

## MOREinfo

Nonprofit member groups of **Community Shares of West Virginia** are required to meet standards, including longevity. The current list of nine includes:

**American Friends Service Committee West Virginia Economic Justice Project**, working on issues affecting low-income and working families, such as health care, living wages, education, social services and benefits. [www.afsc.org/midatlantic/charleston.htm](http://www.afsc.org/midatlantic/charleston.htm)

**Family Leadership First**, a statewide coalition of family leadership groups that work together to bring parent and youth voices to community, regional and state policy tables. [familyleadershipfirst@wv-dreamers.org](mailto:familyleadershipfirst@wv-dreamers.org)

**Mountain State Education and Research Fund**, researching, analyzing and educating on issues including environmental protection, corporate and government accountability, consumer protection, universal health care, and opposing discrimination. [www.mseref.org](http://www.mseref.org)

**Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition**, a grassroots organization improving and preserving the environment through education, grassroots organizing, coalition building, leadership development and media outreach. [www.ohvec.org](http://www.ohvec.org)

**Southern Appalachian Labor School**, committed to social, economic and environmental justice for the Appalachian people, with a current focus on providing adequate housing for those in substandard living conditions through hosting volunteer home repair groups. [www.sals.info](http://www.sals.info)

**Step by Step**, working with families and communities to support children through after-school, summer, arts, recreation, behavioral and physical health promotion and youth and family leadership initiatives. [www.wvdreamers.org](http://www.wvdreamers.org)

**West Virginia Highlands Conservancy**, promoting conservation and appreciation of the natural resources of West Virginia and the nation for the cultural, social, educational, physical, spiritual and economic benefit of present and future generations. [www.wvhighlands.org](http://www.wvhighlands.org)

**West Virginia Ministry of Advocacy and Workcamps Inc.**, providing advocacy and volunteers to help survivors of disaster and promoting wastewater initiatives. [www.wvpresbytery.org/wvmaw.htm](http://www.wvpresbytery.org/wvmaw.htm)

**West Virginia Rivers Coalition**, supporting more than 100 watershed groups and working for the conservation and restoration of rivers by enforcing the federal Clean Water Act. [www.wvrivers.org](http://www.wvrivers.org)  
Learn more at [www.communityshareswv.org](http://www.communityshareswv.org).

# Community Shares Strives to Grow in W.Va.

By PAM KASEY

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State employees have a new option for charitable giving through **Community Shares of West Virginia**.

Growing nationwide, Community Shares (CSWV) organizations offer corporate and agency employees the opportunity to give through payroll deduction to participating environmental, cultural and social justice groups operating in their areas.

Charitable groups that wanted an alternative to the **United Way** model started the concept about 30 years ago, according to CSWV Administrator **Conni Lewis**.

Rather than providing direct service, as United Way organizations do, Lewis said Community Shares member groups are more change-oriented. CSWV member organization **West Virginia Rivers Coalition**, for example, doesn't provide direct service to people, but rather advocates for clean rivers.

Community Shares organizations also are run by their member groups, she said. The groups provide volunteer time and make decisions through consensus.

Thirty-eight Community Shares organizations now operate across the nation, Lewis said, some serving whole states and some serving metropolitan areas.

To become a West Virginia approved voluntary payroll deduction, CSWV had to receive commitments from 50 employees in at least two state agencies, said **Terry Hoover**, director of payroll for the state auditor's office.

West Virginia state employees, including higher educa-

tion employees, can elect at any time to participate in Community Shares. They choose a dollar amount to be withheld each pay period. They can distribute it equally among the member groups or, Lewis said, they are welcome to specify which group or groups they want their donation to go to.

"We know that state and higher education employees don't make a whole lot of money, so a decision to donate to a new organization is not one they'll make lightly in most cases. We respect that. (But) if we follow the same trajectory as other Community Shares in the nation, we'll have health increases in the first several years, and then we'll have more modest increases."

— **Conni Lewis, administrator, Community Shares West Virginia**

CSWV's current roster of nine member groups addresses disaster relief, poverty, democratic participation and the environment and includes two faith-based groups.

Although Lewis declined to share the organization's expectations for donations in its first year, "they're quite modest," she said.

"We know that state and higher education employees don't make a whole lot of money, so a decision to donate to a new organization is not one they'll make lightly in most cases. We respect that," she said. But "if we follow the same trajectory as other Community Shares in the nation, we'll have healthy increases in the first several years, and then we'll have more modest increases."

Lewis looks to Toledo, Ohio-based **Northwest Ohio Community Shares (NOCS)**, which held its first workplace giving

campaign in 2000.

"Toledo, like West Virginia, has had an economically rough time for several years with factories closing and outsourcing and the loss of good-paying jobs," she said.

"Even 25 to 30 percent increases from year to year in donations are not unusual" for NOCS, Lewis said. The organization raised more than \$200,000 in 2004 and currently represents 26 member groups, according to its Web site.

The Community Shares model offers an efficient approach to fundraising for the usually small and low-budget member groups, and it also helps them publicize their work, Lewis said.

"For instance, the **Southern Appalachian Labor School**, which has been around for decades, does wonderful work with housing and teaching construction skills to young adults," she said.

"There are people around the state that, when you tell them the story, they say, 'Wow, that's really great, how can I help?' This is a way for them and the other organizations to get their stories out."

CSWV plans next year to begin approaching corporations operating in West Virginia to offer Community Shares as an option for their employees. The organization also is open to new member nonprofit groups.

Interested corporations, agencies and nonprofit groups are invited to visit [www.communityshares.org](http://www.communityshares.org) or to contact Lewis at [connigl@aol.com](mailto:connigl@aol.com).



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