Even a letter or op-ed that does not get published is valuable because it may be considered by the newspaper's editorial board when reviewing an issue. Call the editorial page editor for information on how to format and submit your letter.

For op-eds, consider starting with the paper that has the largest circulation. In addition, many smaller papers may be open to printing feature stories you or a colleague write. Smaller papers should not be overlooked, especially since they are usually more receptive to receiving articles contributed by readers. Before you begin writing, talk with the editor to get a sense of his or her willingness to edit and print an article that has not been generated from wire reports or written by the newspaper's staff.

To increase the chances of getting an op-ed printed, especially in a large metropolitan newspaper, have the submission authored by a well-known figure in the community. This person does not necessarily have to write the article himself. It is common for op-eds to be authored *for* someone, so long as the person's permission is obtained in advance.

Talk Radio and Local Television News

Find out the topics that various talk radio programs cover, and determine which programs would be most interested and open to a balanced discussion of the arts. Write down the call-in number and keep trying. Callers routinely wait "on hold" for 30 minutes or more for the most popular shows. When you get through, tell the producers your name, place and subjects, and get in line. One way to move up the line is to offer an answer or explanation to the previous caller. Present your direct information about the benefits of federal funding for the arts and humanities. Avoid jargon. Also, avoid making statements concerning the positions of, or your support for, specific political parties or candidates.

Although it is possible to get coverage on local TV, television news station are generally less accessible. Since performances and exhibits make good visuals, it can have major impact if you can get the interest of the television news desk. When attempting to gain local TV coverage, it is important to be aware of, and expect, any potential "breaking news" stories to supersede coverage of your activity. Weekends are usually "slow news days" for most local stations and are a potentially good time to solicit TV coverage. However, contact the assignment editor at your local news station to get his or her perspective on how to increase your chances of local coverage on a particular station's news broadcast.



VOTER REGISTRATION



Since the ability to influence public policy begins with an informed and active citizenry, arts groups can and should register the people they serve to vote! In fact, the Voter Registration Act of 1993 encourages “all nongovernmental entities” to participate in voter registration. According to the law firm of Caplin & Drysdale, Chartered:

Although the organizations exempt from tax under section 501(c)(3) of the tax code must strictly comply with the ban on electioneering, they are permitted to engage in a variety of nonpartisan voter education and voter participation projects. Such projects may include public education, advocacy on controversial policy issues, and efforts designed to increase voting by disadvantaged or excluded groups in society.

As vital components of their communities, nonprofit arts groups have a unique ability to influence the democratic process. This is the opportune time to join in an effort to register the more than 65 million unregistered, eligible voters for the 1996 elections. Arts organizations have many opportunities to register people to vote, including before performances, as they enter exhibitions, and as they participate in many kinds of public activities.

Integrating a voter registration program into the everyday operations of an organization is simple and requires little extra resources or staff. All that is required is a little knowledge and the desire to engage communities actively in the democratic process.

Why You Should Get Involved:

Getting involved in voter registration offers many opportunities to meet and work with a wide range of community organizations that share the goal of increasing voter participation. For example, labor organizations, human service agencies, and religious groups already are offering voter registration programs and would be excellent partners. These new-found relationships can help with local coalition building and developing new alliances and projects.

Being involved in a voter registration drive also helps you build relationships with candidates, elected officials, and community leaders. Elected officials listen to communities that vote! Voter registration will enhance the arts community's visibility and power!

How to Get Voter Registration Rolling in a Nonprofit Organization:

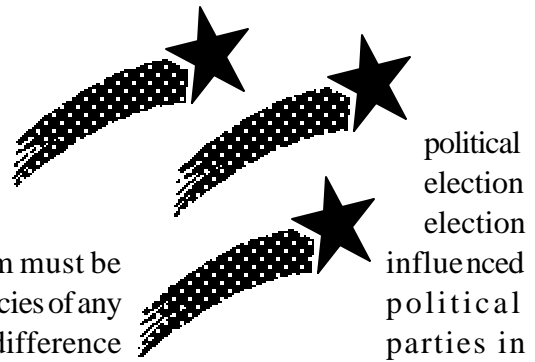
- i Make an organizational decision or policy that your group endorses voter registration as part of your routine services offered to your community.
- i Appoint a staff person or interested volunteer as the coordinator for voter registration activities
- i Get the message out to subscribers/audiences:
 - Articles in newsletters
 - Program announcements
 - Display posters, fliers, etc. in the lobby offering to register people to vote
- i Maintain a record of how many people register to vote through your organization.
- i Report back to your national service organization about your efforts.

Follow These Four Easy Steps:

To start registering voters in your organization, follow these four easy steps:

- 1. *Appoint a staff person or interested volunteer to coordinate voter registration activities.*** This person should ensure that the organization has an adequate supply of state mail-in voter registration forms at all times, and organize a registration table in the lobby where people may fill in these forms. Registration forms can be obtained from the local elections office.
- 2. *Contact your state election official to obtain mail-in voter registration forms.***
- 3. *Always offer to help people complete the voter registration form.*** Check to be sure the application is properly filled out, and offer to mail it to the appropriate elections office. Maintain a record of how many people register to vote through your organization.
- 4. *Obtain answers to commonly asked questions from your local or state elections office.*** For example, How will I know if I'm registered? Where do I vote? How do I get an absentee ballot? Do I need an I.D. card to vote? Can I register to vote at age 17 if I will be 18 on election

day? How do I register? Do I have to choose a party when I register? If I vote in a party's primary do I have to vote for that party in the general election? Nonpartisan means that the activity or program must be by, affiliated with, or supportive of the interest or policies of any party or candidate. Support for candidates of two different parties in an election ("bipartisanship") is not a nonpartisan activity.



political
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parties in

Frequently

Asked

Questions

Q. Can my organization work in coalition with other groups that conduct voter registration, education and get-out-the-vote programs?

A. Yes, so long as the effort is nonpartisan. Participating organizations and individuals cannot make any statements in support of, or in opposition to, any particular candidate or party, or carry on any other activity designed to reflect a preference or recommendation for any political candidate or party.

Q. Can vehicles owned by nonprofit organizations be used to transport voters to the polls? Can drivers employed by the organization transport voters to the polls?

A. Yes, to both questions. You can even affix non-partisan messages to vehicles encouraging voters to go to the polls. However, make certain that the vehicles and the drivers do not have any partisan literature, buttons, posters, flyers, bumper stickers or other political propaganda.

Q. Can a staff person registering voters in a 501(c)3 agency wear a button or put a bumper sticker on his/her car that has the name of a favored candidate?

A. No, not while registering voters. This caution does not apply to referenda; you may urge citizens to "register and vote to stop Proposition X."

Q. Can my organization place posters in conspicuous places?

A. Yes, as long as they do not refer to political parties or candidates.

SAMPLE LETTER-TO-THE-EDITOR

Dear Editor:

For years, arts supporters have fought to keep critical federal funding from being sacrificed. As the elections approach, voters in [YOUR LOCAL AREA] must carefully consider every candidate's support of public investment in the arts.

Congressional efforts over the next few years to redefine government will mean continuing evaluation of this country's priority for the arts and humanities. In [YOUR LOCAL AREA], federal arts dollars mean ... [ADD SPECIFIC POSITIVE EXAMPLES].

It is time for candidates to speak up for the value of the arts, and then act on these commitments. We need leaders who will fight for our cultural heritage.

We must make the nation's future -- a public investment in arts and humanities -- one of our top priorities. To do that, we must understand where all our candidates stand on these vital issues.



SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

(For use at town hall meetings, public campaign forums, etc.)

Arts advocates need to raise public awareness about the arts and their vital cultural, educational, and economic role during this campaign season. A prime opportunity is any public forum where voters can directly ask candidates their position on issues important to the arts community. Just by asking the questions, over and over, we serve notice that a majority of the American public is interested and cares about the arts and nonprofit organizations.

Below are examples of questions that can be posed to aspiring office-holders to find out where the candidate stands on a variety of arts-related issues. Please feel free to tailor them to your specific circumstances.

You may ask a candidate what his/her position is on the following issues:

1. DO YOU SUPPORT FEDERAL FUNDING FOR THE ARTS?
2. IF ELECTED WILL YOU VOTE TO INCREASE FUNDING FOR THE CULTURAL AGENCIES INCLUDING THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS, WHICH HAS EXPERIENCED A 40% REDUCTION IN FUNDING?
3. DO YOU SUPPORT INCENTIVES FOR CHARITABLE GIVING? IF ELECTED WILL YOU VOTE TO PROTECT THE CHARITABLE TAX DEDUCTION WHICH IS CRITICAL TO THE FISCAL HEALTH OF NON PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING THE ARTS?
4. WILL YOU SUPPORT INCREASED TAX INCENTIVES IF ELECTED? [EXAMPLES ARE IRA ROLLOVER LEGISLATION, NONITEMIZER TAX RELIEF, ABILITY FOR ARTISTS TO MAKE GIFTS OF SELF-GENERATED WORK FOR A FAIR MARKET VALUE DEDUCTION?]

SAMPLE PLATFORM STATEMENT

(To be signed by a candidate for public office as part of his or her commitment to the arts and humanities.)

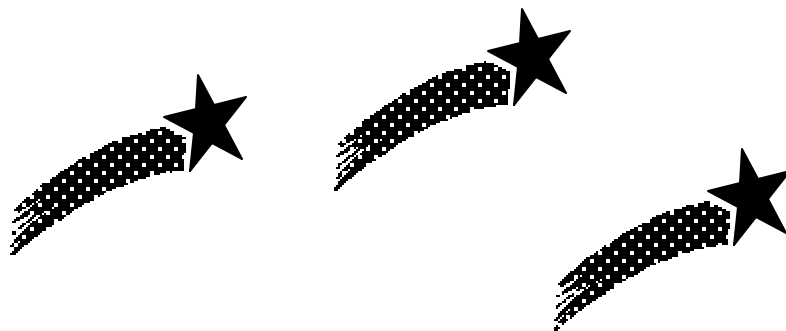
Historically, the United States has attained heights of artistic excellence unparalleled anywhere in the world. If I am elected to the _____, I vow to protect and enhance that achievement.

Toward that goal, I will support policies that maintain the ability of the arts to enlighten and enliven; to instruct; and to develop civic identity. I am committed to strong support for the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute of Museum Services. Additionally, I will attempt to make our educational curriculum inclusive of comprehensive art education.

I also stand squarely behind tax incentives for charitable giving. The public-private partnership of American arts support, unique to this country has fueled the tremendous growth that has occurred in the arts community. To lose or weaken that partnership is to jeopardize the ability of the arts in America to continue to flourish. I will not let that happen. Rather, I will uphold and strengthen the basis for that partnership.

I affirm that nonprofit organizations serve a valuable and indispensable purpose in our society by providing our citizens with needed services and assistance. I will support the continuation of long-standing government policies to ensure nonprofit tax status to charitable organizations. In addition, I will promote nonprofits' access to affordable telecommunications technology necessary to thrive in the 21st century.

To resolve the issues of today and tomorrow, we in America need a strong sense of self -- of ourselves as individuals and as a nation, of our national interests and priorities. We need skillful and creative leadership in negotiating the challenging course ahead. Continued federal commitment to the arts is essential. By focusing America's interest and by sharpening the skills implicit in creative thinking, artistic and cultural vitality will ready us for exciting and demanding times ahead.



FACTS ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES

The nonprofit arts industry generates \$36.8 billion annually in economic activity. From large urban to small rural communities, the nonprofit arts industry has a measurable impact on the treasuries at the federal, state and local level. The nonprofit arts industry annually returns \$3.4 billion in federal income taxes; \$1.2 billion in state government revenue and \$790 million in local government revenue.

Jobs supported by the nonprofit arts industry alone represent nearly 1% of the entire U.S. workforce. The nonprofit arts industry supports 1.3 million jobs annually, which equals one percent of the American workforce, with a total of \$25.2 billion in personal income paid. Comparatively, jobs in the legal services industry comprise only 0.84% of the U.S. workforce and the building industry 0.98%, according to U.S. Department of Labor statistics for 1992.

The American public supports governmental funding for the arts. The latest public opinion poll on the arts, researched by Louis Harris, concludes that:

- ⌋ **79%** of the American public favors a governmental role in funding the arts
- ⌋ **61%** would pay \$5 more in taxes to support the arts
- ⌋ **56%** would pay \$10 more in taxes for the arts
- ⌋ **86%** of adult Americans participated in the arts in the last year.

The cultural agencies cost each American just around 33 cents per year. The NEA, NEH, and IMS are great investments in our children and families. It is less than one one-hundredths of one percent (0.01%) of the federal budget.

The arts and humanities attract new tourism dollars---the fastest growing economic market in the country today. Cultural tourism is the leading reason cited by travelers for visiting a community. In 1994, international visitors spent \$78 billion in the U.S. 23% of these tourists visited museums or art galleries, and another 16% attended concerts or plays while they were in this country.

The NEA, NEH and IMS stimulate local economics and improve the quality of civic life throughout the country. These cultural agencies support programs that enhance community development, promote cultural planning, stimulate business development, spur urban renewal, attract new businesses, and improve the overall quality of life in our cities and towns.

The cultural agencies enjoy bipartisan support at the federal, state and local levels. The agencies were created with and retain bipartisan support from members and leaders of both parties. Every president has supported the endowments since they were established in 1965.

The NEA, NEH and IMS broaden access to the arts and humanities for all Americans. The agencies support projects in all states, including isolated, rural areas and inner cities. Programs cut across racial, geographic, and socio-economic lines, thus helping to keep the arts and humanities from becoming a province of an “educated elite.”

The arts and humanities help prepare young people to join the workforce. Culture opens the door to millions of young people, including “at-risk” youth. It prepares America’s future high-tech workforce by helping students develop problem-solving and reasoning skills, hone communication ability, and expand creativity -- all important career skills of the 21st century.

Scientific research validates the benefits of the arts. A recent *Newsweek* article reported on research from the University of California (Irvine) which proved that a link exists between music and human intelligence. The authors state, “music trains the brain for higher forms of thinking.”

The cultural agencies leverage private giving. Recipients of endowment grants are required to match federal monies -- in some cases, three or four to one. This national recognition serves as a fundraising catalyst.

Private support cannot replace the role of government cultural funding. With government cutbacks in many social service areas, charitable foundations are being pressed to support an increasing number of causes. Corporate philanthropy is diminishing, while many small businesses don’t have the resources to support activities other than securing the bottom line.

