



## Realizing the PR Potential of Your Organization's Form 990

In this increasingly cynical age, donors have come to feel that donating requires more than lots of heart—but also lots of facts. They want to know where their money is going and how it is being administered. And your donors and prospects are being bombarded with news articles and advice from consumer advocates urging them to “do their research first” before donating to a charity.

Many contributors are getting their first peek at your organization's finances via your IRS Form 990, thanks to electronic mass access to this information through sources such as Guidestar and web sites organized by various state attorneys general's offices.

### **Mine Some PR Gold**

The good news is that your organization can take this admittedly dry financial statement and turn it into public relations gold. In other words, if your organization has a good story to tell via your Form 990, do it! Make sure information on your mission and programs and missions is accurate, concise and compelling (avoid nonprofit jargon) so that readers get a positive overall impression of your organization.

**Make it part of your web site.** *Showing* is much more impactful than telling. In other words, don't just tell web visitors that you are a good and faithful steward of donor money — show them with a link to your Form 990.

**Make it part of all your communication.** In your written appeals and donor communications, remind recipients that

they can always request a copy of your Form 990 or, for expediency, refer them to [www.Guidestar.com](http://www.Guidestar.com).

**Use it as you appeal to sophisticated donors.** Many donors and grantmakers use Form 990 information to research nonprofit organizations before they give. So take the initiative and include a copy in your appeals to these sophisticated givers.

**Most important, know what's on your 990.** While board members and managers may have paid scant attention to figures in their organization's Form 990 filing, mass access means that everyone in your organization needs to know exactly what your 990 says – and make sure it is correct.