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CIRCULATIONS  
AUDIT BOARD

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## Poor accounting can destroy an association



As someone who's studied accounting subjects and attained a business degree, good financial management comes easily to me. However, during my extensive involvement with associations over

the last 22 years, I have the feeling I am one of the few.

Logically, associations will accumulate wealth every year because they have no shareholders. Western associations suffer from the misnomer of being referred to as 'not-for-profit' organisations. Asian associations, fortunately, do not use this term as much. While it is true associations are 'not specifically for profit', neither are they 'for loss'. A better description would be 'not for dividend', but I can't see this taking off. American associations are

worse, using the term "non profit". A term I like is 'mutual'.

Organisations with a strong balance sheet – meaning they have a lot of accumulated equity – are able to grow member services by employing quality management staff. My experience also indicates that, if associations invest sufficiently in moneymaking activities such as events, seeking sponsors and recruiting members, they will likely make more money after hiring staff who are dedicated to profitable areas.

One of an association's biggest weaknesses is not using the simple and powerful methodology of 'activity-based costing'. Also known as cost centre accounting, this means that a separate financial report is prepared according to the project or activities in which an association made a surplus or a deficit. Knowing the types of income

or expenditure is also important, but it is a different way of looking at the same figures.

I have been reminded of this recently while I've been assisting an association in dire financial straits. The lack of activity-based costing was one key reason for the downturn and another was not employing management staff dedicated to income-generating areas.

Good bookkeeping is simple, powerful and crucial. If you would like to discuss this with me, please email me at [jpeacock@nfp.net.au](mailto:jpeacock@nfp.net.au)

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