

## OTHER VOICES: A nonprofit's mission must be clear to all

This week is *Crain's* annual philanthropy issue, so it seems appropriate to remind donors and nonprofits alike about the importance of mission.

The economic climate of the past few years has been very difficult for many nonprofit organizations. Charitable giving is down or stagnant in many communities, and government funding has been reduced in many areas. At the same time, the demand for many nonprofit services, especially human services, has in-



Mark Neithercut

creased significantly.

This perfect storm has increased the pressure on many nonprofits. Indeed, many have gone out of business or are suffering significant financial challenges. Many have raided their endowments, and some have defaulted on loans.

Some organizations have been successful despite these difficult times. These organizations often have leaders who clearly understand and are focused on the agency's purpose. That is, the organization has a compelling mission that its leader-

ship — including both staff and board members — knows, endorses and can play back at a moment's notice.

When its mission is clear, the leadership of a nonprofit can make the case for support in a clear and compelling way.

For donors, an organization that is focused on effectively pursuing its core mission is likely to produce a good return on the investment of charitable giving.

This brings us to the importance of a mission statement for a nonprofit entity. A mission statement succinctly summarizes the organization's purpose. It may

also reference who the agency serves and why.

A good mission statement can galvanize the organization's board and staff around a common purpose. A poor mission statement can cause confusion and might result in the organization pulling in opposite directions, chasing grant funds and reducing its impact.

During philanthropy week, we hope that all residents of Southeast Michigan will consider giving to the organizations and issues they care about. If you are a board member of a nonprofit organization, you might ask yourself: "Do I know the mission statement of my organiza-

tion? Do I believe in it? Can I repeat it to a potential donor?"

If you are contemplating making a gift, you might consider asking your favorite organization: "What is your mission?" In addition, ask yourself: "Does this mission align with my personal values and interests?"

Charitable giving is good for the contributor and good for our community. Support those organizations that have a clear mission and are aligned with your interests, and you will find great fulfillment and joy in giving to them.

*Mark Neithercut is principal at Neithercut Philanthropy Advisors.*