

Mary E. Costello

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NOT-FOR-PROFIT EXECUTIVE, CHANGE AGENT AND INSTITUTION-BUILDER

Over 25 years of nonprofit leadership with service as an independent nonprofit consultant, President/CEO, program director, State of Maryland representative and disability advocate, and fund development/communications professional.

Passionate Social Worker and social justice advocate. Dynamic, systems and results-oriented leader with a demonstrated track record of success in turnaround and start-up/expansion environments. Capable of quickly resolving multifaceted, complex issues despite limited financial and human resources. Creative yet analytical dreamer with a penchant for details and a perpetual thirst for new challenges. Superior interpersonal skills and a natural ability to win new friends, mend strained relationships, and mobilize teams to resolve organizational crises. Proudly introduce, foster, and preserve cooperative cultures built upon and sustained by mutual respect, shared ownership, and team-based commitment to the greatest good.

Areas of experience and expertise include:

- 2 to 10-Year Strategic Plans (Cross-Functional)
- 501(c)(3) Applications & Start-Up Infrastructure Development
- Basic to Intensive Program & Organizational Development
- Board of Directors - Governance Support & Training
- Broad Knowledge of Social Justice Issues & Policy/Politics
- Budget Development/Forecasting (Multi-Year/Multi-Program)
- Clinically Sound, Evidence-Based Service Delivery Models
- Comprehensive, Diversified Fiscal Development Plans
- Conflict Resolution & Consensus Building
- Contract/Budget Negotiations & Strategic Alliances
- Corporate: Grants, Sponsorships, Donations & Volunteerism
- Multi-Channel Communications Strategies/Optimized Visibility
- Digital Campaigns: Calls to Action & Fund Development Strategies
- Evaluation Systems/Data-Driven Indicators of Success
- Executive Coaching (Exec Directors, Founders & Board Officers)
- Governmental Regulations/Statute Compliance
- Grants, RFPs & Government Contracts Administration
- Harnessing Unique Non-Profit Assets: Time, Talent & Treasury
- Healthy Organizational Culture; Morale & Synergistic Functioning
- Highly Technical Content to Creative Writing & Storytelling
- Human Resources Management/Humanistic Leadership
- Individual Donor Cultivation, Engagement & Retention
- Latest Digital Technologies & Cloud-Based CRM Integrations
- Marketing & Communications Materials: Print & Web
- Mission Statements & Effective Messaging
- Moves Management & Major Gift Campaigns
- Operational Systems, Processes & Heightened Efficiency
- Organizational Health Assessment & Improvement Plans
- Organizational Transformations, Expansions & Mission Shifts
- Partnership Development/Agreements & Coalition Building
- Person-Centered Planning & Service Delivery Approaches
- Policies & Procedures: Organizational, Program, Personnel
- Public Relations & Damage Control/Correction (as needed)
- Public Speaking & Community Outreach/Education
- Quality Assurance Systems & Process/Documentation Tools
- Service Delivery Innovation & Measurable Impact
- Staffing: Plans/Patterns, Recruitment, Development & Retention
- Team Building, Coaching & Empowerment/Trust
- Transitional & Crisis Management/Leadership
- Volunteer Engagement, Various Advisories & Gratitude Teams

CURRENT PROFESSIONAL ROLE

CEO/Chief Optimist & Independent Nonprofit Consultant

Creative Edge Consulting (dba) - Columbia, Maryland

February 2005 to Present

- Specialize in the comprehensive, tailored support of nonprofit start-ups and young/younger organizations (with most in existence for 3 years or less), in addition to the improvement, sustainability, and expansion of more established agencies. Since 2005 (and part-time since April 2004), have served more than 80 non-profits from across the United States. Organizations range from local grassroots projects to national programs, and those that hope to scale nationally. Client operating budgets span from virtually nothing to 8 million dollars a year or more. To a far lesser degree, supports are also extended to for-profit entities that, most often, engage in education, housing, health or human services work. All consulting services fall under the general categories of **DEVELOPMENT, GROWTH, and SUSTAINABILITY**.
- Creative Edge Consulting (CEC) offers complete one-stop-shop services that involve everything from strategic planning/capacity building and full program/organizational development to providing assistance with all nonprofit funding streams—with an emphasis on diversification and better utilization/ROI of any and all available mechanisms. Generally, CEC efforts center on “professionalizing” young, or struggling older, organizations with regard to infrastructure items while introducing targeted strategies to take operations to the next level of impact, visibility, and sustainability. Work with veteran nonprofits tends to focus on new initiatives/programmatic expansions and improvement activities or more responsive, updated service delivery models, as well as high-level foundation/corporate funding and governmental grants or contracts.

Creative Edge Consulting

ORGANIZATIONAL & PROJECT/PROGRAM TYPES

(Partial List – 2004 to Present)

501(c)(3) Applications / A to Z Infrastructure Start-up Services
After-School & Summer Programs
Anti-Terrorism/Stopping Radicalization of Youth
At-Risk Children & Youth (and Families)
Broad Social Justice Issues (poverty, inequality, inequity, etc.)
Cancer Patient Support Programs
Cancer, Patient-Informed Research Advocacy & Education
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Innovation Grant
Child/Family Counseling Centers
Chiropractic Screenings for School-Aged Children
Chronic Kidney Disease/Dialysis & Risk Factors
College Student/Peer Support Sober House
Community Safety & Proactive Violence Prevention Program
Complete Charter School Design/Charter Application
Disability Support Programs (extensive experience)
Domestic Violence – Family Shelter & Transitional Supports
Education System Reform/Parent Education & Rights in NYC
Facial Reconstruction Surgery for Children
Faith-Based & Interfaith Initiatives
Female Inmate Community Re-entry Services
Foster Care Child/Youth Outreach
Free Dental Clinics for Children
Guide Dogs for Young Blind Children/Teens
HIV/AIDS & Harm Reduction/Prevention Programs
Home Care for Medically Fragile Children
Hospitality Services Training School
Human Trafficking/Commercial Sexual Exploitation
Jobs/Risk Avoidance Training for Teens & Young Adults
LGBTQ+ (marriage equality, anti-discrimination, BIPOC, arts)
Low-Income Transitional/Permanent Housing Projects
Maryland DDA New Residential Provider Acceptance Process
Mental Health/Psychosocial Rehabilitation
Mind-Body Techniques/Trauma Resolution (disaster & war)
Multi-State & National Program Development/Expansion Plans
Municipal Turf Field Complex Project / Sports Programs
National Health Awareness Campaigns
National Institutes of Health *All of Us Program* Application
Private, Public, Alternative, and Charter Schools
Residential Programs (multiple populations)
Senior Citizen Outreach & Support Services
Service Learning/Youth Development Programs
SIDS, Stillbirth, and Unexplained Infant Death
Special Education & Promising New Therapies
STEM & Entrepreneurship Program for Youth (international)
Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Admin Grants
Substance Abuse Recovery/Dual Diagnoses
Supporting Impoverished, Elderly Blues/Musical Heroes
The Boys Project – Disengagement of Boys/Young Men
Title I Supplemental Educational Services (Baltimore City)
Transitional Home - Pregnant Teens/Young Women
U.S. Dept. of Labor/Education & Training Administration Grant
U.S. Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Grants
Women's Issues (work/life balance, equity, female vets, etc.)
Women's Professional/Business Association

- Heavy support of Executive Directors, Founders, and Boards of Directors: 1:1 Executive Coaching, Board education/recruitment/consensus building, crisis intervention/conflict resolution, realistic fundraising expectations, legal/ tax status issues, strategic planning retreats, and attending Board meetings via phone/video to aid in decision-making. Advocate agency-wide embrace of DEIBA practices, including Board, staff, and committee composition.
- Help clients to become more forward-thinking—especially in the context of funding pursuits/process timelines and planting seeds; develop strategy and implementation plans, plus complex 2-10 year budget & other projections.
- While most clients first come to CEC with fundraising (and grant proposals specifically) in mind, intentionally utilize grants and other fiscal development activities as a framework/catalyst for building new programs/organizations, and resolving “red flag” items in current operations with existing programs—prior to any formal financial asks. Work from a philosophy that funding is a by-product of excellence, and the best organizations attract most, if not all, financial and other external support. As such, great focus is placed on fiscal and programmatic accountability, effective and efficient systems, long-range planning, documentable successes, and, above all—meaningful IMPACT.
- Creation of all structures/systems, processes, and tools needed to maximize operational efficacy and quality service provision. This includes current best practices and trends with regard to digital engagement. Recommendations include Customer Relationship Management systems (with a preference for Salesforce and customized, cloud-based integrations such as QuickBooks, MailChimp, project management and service delivery tools, Classy, Pardot, etc.), and plentiful webinars that can further client knowledge/understanding related to fundraising techniques, fiscal matters, and governance.
- Client successes vary in relationship to each nonprofit's unique merits, as well as the available budget for and duration of the consulting engagement. Except for a few Founders who gave up on their nonprofit dream entirely, every organization improved their functioning, gained greater focus, and strengthened their overall position. Most challenging project to date: led one group through the entire charter school application process in only 3 months (independently designing the school on paper—including 10-year budget and faculty/staff expansion projections)—and flew to Miami later that year to personally defend that application in front of a 12-person technical panel from the public school district. Frequently lead projects without any previous subject mastery, including those that must comply with statutes/regulations.
- For those prepared for funding competition, many clients more than doubled their previous outcomes after signing-on with CEC. Since 2005, over 14.5 million dollars in grant and other funding has been obtained among CEC's collective customer roster. The largest foundation grant (a 3-state, 7-year pilot project): 11 million dollars; Two highest governmental (county) grants: approximately 1 million dollars apiece. One 25-year old agency received more than 2 times the charitable gifts typically secured through their annual holiday plea letter—and, for the first time, received a flurry of phone calls and notes indicating how touched patrons were by the letter they received.
- As many people lack the resources to contract with a nonprofit consultant—free advice is routinely offered by telephone and email. This prompted the introduction of personally-penned, thought-leadership articles on the CEC website and blog, *CosEffect*, which address common challenges/questions of nonprofit leaders. A new podcast show and the sale of a comprehensive, multi-volume “HOW TO” manual for starting, growing, and sustaining a new nonprofit will soon become available—regardless of my career transition.

FUND DEVELOPMENT/COMMUNICATIONS & RELATED EXPERIENCE

Director of Development (80% FTE, remote)

Medical Education Institute, Inc. – Madison, Wisconsin

July 2013 – April 2014

This service was in addition to my ongoing, full-time consulting work. MEI is a national nonprofit that provides educational products and services related to chronic kidney disease (CKD). In addition to its web-based learning centers and print materials for patients and health professionals, MEI conducts behavioral healthcare research in partnership with major universities and offers direct support to people who live with CKD.

- Created a comprehensive, preliminary, 3-year Development Plan (focused beyond fundraising alone) that included all potential nonprofit funding streams (all new to MEI except corporate monies), deep assessment of the organization's strengths and needs with suggestions for improved messaging to attract/engage a broader audience, staff/departmental expansions needed to accommodate new fundraising areas and programmatic growth over time, sub-component plans (grants, sponsorships, and communications), a proposed new consumer advisory panel and fundraising arm, Youth Action/Leadership Development effort, development internship program, and detailed organizational and project-specific budget projections spanning two years. Work also included national press releases, and sponsorship packages and grant proposals for educational website development and capacity-building efforts. Within my first full month of employ, helped MEI prepare and submit a 6.1 million dollar, federal grant funding request to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for a Healthcare Innovation Award. (Not funded.)
- From August to October of 2017, MEI contracted with me in a consulting capacity to conduct funding prospect research, prepare grant proposals for several projects, and devise/deliver a customized, video-conference training/coaching program for marketing staff that, at the time, lacked experience with grant application preparation and standards, funder research and online database systems navigation, funder 990 tax return reviews as a source of critical information, and methods/rationale for determining solid funding opportunities. I again performed consulting work for them in September of 2018.

Grant Writer/Fundraiser

Norbel School – Elkridge, Maryland

April 2004 – February 2005

- A small, independent K-12 school for children with learning differences and language delays or disorders. Work focused primarily on foundation and corporate grants, special projects, and donor recognition activities for low-level gifts. Norbel School became my first big client as I transitioned into full-time consulting on February 1, 2005.

Professional Singer/Songwriter & Small Business Owner

Acoustic Blue Productions (DJ & Karaoke) and Whistle While I Work (Residential Painting & Cleaning Services)
Parkville/Owings Mills/Monkton, Maryland

1994-2007

Took a 10-year break from human services to pursue my creative interests as a professional singer/songwriter and composer. To support myself, I additionally owned and operated two small businesses. (Artistically, I am also an actor, artist/illustrator, and multi-genre literary writer.)

- Performed as a vocalist in the Baltimore area for 20 years, and also served as a Karaoke Host/DJ and frequent MC/Host of nonprofit fundraising events during this time. One of my ongoing karaoke club gigs was rated by the Baltimore City Paper as "The Best Karaoke in Baltimore" for several years running. With charity events, I was known for energizing and entertaining the crowd, getting people to dig deeper into their donor pockets at events, and creating/facilitating unique, revenue-producing event sub-programming. (NOTE: I do have event planning and facilitation experience as well.)
- (Acoustic Blue Productions) Partnered with Baltimore radio station MIX106.5 for a series of American Idol-ish morning show singing contests where I additionally served as an on-air personality and judge. Through this, the radio station's Director of Promotions became a networking partner and friend, and introduced me to marketing techniques related to corporate sponsorships, such as mentions, impressions, and so forth. He offered both advice and plentiful radio station give-away items (concert tickets, trips, etc.) for use at a number of nonprofit fundraising events, and boosted my personal confidence and capacity to independently (for the first time) request/ obtain donated auction and other items from local/regional businesses on behalf of charitable organizations.
- This career period included my first successful attempt at website design, internet/other marketing, private sector customer service, and frequent, small contracts negotiations/execution. Further, I learned and honed live sound reinforcement skills, as well as audio recording techniques—which have nonprofit applications with regard to podcasts, live event sound systems, and video production. Perhaps most importantly, I am comfortable on a microphone as a fundraising host and performer, and have entertained/actively engaged crowds from a few hundred to several thousand. Without question, I am a more confident, natural, and effective public speaker as a result.

EARLIER CAREER HIGHLIGHTS – ADMINISTRATION & ADVOCACY

- As President/CEO, wrote a comprehensive bid proposal (that included a complete operations manual responsive to strict State regulations and individual support plans for each prospective resident) that resulted in the negotiation and award of a 2.8 million dollar, 3-year grant contract with the State of Maryland to start-up and operate the residential human services organization I founded in 1992, **Creative Options, Inc.** One of only 3 providers approved through that year's Request for Proposals (RFP) for new community-based providers. At the time, Creative Options was respected for unique approaches to supporting individuals with dual diagnoses (intellectual/developmental disabilities and mental health disorders, with often times others) deemed "difficult to place" by the State of Maryland due to severe behavioral challenges and long-time histories of "failure" to successfully live in the community. Offered customized, person-centered alternatives to State institutionalization while offering members of the *Knotts Class Action Suit* a substantially higher quality of life. Today, this agency's annual operating budget exceeds 14 million dollars.
- Highest-level State representative and disabilities advocate. Member of a small but dynamic team of professionals (led by Michael Smull and Susan Burke Harrison) that helped transform the way in which people with disabilities are supported in the State of Maryland. A special joint project between the University of Maryland at Baltimore and Maryland's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene/Developmental Disabilities Administration, the **Community Support & Access Unit** ushered the start of "money follows the person" (with Maryland funding systems), person-centered approaches, and a consumer's right to choose their community-based provider agencies and other necessary supports. Introduced/utilized a unique "*Essential Lifestyle Plan*" process to help individuals create the life they choose—including where they live, with whom or alone, where they work, where (and if) they worship, and where they play. Our team provided *Essential Lifestyle Plan* training to other states as well, and helped pave the way for this *then-* progressive philosophy and support model to become a widespread national norm. Additionally, the Access Team planned/coordinated transitions for special education students returning home from exorbitantly costly out-of-state residential schools and entering Maryland's adult disability services system. Secondly, our special project resulted in dramatic fiscal savings for the State.
- Between 1990 and 1994, created 2 new residential programs "from the ground up" (**English & Condray** and **Creative Options**) and revamped/greatly improved operational systems—largely in preparation for State licensing reviews—for 2 others (**Center for Community Development** and **Careco**). Completed these processes within extremely short timeframes of 3-6 months at each agency. At English and Condray, 5 residential homes officially opened and welcomed all their residents within a span of only 5 weeks. (The full start-up process began 4 months prior.)
- Within my first 4 months at **Center for Community Development**, brought this troubled agency from the brink of program closure, due to what was cited by the State of Maryland as "deplorable conditions," to experience their first full State licensing renewal in the 10-year history of that organization. In fact, no deficiencies could be detected by evaluators during this 3-day licensing review—which, to my knowledge, had never before been achieved by a Maryland residential provider. This success involved massive overhaul of the program, clinically and operationally, as well as addressing the serious physical plant issues within each of the 15 residential homes that included a high degree of health & safety violations. Total cost of this organizational revamp—less than \$3,000. (Two additional homes opened prior to my departure as well.)
- Fostered environments where staff felt valued and respected, as well as an instilled sense of shared "ownership." As a result, morale was unusually high despite crises and ordinary day-to-day trials of human services work. Teams functioned well outside the parameters of typical job descriptions and outcomes proved, again and again, to be quite impressive. One example was mobilizing clinical staff to address the physical plant issues of 15 residential homes that included repairs, painting, cleaning, etc. They spent 3 months doing this each day, even though (ethically) I would not require it of them. My team "stepped up to the plate" to work *alongside* me to resolve this program's crisis (see previous bullet statement). This is representative of my "hands on" management style and the type of cooperative culture I strive to create whenever I am at the leadership helm. Consequently, key staff has followed me from one directorship to my next.

PAST LEADERSHIP ROLES

Program Director

1993-1994

Center for Community Development
Capital Heights, Maryland
(*Senior Management, Residential Revamp*)

President/CEO & Founder

1992-1993

Creative Options, Inc.
Columbia, Maryland
(*Senior Management, Residential Start-up*)

Developmental Disabilities Specialist Community Support & Access Unit

1991-1992

University of Maryland at Baltimore/Maryland
Developmental Disabilities Administration
Baltimore, Maryland
(*Highest-level, Maryland State Advocate*)

Management/Program Consultant

Interim Project Coordinator/Qualified Mental
Retardation Professional (QMRP)

Temporary, 3-Month Special Project / 1991
Careco, Inc.
Washington, DC

(*Intermediate Care Facility/Intellectual Disabilities
DC Licensing Review & Expansion into Maryland*)

Director of Maryland Operations

1990-1991

English & Condray, Ltd.
Silver Spring, Maryland
(*Senior Management, Residential Start-up*)

Program Director

1989-1990

United Cerebral Palsy Association
Bowie, Maryland
(*Senior Management, Residential & Day
Programs... including program expansion*)

Services Coordinator

1988-1989

Prince George's County Health Department
Cheverly, Maryland
(*Lower-level, Maryland State Disability
Advocate/Case Manager with Regulatory
Oversight Duties*)

Manager/Employee Assistance Program

1987-1988

Melwood Training Center
Upper Marlboro, Maryland
(*Mid-level Management, Counseling & Case
Management Program for Workers w/ Disabilities*)

COMBINED FUNCTIONAL SKILLS – (EARLIER) ADMINISTRATIVE, CLINICAL, & ADVOCACY

- Grant writing and State/County contracts administration since 1987. Foundation and corporate grant applications since 2004. Budget development and fiscal oversight. Drafted or revised personnel/program/organizational policies & procedures for multiple agencies. Created staff/consumer training materials and ensured trainings took place in accordance with State regulations. Personally conducted most of the 10 in-house staff training programs. Plans of Correction (as needed) and other reports, collection of statistical data, and completion/safeguarding of all required documentation. Public speaking and community education. Strategic planning and establishment of short-term/long-term goals, measurable outcomes, and overall vision. Evaluated service/budget proposals from community provider agencies while a member of the Community Support & Access Unit (University of Maryland/DDA) and made recommendations to the State for approval.
- Daily administration of residential, counseling/case management, and psychosocial recreational/educational day programs for adults with a wide range of disabilities and co-occurring diagnoses: intellectual, developmental, physical, neurological, neuromuscular, psychiatric, and learning. Administrative and advocacy roles included support of individuals with common and rare medical conditions as well. Additionally, two of my residential programs included congregate living facilities for the aged.
- Residential programs were 24/7 environments involving high-level crisis response systems. Staffing patterns included single, double, and awake overnight coverage, as well as drop-in support apartments (in my last directorship only). Residents required intensive supports due to severe behavioral challenges or, conversely, personal care needs (feeding, bathing, etc.) of folks with physical disabilities and complex, sometimes very serious, medical conditions. Emergency protocols were extensive, precise, and specific to each house and each resident.
- Managed annual operating budgets of up to 1.5 million dollars (which would be double today without program expansion), working closely with CFOs or large finance departments. Personally issued weekly expense checks (food/supplies and maintenance) and household cash for all residential homes, with reconciliations/receipt verifications regularly conducted by the CFO or bookkeeping staff. Tracked staff time and other detailed cost center allocations/spending per house. Managed 3-month start-up budgets of up to 87k for new programs, and personally selected all new properties and furnishings (and navigated health, fire, and State inspections). As needed, requested formal line-item transfer approval from the State to shift surplus funds to underfunded/unfunded needs not included in original budget projections and State contract.
- Recruited, coached, and led multi-leveled staff teams of 55+ persons—with skill/academic levels ranging from direct care staff with high school diplomas to folks with advanced or terminal degrees. Ensured that all staff successfully passed all background check standards and external trainings such as medication administration, first aid, and CPR certifications prior to work start. Responsible for all personnel records, and fair/compassionate human resource management in full compliance with all labor laws; hiring, performance evaluation, promotion, and termination of employment. I build not only teams—but caring *communities*, and set the tone/expectations for a healthy and happy workplace.
- Reviewed clinical assessments and other records for all prospective residents, got to know individuals as people when making admission decisions, and planned transitions in accordance with each new resident's needs. Supports were customized for every resident, and reflected all elements of healthy and full living: housing/home, vocational/educational, health/mental health, recreation/leisure and social relationships, transportation/mobility, spiritual life, and continued personal growth. Created detailed goal plans for each resident that featured teaching methodologies for learning new skills, behavioral plans (as needed), and milestones/deadlines for obtaining/completing all necessary services with responsible party designations. Scheduled and facilitated annual, plan modification, and emergent interdisciplinary team meetings for residents as both a Program Director and Services Coordinator. Developed/implemented annual plans in various historical and role-specific forms: *Individual Habilitation Plans (IHP)*, *Individual Service Plans (ISP)*, *Individual Plans (IP)*, and *Essential Lifestyle Plans*.
- High-level interaction/collaboration with State representatives, State institutional and psychiatric hospital staff (social workers, psychologists, nurses, doctors, OT/PT, etc.), Legal Aid/Maryland Disability Law Center, behavioral consultants, and vocational programs. Acted as liaison between consumers/families, State governmental regulatory/oversight systems, political offices (Members of Congress and County Executive offices), residential schools, community providers, and the public. Supervised/trained Social Work bachelor-level interns and volunteers.
- Created cultures of excellence; an unwavering standard from the start of my career to today. Historically, my servant-leadership has centered on several key principles: 1) PEOPLE are an organization's greatest asset and must be treated as such. 2) Build a bigger table. 3) Innovation requires risk. 4) Excellence sells. 5) Success is rarely an accident. 6) Relationships and gratitude are everything. 7) Lead with love.

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Social Work (BSW): The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC – October 1987

(Plus, prior to changing my major to Social Work, 2 years of Drama Department curriculum. CUA does not offer AA degrees.)

Honors, Senior Thesis (1986) – The Deinstitutionalization of the Chronically Mentally Ill from St. Elizabeth's Hospital