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Nonprofits discuss strategies for catching attention of donors

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Everybody loves a good story, especially when they're being asked to donate money.

At a conference of dozens of representatives from local nonprofits this week, administrators said communicating moving client success stories to donors was key in getting support for their programs.

The meeting of minds at Providence St. Joseph Medical Center on Tuesday — called “Burbank Nonprofit Day” — allowed Burbank nonprofit employees to swap tips and insights about maintaining success.

Organized by the Encino-based Valley Nonprofit Resources, the three-hour session brought nearly 50 representatives of local nonprofits together and included appearances by Burbank Mayor Jess Talamantes and City Manager Mike Flad. Assemblyman [Mike Gatto](#) (D-Silver Lake) called in from Sacramento to listen in on one panel discussion.

Tim Carpenter of Burbank's Engage, the driving force behind the Burbank Senior Artists Colony, discussed the importance of telling inspirational stories in order to attain funding.

Shortly after developing the colony — which provides art classes, performance spaces and opportunities for seniors to pursue filmmaking, writing and music — Carpenter said he received a call from a 60-something woman.

“I think I might be a writer, but I've never written a word,” she told Carpenter.

She later enrolled in a writing class at the colony and produced a 12-page screenplay about an elderly woman who robs a Burbank convenience store at gunpoint. The screenplay was turned into a film short by the colony's production company. It caught the attention of the [New York Times](#), which published a piece about the colony. And [Ira Glass](#) of the [NPR](#) show, “This American Life,” produced a segment about the film.

“Although this is a lofty story, we need lofty stories in nonprofits to get people to listen and understand that change is possible,” Carpenter said.

Edna Karinski of the Community Foundation of the Verdugos — which provides grant funds to area nonprofits — agreed.

“In order for us to have this money to give out as grants, we have to have donors support us and be able to tell those engaging stories,” she said.

Flad spoke on the future of the city partnering with nonprofits, noting that government receives “less money with more strings attached.”

“We're going to need to rely on you more,” he said. “I don't mean to dump services, or transfer services. It is truly a shift — how can we better leverage taxpayer dollars by partnering with you more?”