

# WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD

*A division of the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce*

## COPE Offers Training Series for Non-Profits

Many American companies have mission statements. That's not news. In fact, many have social as well as business missions. That's not news either. What is news, however, is how one local small business has fulfilled its social mission by combining it with its business mission.

Cope & Associates, Inc. is a small boutique consulting firm in Burlington started in 1991 by Paula Cope. Having grown from a sole proprietor in a home-based business, COPE now has nine staff in their downtown office and serves clients all over the United States.

"Over the past 15 years, we have served over 450 clients from small businesses to the federal government," says Paula Cope, its president.

Among their clients are school districts, hospitals, financial service firms, governments, and the Department of Homeland Security. Known for its innovation and creative design, the firm has focused on developing new methods for community engagement, is designing tools for a national network of exit planners, and recently unveiled a whole systems approach to succession planning and management.

The firm has always had two missions. First, to provide the highest level of consulting and training to individuals and organizations in the areas of organization development, human resources, and training. Second, COPE's social mission has to be to "give back" to the community.

"We do that in so many ways from raising money for charities at a silent auction during our recent anniversary party to having employee policies that provide release time to staff for volunteering and mentoring," says Cope.

Of all of the activities the firm does, the one they feel has the broadest impact is the training series they offer to non-profits through the United Way. For the past three years in the coldest part of winter, COPE has offered their Sunrise Series of training. Courses are purposely designed to be of short duration, most averaging two hours, and held early in the morning so that direct service providers can take advantage of them. COPE does a needs assessment each November to determine courses in high demand and adds in other innovative programs like "Audio Logo" which helps non-profits answer the question, "So what does your organization do?" Many of their classes are adapted from topics taught for their commercial clients such as the supervisory series, business writing, hiring and interviewing, and time management. In addition, several of the programs are written specifically for the non-profit community such as strategic planning, board development, and developing board orientation programs.

Courses are taught by Cope & Associates, Inc. staff as well as others in the community with expertise in special topics like grant writing, financial management for non-profits, and event planning. All instructors must have taught the materials before and come highly recommended by their own clients. In addition to class handouts, COPE staff often design additional, reproducible job aids, so attendees can take back information that can be used immediately to improve work processes and planning activities.

Pricing has been a key factor in the program's success. "We price the courses low so organizations can afford to send more than one person. One agency sent 14 people to one of our courses and still

raved about the cost effectiveness of the class," said Cope.

One important element in keeping the program expenses low is the partnership with the United Way. Currently, two United Ways participate, Chittenden and Addison, but two more are considering it. All marketing of the program has been done through email and word of mouth. COPE decides the courses and schedule, designs the electronic flyer, and the United Way distributes it. Often, the flyer gets forwarded on to others outside of the United Way system, which the firm does not discourage.

"Occasionally, even someone from the for-profit world will attend. Maybe they heard about it from a friend or their spouse. They pay a slightly higher fee, but their participation is welcomed too," reports Cope. The next series of classes will begin in late January.

With the demise of VANPO, the Vermont Association of Non-Profit Organizations, COPE is looking to expand their training offerings to non-profits.

"Before my career in consulting, I had half a lifetime in the non-profit field and am committed to providing the best products and services to them. They give so much back to their communities through direct services and their resources are so limited, we are proud to do anything we can do to help to make them the best they can be."

*Paula Cope is the owner of Cope & Associates, Inc., a women owned, small business. She is currently on the board of the Lund Family Center and on the United Way Investment Committee. This past spring, she chaired one of the Community Impact Work Groups for United Way.*