

United Way identifies challenges with goals

As the organization looks to add accountability, shifts in education, population could hinder efforts

BY BILL HETHCOCK | STAFF WRITER

The University of Texas at Dallas turned over white papers to the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas this week that set the metrics — and spelled out challenges — the organization will face in trying to reach its goals of improving health, poverty rates and education.

Those are the three broad goals of the United Way's new business model, being used for the first time this year.

The organization has drilled down to specifics in its three focus areas in a way that leaders hope will show corporations and individual donors that their contributions are making a measurable difference.

The United Way worked with UT-Dallas to develop metrics to measure whether their initiatives, called United2020, are a success, said Gary Godsey, president and CEO of the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas.

"The most significant function will be to educate donors and potential donors around the work we're hoping to accomplish," Godsey said. "We've been talking in global terms about what we're hoping to accomplish. This takes it down one level."

Some of the specific goals include reducing the percent of emergency room visits in North Texas that are for non-emergencies, moving 250,000 people out of poverty and preparing more students to succeed in education after high school.

About 1,200 North Texas businesses and 100,000 individual donors contributed \$51.2 million to last year's United Way of Metropolitan Dallas campaign.

The United Way faces significant challenges in reaching these goals.

The switch from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, or TAKS, to the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, or STAAR, for example, will hinder reporting for education, said Timothy Bray of the University of Texas at Dallas, who worked with other professors on the research.

In health, it's impossible to predict the impact of the wide-ranging health care overhaul and whether those reforms — under attack by some lawmakers and being challenged in the courts — will continue to be the law of the land, he said.

Uncertainty about where the economy is headed and the possibility of funding cuts for programs for the poor will make poverty difficult to curtail and track, Bray said.

"The landscape is shifting dramatically," he said.

Tracking the information will allow the United Way to target its contributions to the agencies and nonprofits it works with, Bray said.

"They can see where progress is and isn't being made," he said. "That allows them to make their grant-making more precise."

The information in the white papers is valuable to corporate contributors, said

STAYING GOAL-ORIENTED



HEALTH

82.2%

OF EMERGENCY ROOM VISITS IN D-FW ARE FOR NONEMERGENCY OR PREVENTABLE CONDITIONS.

The United Way wants to reduce that number as well as the rate of adult obesity, which is 26.1 percent, and the obesity rate of ninth through 12th graders, which is 16.9 percent.



POVERTY

618,000

PEOPLE IN THE DALLAS AREA LIVE IN POVERTY.

If existing trends continue, population growth and demographic changes would drive that number up to 917,000 by 2020. The goal is to move 250,000 people out of poverty and keep them out, leaving the number of poor at 667,000 or fewer by 2020.



EDUCATION

THE GOAL IS TO PREPARE

50%

more students for success after high school.

Deborah Gibbins, a senior vice president and controller with Plano-based Frito Lay and head of the United Way's Health Impact Panel.

The panel will evaluate whether nonprofits and agencies tasked with health goals are meeting them.

Frito Lay employees and matching contributions from parent company PepsiCo raised more than \$3 million for the United Way last year, making the company one of the region's top contributors.

"Any business wants to understand the return on investment and know the money they're putting toward something is really making a difference," Gibbins said. "Having hard facts and data and metrics that we'll track our progress against appeals to any company that makes this type of investment decision in their own business every day."

Under its new business model, agencies and nonprofits continue to submit applications annually, as they have in the past. The applications will be evaluated based on their alignment with the United Way's goals, Godsey said. They'll be evaluated throughout the year by panels to determine whether their efforts are having the desired effect, he said.

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