

STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY – 2015-2017

Introduction

New Jersey's non-profit community is an integral part of a strong economy and vibrant quality of life for the people of our state. Non-profits enhance our daily lives by caring for our most vulnerable people; preventing and treating disease; protecting our parks and beaches; offering artistic and cultural enrichment; providing spiritual fulfillment; mentoring our children; educating youth and adults alike; organizing for social change; providing vital services from infancy through senior years; and serving as an outlet for generosity, creativity, grief and hope. Non-profits are also an essential part of our economic well-being, through direct employment as well as training to help people find and keep jobs; payroll taxes and business relationships with local merchants and businesses; and countless programs, services and amenities that make communities appealing places for employers to locate, and for customers and employees to visit, live, and work.

The Center for Non-Profits was founded over thirty years ago in recognition of the indispensable role of non-profits for ALL New Jerseyans. This commitment to the vitality of non-profits, individually and collectively, continues to fuel the organization today.

The Planning Process

Recognizing the need to take stock of the organization's mission and programmatic priorities as measured against its capacity and the needs of the non-profit community and related stakeholders, the Center's leadership set out to update its strategic plan to span 2015 through 2017. Following an RFP process, the board selected Abby O'Neill, principal of Abby O'Neill Consulting, LLC, to facilitate the planning process.

The comprehensive planning process included a review of existing resources, including the Center's prior strategic and business plans, the Center's non-profit sector research reports, and various additional internal analyses and documents; extensive outreach to key stakeholder constituencies (member and non-member non-profits, funders, government officials, board and staff, and others) through online surveys, telephone interviews, and focus groups; and board/staff planning sessions to review findings and establish organizational priorities.

What We Found

Reputation

- The Center continues to command **a high level of respect and credibility as the state's leading voice for the non-profit community**, as well as for its **proven track record as a trusted, "go-to" resource for accurate, friendly delivery of information, training and capacity-building expertise.**

Programs

- Across the broad spectrum, stakeholders perceive the Center to be **an organization that delivers significant value to its members and the non-profit community through its programs and services.** This is especially true of three of its four core areas: building non-profit capacity, advocacy on behalf of the sector and educating non-profit leaders on best practice.

Strengths

- **The Center's greatest perceived strength is the role it plays in the state in the advocacy arena.** Even further, the Center's advocacy efforts represent a **unique identifying characteristic** that distinguishes the Center from other organizations serving the non-profit sector in the state.
- Members and non-members of the Center rely on the organization's **consistent ability to deliver much-needed, accurate information by a staff that is friendly and compassionate.**
- **The Center's annual conference is considered to be a key, "need to attend" event** by stakeholders for the networking, informational and educational opportunities it offers.

Gaps and Opportunities

- Stakeholders are keenly interested in having the Center **expand its role as a leading convener of the non-profit community in New Jersey.**
- Non-profit stakeholders want **more tailored access to relevant information, education, and resources** as they are bombarded with information from a multitude of sources.
- **The Center must clarify its branding and value proposition** in order to more clearly distinguish itself from other organizations that may seem similar, and to more strongly demonstrate both the benefits and the broader value of investing in the Center as a member.
- **Non-profit stakeholders are eager to be more engaged by the Center as volunteers** on committees and as mentors/advisors to other non-profits.
- The Center must **intensify and regularize its communications efforts**, both about its own programs, services and achievements, and more broadly about the value of the non-profit community to the quality of life in New Jersey, in order to build on its already positive reputation and foster an external climate favorable for non-profits to thrive.
- In order to leverage resources, enhance value, ensure availability of high quality services, and expand its reach, the Center should **continue to pursue targeted partnerships**, particularly in areas where overlap in offerings exists (e.g., workshops/webinars, consulting services).
- In order to effectively deliver on its value proposition, **the Center's current programs and services must be streamlined** to allow the Center to lead from its areas of strength.
- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, even with enhanced partnerships and recommended program adjustments, **increased organizational capacity is absolutely essential** if the Center is to deliver programs and services more effectively, engage in more consistent communications, play an even more powerful advocacy role, and to implement an aggressive, sustainable fundraising effort that is perceived as being crucial to the Center's longevity and success. Although increased staffing is a priority need, realizing the vision that internal and external stakeholders have articulated for the Center will require the collective commitment of the board, staff, funders, non-profits and other allies alike. All have a stake in a strong non-profit community and in a fortified Center for Non-Profits to champion and strengthen our state's non-profits in the coming years.

The Plan

Mission

To build the power of New Jersey's non-profit community to improve the quality of life for the people of our state.

Vision

- The non-profit community in New Jersey is strong, vibrant, appreciated and possesses the financial, human and knowledge resources needed to improve the quality of life in our communities, state, nation and across the globe.
- The Center for Non-Profits is a high visibility, high impact leader, champion, convener, and resource for and about New Jersey's non-profit community.

Our Value Proposition

The Center for Non-Profits:

- **Champions and protects** the non-profit community as an indispensable part of the social and economic well-being of New Jersey and its residents.
- **Advances knowledge and promotes best practices** to foster effective, ethical organizations in furtherance of the public good.
- **Convenes and fosters connections** between and among non-profit organizations and their champions, as well as partners in government and for-profit business, in order to enhance collective strength.

Core Focus Areas

Advocacy/Public Education

Vision

- The Center is the leading champion and sought-out resource on New Jersey's non-profit community, with a level of influence comparable to the major associations representing for-profit interests in the state.
- Policy makers in New Jersey who develop legislation, regulations or policy proposals affecting non-profits regularly seek the Center's input on such items prior to, or during their development. The Center's position is regularly sought on key non-profit policy issues of the day.
- The media contact the Center regularly for insights/comments about issues pertaining to the charitable community. The Center's press releases/media campaigns receive coverage in appropriate media outlets.

Key Activities

- Policy analysis, issue advocacy, lobbying
- Promoting non-profits as a community to media, government, business, non-profits themselves
 - Non-profit research (surveys, etc.) and dissemination
 - Public awareness campaigns/communications efforts

Technical Assistance/Capacity Building

Vision

- The Center is the FIRST stop resource for information and referrals on technical assistance and capacity building
- The Center, *with strategic partners*, is a means by which organizations obtain, or are connected to, sources of high quality, accessible, affordable, management and compliance assistance to boost operations and effectiveness
- The Center provides opportunities for organizations to boost capacity by stretching resources (e.g., referrals, cost- and time-savings)

Key Activities

- Non-Profit Central – online clearinghouse, resource directory, documents, job postings, events
- Help desk (phone/email assistance)
- Website
- With strategic partners, workshops, webinars and customized consulting

Convening/Strengthening the Non-Profit Community

Vision

- The Center is known as a major convener of non-profits and their stakeholders for strategic issue discussion, problem solving, and intelligence-gathering.
- The Center's strength as a convener is evidenced by its strong and vibrant membership (900 by 12/31/2017)

Key Activities

- Annual Statewide Conference
- Issue briefings/town halls/local or regional convenings around common issues
- Issue-specific task forces

Governance/Ethics

Vision

- The Center, through its board, staff, volunteers, and programming, exemplifies the highest levels of ethical standards and commitment to excellence and sound practice in all aspects of its work.
- The Center's board is fully engaged and invested in the financial sustainability and programmatic impact of the organization in fulfilling its mission to the non-profit community of New Jersey.
- The board represents and serves the interests of a diverse array of organization subsectors, constituencies, populations and stakeholders the pursuit of the Center's mission.

Center for Non-Profits

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