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CHARITY CHALLENGE

Flag Day blues: Four in 10 VWOs can't meet S\$50,000 benchmark

Lack of volunteers, uncertain economic outlook, donor fatigue cited as challenges

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SINGAPORE – Voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) showed keen interest in conducting Flag Days, but about four in 10 of them were not able to raise S\$50,000 last year. The lack of volunteers, an uncertain economic outlook and donor fatigue were some of the challenges cited by some VWOs during these donation drives.

According to the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) — the umbrella body representing over 400 VWOs here — the S\$50,000 figure is based on the average proceeds collected in previous years. It is not a stipulated target, but serves as “a benchmark”

intended at ensuring that organisations put in effort to optimise their allocated Flag Day, the NCSS added.

According to Glory Centre Community Services Association's Honorary Secretary Grace Teo, at least 500 volunteers would be needed for the organisation to try and hit S\$50,000. Getting a “good date” for Flag Day is also important, she felt, as most student volunteers could be unavailable during the school holidays and examination periods. “If they don't work hard, it is equal to not having any volunteer.”

Earlier this month, the annual National University of Singapore Students' Union (NUSSU) Flag Day saw the participation of some 6,000 students, who raised more than S\$415,700 for its beneficiaries.

Filos Community Services said it raised about S\$70,000 at this year's Flag Day — almost double the S\$40,000 collected two years ago.

Ms Kathleen Goh, the group's

Administrative Executive, said the smaller pool of manpower and how the “economy was not so good” could have led to less donations in 2011.

Others like En Community Services Society said some members of the public are less inclined to donate when Flag Days are conducted every week. They raised about S\$51,000 last year, and about S\$39,000 in 2011. Community worker Joi Tan acknowledged that it is a “tough line to balance”, where the weekly Flag Day can be “too regular for the public but yet necessary for the VWOs”.

To conduct a Flag Day here, member VWOs have to apply to the NCSS. Slots are allocated annually and VWOs have to register their interest, select dates online before a balloting exercise is conducted.

In a year, there are 62 Flag Day slots available to member VWOs and they fall on all Saturdays, during school holidays and Wednesdays.

Last year, 81 VWOs applied to ballot for the available slots and 64 were successful, including joint applications of two VWOs.

Applications for next year's Flag Day slots closed last Monday.

But for VWOs that failed to raise the S\$50,000 sum last year, a special waiver was granted to allow them to ballot for the next Flag Day. They could also try to raise more on subsequent Flag Days to secure the amount over three flag days. “The NCSS does not stipulate a target amount for flag day collections. Member VWOs are encouraged to maintain average gross proceeds of S\$50,000 over three flag days,” the statutory board added.

Despite the challenges, Flag Days remain an important fund-raising vehicle for VWOs TODAY interviewed, where the money collected could make up to 70 per cent of their annual donations.

Ms Alina Tee, the Manager for Resource Development & Communications at the Kidney Dialysis Foundation, said Flag Day is “also a means to increase awareness and exposure of the charity to members of the public”. “Furthermore, it provides a platform for charities to engage students and supporters in voluntary work.”

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