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Denny Fenneman (left), Executive Service corps consultant, and Terry Elfers, COO of Cincinnati Public Schools, want to find food service savings.

Executive Service Corps helps schools save money

By Val Prevish
Enquirer contributor

To make the most of unprecedented tight budgets, planners at Cincinnati Public Schools know there is value in every dollar saved.

That's why Terry Elfers, the schools' chief operating officer, turned to the Executive Service Corps of Cincinnati for help in increasing the district's operating efficiency.

In the 18 months since Elfers took over as COO, the Service Corps has helped trim at least \$7.5 million total from the schools' public expense.

A former member of the Executive Service Corps himself, Elfers knew how effective the volunteer consultants are at helping nonprofit organizations, schools and municipalities identify savings. All former business management professionals or entrepreneurs, Service Corps volunteers are often retirees from the area's most successful companies, such as Procter & Gamble, Duke Energy, Kroger and many others.

<http://news.cincinnati.com/apps/pbcs.dll/section?template=zoom&Site=AB&Date=20100110&Category=BIZ01&ArtNo=1100378&Ref=H1&Profile=1076>

In one of the Service Corps' first CPS projects - the yellow bus contract - consultants identified savings of \$2 million per year in the \$10 million-a-year contract, Elfers says.

"And at the time we were looking at a \$10 million shortfall in the budget. When you think that one project solved a fifth of our budget problems at the time, that's an enormous impact," he says.

Denny Fennema, a Service Corps consultant and program director for CPS projects, says consultants work with local agencies and schools to find ways to stretch their budgets.

In the case of the school buses, the Service Corps questioned whether three bus vendors were needed.

"Sometimes these buses were passing each other along some of their routes," Fennema says. "There were real efficiencies to working with one vendor as opposed to working with three."

Procter & Gamble helped fund the CPS projects with the Executive Service Corps, which collects small fees to pay overhead, says Darlyne Koretos, director of support services.

Funding from private sources such as P&G and United Way makes the work of the Service Corps possible, as the nominal fees the organization is paid from clients do not cover its expenses. Private donations and the work of volunteers offer nonprofits the kind of consulting they could otherwise not afford, she says.

"Typically \$3,000 would cover six months of work," Koretos says. "Those who can't afford that fee can apply for financial aid."

Founded in 1995 by a retiree from P&G, the Executive Service Corps is made up of 122 volunteers, 46 percent of whom are retired managers or executives. The rest are working professionals or between jobs.

The Cincinnati area office is part of a network in 26 states.

A desire to give back to their community is what drives individuals who volunteer their time, Koretos says.

But a slow job market also is swelling their ranks.

"The recession has been good for us. We have more people between jobs than ever before," Koretos says.

For the volunteers, Executive Service Corps gives them a chance to stay active in their professional careers and to spend as much or as little time as they like working with clients.

"A busy month for me is volunteering 70 to 80 hours," says Fennema, a former supply chain manager for P&G who also has taught at Miami University. "We have some volunteers who work over 100 hours (per month) and some who only work 20.

"I've been blessed so richly in my life, it feels good to give back."

Elfers says school officials have definitely appreciated the help.

"The money savings is important, but running the district well is even more important."

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Additional Facts

Executive Service Corps of Cincinnati

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Other agencies helped: The Boy Scouts of America Dan Beard Council saved \$200,000 on construction of a new Achievement Center in Evendale; the Wellness Community in Blue Ash has been able to assist 20 percent more cancer patients.

Web site: www.esc-cincinnati.org