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# Skills-Based Volunteerism Case Study

MS&L

## PROJECT DIMENSIONS:

### Resources:

Teams

### Engagement Model:

Long term

### Types of Skills:

Communications/PR

### Geography:

Local

## MS&L – George Goodwin Community Grant:

### Building Communications Capacity Through Skilled Volunteerism

MS&L Atlanta offers a full range of communications services for its clients, including public relations, workplace communications, investor relations, and marketing communications services. It has been one of the southeast's leading integrated communications firms for the past 42 years.



For more information about skills-based volunteerism, please contact  
Veronica Parages, [vparages@HandsOnNetwork.org](mailto:vparages@HandsOnNetwork.org).

## The Need

Media coverage is one of the most effective ways for nonprofits to generate awareness and support. Yet, many nonprofits simply do not have this capacity in-house. Now with the specter of dwindling dollars, it is even more difficult to assign dedicated staff time to communications functions. Those nonprofits that do actively promote themselves have to compete harder than ever to win the attention of a media-overloaded public. Most mission-focused nonprofits, regardless of their size, face the same fundamental challenge – how to communicate a clear

connection between their mission and the value of the services and programs they deliver.

Based on a survey called “2007 Getting Attention Nonprofit Marketing” written by Nancy Schwartz, over 35% of the nearly 400 respondents cite strengthening relationships with target audiences as a top priority. Few grassroots organizations, however, have the staff or strategic framework to do so. MS&L consultants have strategies in mind to make it happen.

Manning Selvage & Lee, an Atlanta-based Public Relations Firm has addressed this core sector need through the George Goodwin Community Grant – a gift that places critical PR/Media/Marketing staff resources with local nonprofits to raise the visibility and build the communications capacity of community organizations.

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## The Model

The George Goodwin Community Grant is named in honor of George Goodwin who, as a reporter for the Atlanta Journal, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1948 for distinguished local reporting. In the mid-sixties, he established the Atlanta office of Bell & Stanton, which later became Manning Selvage & Lee (MS&L). In recognition of his long and dedicated service to the city of Atlanta, MS&L established the George Goodwin Community Grant in 1999.

Each year, MS&L selects an Atlanta-based organization to receive the Goodwin Community Grant. The grant provides \$100,000 worth of pro bono professional public relations and marketing services to one nonprofit during a 12-month period. Recipients have included Special Olympics Georgia, Consumer Credit Counseling Service, the Southern Institute for Business and Professional Ethics, the Center for Puppetry Arts, and Samaritan House of Atlanta.

During the grant period, MS&L provides an array of services that run the gamut of strategic thinking, public relations, and marketing. They start with a strategic communications plan that frames the scope of work and provides guiding principles for post-grant growth and implementation. The plan includes elements such as re-branding; environmental scans that identify competition within local and national markets; message development and all PR materials; media outreach to traditional and new media outlets; internal and external newsletters; speakers bureaus for the organization’s leaders; speech writing tailored for different appearances; and the writing of op-eds and white papers.



## The Impact on the Organization

The first priority for MS&L is to ensure that their support will make a significant impact on the organization. They look for different levels of sophistication and maturity, and for opportunities that will contribute to long-term organizational sustainability in terms of attracting new donors and supporters, and extending networks and partnerships. They consider

several strategic questions: What is the organization's overall impact in the Atlanta metro area? Does the organization reach a significant size of the population? How will the organization benefit from strategic communications planning? Does the organization have the financial capacity to pay for costs associated with production and implementation?



## The Impact on the Company and Volunteers

MS&L associates are highly motivated and bring the same level of dedication and professionalism to this work as they do to any other client. Cross-functional teams from different departments are brought together, often for the first time, to come up with unique communications solutions for their nonprofit “client”. Senior staff members have the rare opportunity to do hands-on tactical implementation and to interact with associates as peers rather than as supervisors. The impact on individual employees is profound – from the personal satisfaction of knowing that one has made a material difference in someone else’s life, to the professional satisfaction of seeing the impact of a well-placed news story in a leading national newspaper. There is also real value in being part of the team assigned to work on the grant; it is considered a mark of distinction, and goes a long way to boosting morale and injecting a different pace and sense of fun.

*“Working on the MS&L Goodwin Grant gave me the opportunity to give back to my community in a very tangible way. By sharing my professional expertise, I was able to help the Samaritan House of Atlanta reach a broader audience and further its mission of breaking the cycle of homelessness in metro Atlanta.”*

**Anne O’Neill, account supervisor, MS&L/Atlanta**  
led the most recent George Goodwin Community Grant account at The Samaritan House in 2007-08.

The MS&L model is a hybrid that combines elements of pro bono with skills-based volunteering. The project is run in much the same way as a for-profit project. Professional services are counted as billable hours, which allows the company to place a value on its donation. Each project has clearly determined deliverables and outcomes, but with the strategic focus of skills-based volunteerism, grantees are able to extend their impact and integrate effective communications strategies into future planning and program delivery. There is also a clear intersection between MS&L’s corporate values and expertise, and the much needed transfer of skills to help build the capacity of the grant recipient.

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**For more information on George Goodwin Community Grant, contact:  
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