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Top Ten Web Resources for Arts & Cultural Leaders

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Over the past year, there has been an explosion of fee-based websites aimed at specific segments of the nonprofit world, including hospitals, local governments, and universities. Luckily, sites offering free resources to support the work of nonprofits continue to thrive and expand. Indeed, while several of the sites on this year's list have appeared in previous *Arts Insights* newsletters in the past, their expanded offerings and redesigned pages make them nearly unrecognizable and worthy of recognition and review.

Best of the Best

The Complete Toolkit for Boards tops our list for the third year in a row. This comprehensive library of online tools covers nearly every aspect of effective nonprofit operations, offering everything from fact sheets and forms to board manuals and sample policies. Vast, but extremely well-organized, *The Complete Toolkit* is known for providing concise, nuts-and-bolts information on effective governance and much more. If you add only one site to your bookmarks this summer, this is our top candidate: www.managementhelp.org/boards/boards.htm

As noted above, several sites returning to our list this year made the top ten by significantly enhancing or expanding services. In this regard, *The Complete Toolkit for Boards* has undergone perhaps the most dramatic transformation. Its new search engine is simple to use, its updated format far easier to read, and its new peer group resources, which assist users in creating online discussion groups, are helpful and well organized. Perhaps most inventive is the site's new emphasis on interactivity which, like the user-compiled Wikipedia, encourages visitors to contribute their own expertise by adding information to its offerings, particularly links and recommended reading. We also liked the "breadcrumbs" feature, which keeps track of pages visited during the current session, useful for navigating through what is certainly the net's most expansive library of information on nonprofit management.

Fundraising

Clearly stated standards for responsible financial stewardship are a critical component of earning the trust your supporters. Despite the dramatic increase of online giving in recent years, and despite their best intentions, many cultural organizations do not have the proper security measures in place to accept online donations without placing themselves and their donors at risk. Take ePhilanthropy's self-test to assess if your organizations policies and procedures meet current standards:

<http://www.ephilanthropy.org/site/PageServer?pagename=selftest>.

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Did you know that the Red Cross was forced to return nearly 700 fraudulent gifts in June 2007? We didn't until we read this week's issue of ePhilanthropy's biweekly newsletter which, among other stories, reported on the recent increase in thieves using nonprofits to check the validity of stolen credit cards. For an archive of past issues, or to subscribe, visit:

www.imakenews.com/eletra/mod_archive_view.cfm?u=ephilanthropy&search=dt.

If you are not already familiar with Guidestar (www.guidestar.org), the web's premiere site for researching the finances and governance structure of nonprofit entities, you will be surprised by the amount of material available on your organization to anyone with web access. Last year, over 5 million people visited the site to access its database of information on non-profit organizations. Don't miss the opportunity to present your organization's mission and goals to this motivated group of potential donors.

Guidestar requires registration for all users, even the casual browser, but the process is quick and simple. Once registered, you can review the information (drawn from IRS 990 forms) posted on your organization and, most importantly, supplement it with your own data and details. This takes some time and thought, but by presenting goals and accomplishments clearly, in your own words, your organization will be far more visible to the funders who want to find you. Guidestar made our list last year, but you'll find lots of new features this summer, including an improved search engine, updated information on 990 form requirements, and a newly-designed monthly newsletter with archive available at: www.guidestar.org/news/newsletter/archive/index.jsp.

Advocacy

The American Arts Alliance site continues to provide excellent advocacy tools focused on arts education and charitable giving, as well as up-to-the-minute updates on pending legislation of interest to arts organizations. Our favorite feature: the *Take Action* zip code search engine, now available on the home page, which returns detailed profile information on congressional representatives and state senators, as well as phone numbers, website addresses, and email links for each. We also enjoy the monthly *Stories from the Field* section as a good way to keep in touch with the initiatives led by cultural organizations around the country. Visit: www.americanartsalliance.org

An extensive library of advocacy resources is also available through Americans for the Arts. Their *Public Awareness Campaign* page is located at www.americansforthearts.org/public_awareness/ and provides tools, testimonials, and tip-sheets to more actively promote support for the arts. Their resources page, found at www.americansforthearts.org/public_awareness/resources/, allows access to several important reports, including *No Subject Left Behind*, a resource guide on the No Child Left Behind Act for arts educators. Also of interest is the *Art. Ask For More.* campaign, which includes a search engine allowing you to make contact with local partners in your area for "informational and, in some cases, funding resources."

Food For Thought

Board Café, the monthly newsletter of ideas and opinion published by COMPASSPOINT, is an often light-hearted but always insightful resource for keeping up with the latest trends in nonprofit management. Its no-nonsense tone and upbeat attitude make it of one the best sources on the web for ideas on complicated issues ranging from diversity to difficult board members. Although publication appears to have gone on hiatus in April, its archives contain a wealth of insight and information where you can scan past issues by topic and for information on subscribing:

<http://www.compasspoint.org/boardcafe/archives.php>

Finance

Although many of the services offered by *Independent Sector* require membership, its recently updated library of links to the ethical policies of more than sixty nonprofits continues to be available at no charge. Efficiently organized by field, this compendium is an excellent resource for any group reviewing its fiscal systems and policies. For guidance on ethical issues pertaining to governance, fiscal oversight, financial reporting, and fundraising practices, visit:

www.independentsector.org/issues/accountability/standards2.html

Also available to non-members is the current draft version of the new IRS 990 form:

www.independentsector.org/programs/gr/Draft_Form_990.htm.

Volunteer Management

Post your organization's volunteer opportunities and increase its visibility at the same time by visiting VolunteerMatch (www.volunteermatch.org), the web's most-accessed source for teaming volunteers with nonprofit organizations. The site, which since its inception has made over 3 million volunteer referrals, has concentrated recent efforts on providing new features to volunteers (including a new real-time map feature for disaster relief opportunities) but nonprofit managers will find useful new services too, including one-hour webinars on getting the most from the site. Registration, which was always simple, is easier than ever. www.volunteermatch.org/post/register/np/overview.jsp

Another important resource for volunteer managers is provided by EnergizeInc's volunteer management library at www.energizeinc.com/art.html. Here you'll find time-tested advice on topics of interest to any organization employing volunteers. The newly designed homepage is better organized with a decidedly more professional feel than in the past. We particularly liked the icons showing which sections have been recently updated.

Arts Education

In addition to the resources offered by Americans for the Arts (see above, under Advocacy), the creative team at www.supportmusic.com does an excellent job at assisting visitors to make the case for music education in schools. The site tracks current debate, provides tools for organizing local efforts, and includes downloadable promotional materials. We like the "Grade Your School" assessment, its monthly Counterpoint column, and the podcast, currently featuring an interview with Presidential candidate and music education advocate Mike Huckabee.

Additional Governance Resources

No review of tools available to board members on the web would be complete without mentioning *BoardSource* (www.boardsource.org), hosted by the National Center for Nonprofit Boards. One of the most reliable sources of nonprofit information on the web, it doesn't qualify for our top ten list because it assesses fees for most resources. Still, if you aren't familiar with the site, it's well worth a visit. One of its most helpful features, a compilation of the answers to 150 questions asked of its staff over the years is now searchable by topic and requires no registration:

www.boardsource.org/Knowledge.asp?ID=3

Finally, while it's no substitute for summer travel, we enjoy visiting the websites of our nonprofit colleagues overseas. One of the best is Australia's www.OurCommunity.com.au. Just one glance at its bright and brisk Board Resources page, www.ourcommunity.com.au/boards/boards_article.jsp?articleId=1297, gives a sense that things work a bit differently on the far side of the globe. Packed with information on the business of building a better board, it's clearly organized and eye-catching at the same time. We particularly liked its Board Effectiveness Quiz found at www.ourcommunity.com.au/boards/boards_article.jsp?articleId=1342, but the entire site is filled with new twists on the basic strategies of effective governance.

Conclusion

With the rapid advancement of technology and sophistication in the non-profit sector in general, and the arts and culture field in particular, it is always a good idea to be at the forefront of what's happening. We encourage you to continue your own exploration of useful resources and to contact us if you have suggestions for next year's *Top Ten Websites for Arts and Cultural Leaders*.

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