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The I Live Here, I Give Here campaign aims to boost giving. Carrie Blanda (left), volunteer coordinator Karen Wilson and campaign spokesperson Evelyn Nazro.

GETTING INVOLVED

Nonprofits aim to raise more money by educating the public on issues

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The nonprofit sector is moving to raise Central Texans' charitable giving through new efforts pinned on education and involvement.

While some efforts are aimed at the public, others are targeting specific groups, from young professionals to women.

The timing for these efforts isn't coincidental.

"The pool of people that are low-income is growing. There is a larger gap to fill and the nonprofit community responsible for filling the gap are struggling with a broader base of clients," says Evelyn Nazro, spokesperson for the I Live Here, I Give Here campaign and director of Public Strategies Inc.

Anecdotally speaking, Central Texas is a town that's been generous with its time, but less so with its money.

Austin was ranked 48th out of the 50 largest U.S. cities in per capita charitable giving, according to research by the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*.

That's where efforts like the I Live Here, I Give Here Campaign are coming in.

Through its research, the campaign found that one major reason that Central Texans weren't donating was because of a general lack of awareness of the issues facing the community.

The campaign is hoping to change giving attitudes through education. Its strategy includes advertisements and a Web site

offering resources and philanthropist testimonials. Additionally, the campaign has begun spotlighting a different community issue each month to bring similar nonprofits together to discuss solutions.

While it's too early in the campaign to measure effectiveness, there is some evidence that the campaign is moving in the right direction, Nazro says.

In December, the campaign's Web site, www.ilivehereigivehere.org, had 4,452 visitors — its highest traffic to date. Visitors spent an average of 4 minutes and 14 seconds looking at the site.

"This is a strong indicator that the site is a valuable resource and full of helpful information," Nazro says.

Greenlights for Nonprofit Success, a nonprofit consultancy, has several initiatives aimed at bridging the gap between nonprofits and funders, says Kim Wilson, Greenlights director of development and marketing.

Since 2005, Greenlights has offered Board Summit, an event that matches business people with nonprofits looking for board members. The November summit attracted 250 people and resulted in 30 potential board matches, Wilson says.

Wilson is optimistic that programs like Board Summit will ultimately boost giving.

"In some older cities there is a mind set of writing a check. Here people want to be hands on," Wilson says. "Once they understand how it works, then they are going to

give their money."

Rebecca Powers, founder and president of Impact Austin, agrees.

"I use myself as the poster child for Impact Austin," Powers says. "I had lived in Austin and was able to write a \$1,000 check, but I didn't know how to get involved."

The foundation is based on the belief that women give differently from men. Women prefer to collaborate on grant-making decisions and learn exactly how their money is used, Powers says.

"We are not a social organization. What we are really working on is becoming informed philanthropists. We are looking out for outcomes, so that we know what we are supposed to do," Powers says.

Impact Austin recently reached its goal of attracting 500 members.

Locally, more nonprofits are launching their own initiatives to educate younger Austinites about their particular organizations, according to Wilson of Greenlights, Habitat for Humanity, Central Texas Red Cross and Caritas of Austin are some of the local organizations that have started young professionals groups with the hope of turning them into volunteers and donors.

"Austin is such a young town. And some of those young people didn't come from a background of giving. But now they may be doing well and have the potential to give financially," Wilson says. "Nonprofits are trying to get them engaged and connected to the organizations."

There are also a host of programs aimed at getting Austin's youth in the habit of giving early.

Linda Brucker was motivated to found the Legacy of Giving program, which is aimed at teaching philanthropy to school-age children, after working on a social studies project on homelessness with her then five-year-old son.

"I was changed by a project my son brought home," Brucker says. "It just dawned on me what if everybody had this lesson in life?"

The program, which is incubating under the Austin Community Foundation, includes teacher training, curriculum and student-led activities. It is being piloted at nine area schools and is already seeing some successes, Brucker says.

As part of a five-day exercise on homeless and hunger, the children donated 22,600 pounds of food to the Central Area Food Bank of Texas Inc.

"Our plan is to have lessons three times a year for children in kindergarten through 12th grade," Brucker says. "The hope is that after 12 years, it will be part of their DNA."

Creating a culture of giving is an ongoing process.

"We can't change attitudes over night, but the volunteer spirit is alive and well here," Nazro says. "And I think the more educated Austin is, the more it will be giving in higher numbers."