

# **Strategic Plan**

**2005-2008**

**Center for Non-Profit Corporations**

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# The Center

for Non-Profits

helping organizations build a better New Jersey

April 2005

Dear Friends,

We are pleased to enclose the Center for Non-Profit Corporations' 2005-2008 Strategic Plan. It sets out the Center's main priorities for the next three years as we build on 23 years of accomplishment in providing leadership and service to the sector.

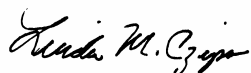
This plan is the result of several months of intensive work, including multiple board/staff planning sessions, online surveys of Center member organizations, focus group sessions with non-members, and telephone interviews with other key constituency representatives such as funders, government officials, management support organizations and others. We asked about what we've done right, where improvements could be made, future trends and your priority issues and needs.

***And we listened.*** Based on your input, here's just some of what you can expect in the months ahead:

- A strengthened, ***more powerful advocacy/public education program*** to champion non-profit issues and convey the strength and value of the non-profit community.
- Special initiatives to tackle the challenges of ***health and liability insurance***.
- An ***upgraded Web site*** with extensive improvements, added interactivity and enhanced members-only content.
- The same high level of ***legal and management assistance*** you've come to expect, with even ***more advanced-level content*** for established organizations.
- ***Improved communications*** to ensure that our members and supporters are fully aware of the depth and breadth of the Center's programs, services and accomplishments for New Jersey's non-profit community.

We would like to thank everyone who participated in our planning process. Whether you completed an online survey, took part in an interview or focus group, or simply called our Non-Profit Help Desk to ask a legal or management question, be assured that your input was a vital part of our discussion. We hope you will see your views reflected in our plans, and we hope we can count on your active participation in our programs and activities in the months ahead. The Center works because of you, and we plan to work side by side with you to ensure a strong quality of life for the people of New Jersey.

With best wishes,



Linda M. Czipo  
Executive Director

## Center for Non-Profit Corporations

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## Strategic Plan 2005-2008

### Introduction

New Jersey non-profits play a regular and significant role in our daily experience: Through them, we pursue recreation and hobbies, enjoy the arts, and fulfill spiritual needs. Non-profits provide care of our children, our elderly, and our needy; they enable access to medical care, the pursuit of education and the building of community. New Jersey's non-profit sector is an expression of how we live, what we value, where we turn for pleasure and where we turn in need.

The Center for Non-Profit Corporations was founded in 1982 to strengthen and promote non-profits in the pursuit of their missions. The Center's founders believed that a strong non-profit sector was ensuring a strong quality of life for the people of New Jersey. As the Center prepares to enter its second quarter century of service and leadership for New Jersey's non-profit sector, we continue to hold that belief today.

### Planning Process

In the spring of 2004, the Center embarked on a strategic planning process to chart its course over the next three years. The effort was initiated by the Board of Trustees, with a Strategic Planning Committee of the Board and conducted in partnership with the Center staff. The Center retained Regina Podhorin, President of The Leadership Group in Trenton, to facilitate the strategic planning. This comprehensive process included multiple board/staff planning sessions, online surveys of Center member organizations, focus group sessions with non-members, and telephone interviews with other key constituency representatives such as funders, government officials, management support organizations and others.

### What We Found

- ***There is widespread support for the Center's role*** as a leading advocate, central information and assistance resource for New Jersey non-profits and the issues that affect them.
- ***The Center is highly regarded*** by non-profits, funders and other constituencies who are even somewhat familiar with the organization.
- Among the ***top priorities*** identified by non-profits, funders and other respondents were ***public policy advocacy, capacity building*** and ***insurance issues***. ***Convening the sector*** for networking purposes and to develop creative solutions to critical problems was also rated highly.
- ***The Center must increase its communications, visibility and advocacy capacity*** in order to build upon its past accomplishments and realize the ambitious goals identified in the planning process.

The information and thoughtful deliberation during the past several months have resulted in the priorities that are laid out on the following pages. Newly restructured committees consisting of board members and, in some cases, non-trustee member representatives and other individuals, are spearheading the work of making these ambitious plans a reality. The vision that gave rise to this plan builds on past accomplishments and current strengths. We believe that the Center is uniquely positioned to grow, to represent non-profit interests vocally and responsibly, and to respond to practical needs of the sector, both current and emergent, in order to foster a strong, effective non-profit community for the people of New Jersey. We look forward to working with non-profits and all who care about them, to ensure a strong future for our sector.

## Mission Statement

The mission of the Center for Non-Profit Corporations is  
**to build the power of New Jersey's non-profit community**  
 by serving as  
**the premier voice**  
 and  
**comprehensive resource**  
**for and about our sector.**

## Strategic Direction

**The Center will build the power of the non-profit sector by:**

- Demonstrating leadership on non-profit issues;
- Convening the sector to solve critical problems;
- Fostering a unified voice of the sector;
- Raising the profile of the non-profit sector and non-profit issues; and
- Heightening responsiveness to sector issues/needs among policy makers, funders, the media, business and others.

**The Center will serve as the comprehensive resource for and about our sector by:**

- Providing direct services to individual non-profits;
- Providing referrals for the full range of sector resources; and
- Placing special emphasis on serving member organizations and enhancing the value of membership.

## Primary Service Areas

**Non-Profit Sector Advocacy** – Champion the non-profit sector and non-profit issues to state and federal government, funders and the general public

**Capacity Building (Technical Assistance/Training) & Direct Member Benefits** – Strengthen and engage non-profits, to improve non-profit effectiveness and ultimately foster strengthened non-profit advocacy efforts.

## Primary Trends, 2005-2008

During the planning process, a wide variety of emerging trends were examined as part of board/staff planning sessions, member surveys, focus groups and interviews. The following were those most frequently identified by stakeholders as the most significant. These trends will inform and guide the Center's specific priorities in both advocacy and direct service.

- Nonprofits' lack of sufficient resources for capacity/infrastructure building
- Increased demand for public accountability of the nonprofit sector
- Increasing difficulty in attracting and retaining effective board members
- Desire for increased technical assistance and training in:
  - board governance
  - marketing
  - fundraising for individual gifts
  - outcome evaluation
- Requests for increased direct member benefits, with special emphasis on:
  - group insurance, especially medical
  - upfront benefits for new members (incentives)
- Advocacy and supporting research as required regarding:
  - accountability
  - increased funding for capacity building and general operations
  - public trust of sector

## Tactical Priorities

### Advocacy and Public Education

Public policy work can often make the difference between short-term band-aid approaches, and long-term or preventative solutions for many critical problems. In fact, many of our nation's most significant social policies have come about as a result of advocacy and lobbying by non-profit and voluntary groups. Non-profits often serve as the only voice on behalf of many typically under-represented constituencies such as children, the elderly, the disadvantaged and others who cannot speak out before government on the issues that uniquely affect them.

The need to strengthen the non-profit voice has been stressed repeatedly throughout the planning process. Further, the Center's role as New Jersey's leading advocate on non-profit issues has received wide support from all of our constituencies. In order for the Center to realize this vital goal, it will take aggressive steps to strengthen its advocacy and public education functions.

*By the end of Year 3...*

- The Center will be a *more visible, more credible and more effective advocate* for and with the non-profit community.
- Advocacy will take the forms of public policy, public and media relations, and promotion of the sector to business leaders, funders and the public.
- The Center will have a *permanent, fully established, integrated and systematized advocacy department* to accomplish advocacy and public education goals.

### *Activities*

#### **Determine annual, proactive advocacy agenda and priority issues for strategic action**

- Priority issues identified for 2005-06 include:
  - Property tax exemption as part of property tax reform
  - Encouraging non-profit participation in public issues and policies
  - Promoting non-profit accountability by encouraging best practices/efficiencies, articulating the role and value of the non-profit community, supporting balanced laws and regulations, and advocating for increased resources to strengthen the non-profit infrastructure
- The Center's board and advocacy committee will identify a proactive advocacy agenda for each year.
- In keeping with the plan priorities, agenda will emphasize themes of *accountability, increased resources for capacity building and infrastructure*, and *public trust/perception of the non-profit sector*.

#### **Increase presence and strength of Center in advocacy environment to achieve defined goals**

- Create a targeted communications plan for advocacy
- Communicate tangible results of advocacy efforts
- Engage contract lobbyist or part-time policy staff, building to full-time policy analyst plus contract lobbyist as needed
- Engage public relations consultant to publicize advocacy initiatives as part of strategic marketing/promotion of Center

#### **Engage membership and all Center staff more fully in advocacy efforts**

- Recruit more members for Center Advocacy Committee
- Provide more opportunities for members to interact with public officials and each other on policy issues (legislative reception, policy briefings, advocacy trainings)
- Provide more opportunities for input on issues (surveys, etc.)
- Consistently and convincingly communicate the value of advocacy as a membership benefit
- Increase member understanding of importance of non-profit sector issues to individual fields of discipline

## Capacity Building

A non-profit's long-term programmatic success, stability and credibility with policy makers, funders and the public are directly related to its basic organizational and structural health. Throughout the nation, there is growing recognition that non-profits – like successful businesses – must be able to invest in activities such as research, organizational development, planning and employee training in order to fulfill their missions. Without these vital infrastructure supports, many organizations will be destined to operate in short-term crisis mode without the ability to plan and achieve long-term objectives. But unlike the business sector, where substantial investment in research and development is expected and viewed as a necessary part of successful operations, for non-profits such investments have too often been viewed as luxuries or inappropriate diversions from core programs. Sustained funding and comprehensive technical assistance are required in order for capacity, program delivery and community outcomes to increase in a significant way.

Legal and management assistance helps to strengthen the basic organizational infrastructure to allow non-profits to conduct their programs effectively. By providing direct services and serving as a gateway to other resources for non-profits, the Center frees organizations to pursue their own missions more efficiently and successfully.

*By the end of Year 3...*

- **Strong and effective Center sponsored programs will *address the full variety of needs of nonprofits* that possess *differing levels of sophistication and evolution*.**
- **Through institutionalization of *sound evaluation techniques* the Center will be able to *demonstrate the relationship between skill building and action* as it relates to effectiveness and successful sector advocacy.**

### *Activities*

The Center's capacity building work will promote the highest levels of integrity and accountability and effectiveness of the non-profit community, with special emphasis on the priority trends identified in the planning process:

- board governance
- outcome evaluation
- marketing
- fundraising, particularly for individual gifts

### **Provide organizational assessment services and direct, individual technical assistance to members**

- Emphasize as member benefit to enhance value of membership, aid member recruitment and retention
- Build ***formalized*** network of ***consulting partners*** for service provision

### **Establish and implement mechanism for long-term evaluation of workshop offerings**

- Make adjustments in offerings/technical assistance services to maximize effectiveness

### **Increase partnerships with other capacity building organizations**

- Prevent or minimize unnecessary duplication
- Enhance member access to fuller range of services
- Increase depth, effectiveness and external visibility as the primary resource for and about the non-profit sector

### **Enhance Center workshop offerings to:**

- Provide more advanced level training opportunities for participants who have completed basic levels
- Offer advanced training for larger or more sophisticated organizations, with emphasis on adding value to membership
- Concentrate offerings on topic areas of greatest demand and on Center strengths
- Research interest in and value of certificate series

## **Member/Future Member Services**

Membership helps to foster a heightened sense of community among diverse organizations; conveys the strength and power of the non-profit community before policy makers and others; provides non-profits with a direct voice in the workings of the Center; provides a means for non-profits and others to support the Center's work.

Members and non-members alike expressed strong support for member benefit programs as a way to add value to membership, help members reduce costs and increase efficiencies, and encourage membership growth and retention. By far, the most pressing need identified was in the area of medical and liability insurance, costs of which have increased significantly in recent years. There was also strong recognition of the need to better communicate the depth and breadth of the Center's existing services to members and potential members.

*By the end of Year 3...*

- ***The value of membership will be readily apparent through a strengthened menu of member benefits and cleaner distinctions between member and non-member services.***
- ***The Center will achieve significant increases in membership at all levels (new members and member retention).***

### **Activities**

#### **Provide opportunity for group coverage for medical and liability insurance**

- Create ad hoc insurance task force, including members, to pursue this initiative
- Retain insurance consultant, legal expertise as needed
- Explore possibilities of partnering with existing plans vs. need to develop new vehicle(s)

### **Increase and systematize member marketing and outreach**

- Engage public relations consultant for strategy development and implementation, with the eventual goal of hiring full time marketing/fundraising staff
- Develop strategic campaign and theme to aggressively promote the benefits and strength of the Center
- Systematize communications with current members to keep them informed of full range of available benefits
- Develop and systematize more consistent system for follow-up marketing to future members who attend trainings or request information

### **Enhance effectiveness and accessibility of information and communications through critical technology upgrades**

- Perform comprehensive upgrade to Center Web site content, appearance and navigability; add enhanced features, increase interactivity, add special members-only features
- Maximize use of technology for regular member communications (advocacy, newsletters, technical assistance, marketing)
- Upgrade internal communications to maximize efficiency and productivity (e.g., in-house high speed Internet access, networked computer workstations)

### **Update and increase print resources/publications**

- Produce updated editions of previous references such as the *New Jersey Grants Guide* and *New Jersey Non-Profit Salary and Benefits Survey*
- Produce a series of single-topic booklets on various non-profit management subjects
- Enhance on-site resource library of materials and widely publicize its availability to members
- Maximize integration of library resources into Center Web site

## **Board Development/Governance**

The Board and staff recognize that success will require a significantly enhanced Center infrastructure. The Board of Trustees is actively engaged in an ambitious board development/board recruitment effort, including the establishment of an advisory council in order to provide enhanced visibility, credibility, commitment and access to resources to enable the Center to realize the vision laid out in this plan.

### **Strengthen and Expand Board of Trustees**

- Recruit influential, connected individuals from non-profit, corporate and other sectors who are committed to the non-profit community and the pursuit of the Center's mission and strategic priorities, beginning with 5 new Board members in 2005
- Fortify long-term strength and stability by recruiting future board prospects for committee service to engage them in current Center work and gauge involvement and commitment
- Develop role, structure and composition of advisory council, with special attention to philanthropy and public policy objectives
- Continue to promote and exemplify the highest standards of integrity and accountability in all aspects of governance and operations