

2021-2024 Strategic Plan Framework

Adopted by the Board of Trustees May 21, 2021

INTRODUCTION

The Center for Non-Profits was founded in 1982 in recognition of the indispensable role of non-profits for all New Jerseyans. This commitment, to the individual and collective vitality of non-profits in furtherance of the public good, continues to fuel the organization today.

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 illness and disease; protecting our parks and beaches; offering artistic and cultural enrichment; providing inspiration and 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; 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.

Our society and the non-profit community are at a crossroads. The pandemic, political divisions, and heightened outcry for racial justice have laid bare deep inequities and years of under-investment in critical systems and needs – including non-profits and the people and communities they serve, and particularly marginalized communities and people of color. As non-profits, if we are to fulfill our promise of making society better through our missions and actions, we must recommit ourselves to advancing an equitable society, and actively working against systemic racism and injustice, through our direct programs and operations, through advocacy and systems change.

As the Center for Non-Profits looks forward it is committed to adopting a strategic plan that is grounded in equity and justice while advancing strategies for a strong Center as an independent voice and trusted resource in service to the community, to advance a thriving New Jersey for all.

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Center for Non-Profits is a New Jersey non-profit corporation and a federally recognized 501(c)(3) publicly supported charity.

The Strategic Planning Process

Beginning in October 2020 through May 2021, the Center for Non-Profits engaged in a process to update its strategic plan spanning the period of 2021-2024. The goal was to understand recent general trends occurring in the non-profit sector—especially in light of the ongoing crisis due to the pandemic; incorporate learning from recent survey data and other input from the non-profit field; identify the Center’s strengths, big ideas and opportunities; and build consensus on a set of priorities, goals, and strategies for inclusion in the new plan.

The work was guided by the Center’s Strategic Planning Committee and Board, the Center’s staff, and supported by Elizabeth Murphy of Rathú Consulting who facilitated the process. The process collected existing data and new feedback from the Center’s major stakeholders and accessed a variety of reports and survey data. One-on-one interviews were conducted with all Board and staff members. More than 75 racially, culturally and generationally diverse stakeholders from throughout New Jersey—representing a wide variety of fields, disciplines, sectors, organization types and budget sizes, and geographies—were convened, via Zoom, in a series of four community conversations where colleagues were asked for their opinion on more than a dozen questions relating to general trends, and their needs regarding organizational challenges, equity outcomes, professional development, networking and advocacy.

The ideas and insight noted throughout this plan were informed by the Center’s Strategic Planning Committee, Diversity and Equity Committee, stakeholder interviews (between Board, staff and consultant), and the statewide community conversations, along with data from recent statewide surveys including 2020 rapid response COVID surveys and [The State of New Jersey’s Non-Profit Community: 2021 Trends and Outlook Report](#).

The Center’s Strengths

- The Center is widely seen as the leading policy and advocacy organization for New Jersey’s non-profit community. Advocacy efforts are highly regarded and vitally necessary for the non-profit sector.
- Knowledge-sharing, professional development, data-gathering, convening, and networking opportunities are valued and needed.
- The Center staff are highly respected and experienced, recognized for their depth of knowledge, expertise, connections, and commitment to the non-profit community.
- Strong partnerships with key stakeholder organizations and communities.
- An engaged, committed board.

The Center’s Challenges

- The need to build the Center’s infrastructure in order for the Center to deepen and expand impact, and continue to meet the challenges facing the non-profit community in the years ahead.
- The need to be ready to lead and support the sector as we emerge from the pandemic without knowing how the sector will be permanently changed by the crisis and what the new landscape will look like.
- The need and opportunity to increase membership to amplify non-profit cohesion and voice.
- The challenge of boosting constituent engagement in a high-stress, “high-noise” environment.
- The need for a comprehensive branding campaign and communications strategy that re-envision how the Center describes and distinguishes itself, its impact, and value proposition, in order to heighten visibility, promote and cultivate membership, and communicate the value and importance of the non-profit community.

Top Issues Most Important in Maintaining and Improving the Non-Profit Sector in the Next Decade

From the [February 2021 Issues and Trends Survey](#)

- Foundation and corporate funding
- COVID-19 recovery
- Advancing non-profit diversity/inclusion and equity
- Infrastructure and capacity-building
- attracting/retaining capable, committed board members
- giving and volunteering incentives
- improving public understanding about non-profits

Top Issues Facing Individual Non-Profits

From the February 2021 Issues and Trends Survey

- financial uncertainty
- the need for better branding or communications
- the need for a stronger board
- COVID-19 recovery
- increased demand for program services
- the need for strategic planning
- the need to improve diversity/equity/cultural competence
- increased benefits/insurance costs
- inability to afford enough good staff

General Trends

- COVID-19 has changed the entire landscape – health, the economy, work, volunteerism, philanthropy, technology and more.
- Over the years, the non-profit sector has taken on an increased workload because government has scaled back its role in providing those services.
- Non-profits made needlessly vulnerable by years of under-funding have now been thrown into crisis by the pandemic. This is years of the [Nonprofit Starvation Cycle](#) coming home to roost, with dire consequences for the organizations and the causes/communities they serve.
 - Some funders have increased their funding and flexibility during the pandemic, providing a much-needed opportunity to encourage making more of these changes permanent.
- Heightened awareness of the need for every non-profit to advance equity, diversity, and anti-racism, internally, through their programming, and throughout society.
 - Longstanding inequities have been exacerbated in prior years and illuminated by the pandemic and increased awareness of violence against people of color.
 - Non-profit board and staff leadership are disproportionately white and do not reflect the broader population. Many, if not most, non-profits are aware of the problems, but many are also seeking direction, training and tools to help them address it.
- Technology is transforming how we operate, creating tremendous opportunity but also illuminating and amplifying inequities.
- Greater emphasis on the need for extensive data collection and transparency in evaluating programs and services; need to make informed decisions using technology.

The Center's strategic plan is informed by these trends and reflects the mission, vision, values and beliefs that appear on the following pages.

MISSION

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

VISION

We envision a New Jersey non-profit community that is strong, vibrant, valued, and effective in advancing a civically engaged society and equitably delivering a thriving quality of life to all communities throughout the state of New Jersey.

Guided by our values, 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.

WE BELIEVE:

- American society is improved by the essential partnership between charitable and civic non-profits and philanthropic organizations, government, and enterprise to create abundance and solve society's most critical challenges.
- Charitable non-profit organizations are a vibrant force for advancing a just, thriving, and equitable society and economy.
- New Jersey's civic life is enhanced by charitable non-profits engaging residents, listening with the intent to hear, exercising leadership, connecting resources to communities, and delivering results consistent with non-profit missions.
- Charitable non-profits deliver results when they have capacity to meet their missions and create a positive impact on lives and communities.

WE VALUE:

- **Leadership:** We seek to strengthen non-profits by facilitating pathways for equitable representation and professional development for a broad array of people, diverse backgrounds, abilities, and perspectives, especially Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). We commit to listening deeply and respectfully, and to broadening our perspective before we act.
- **Integrity:** We maintain the highest standards of professional and ethical behavior, and value transparency and honesty in our communications, relationships, and actions. We expect the same of our collaborators and constituents.
- **Equity:** We champion and commit to removing cultural and racial injustices and dismantling structures that prevent people from fair access to livelihood, education, resources, and participation in public policy and the cultural life of society.
- **Inclusion:** We expand, amplify, and leverage the collective voice and thereby increase available resources of the charitable non-profit community to enhance public well-being.
- **Learning:** We seek and share qualitative and quantitative information to improve our impact and the ability of charitable and philanthropic organizations to adapt and excel.
- **Collaboration:** We are committed to seek abundance, build and maintain relationships, and partner with communities, non-profits, private and public interest to accomplish our mission. We will not work alone or compete for its own sake.

STRATEGIC PILLARS

- **Champion and advocate** for the non-profit community as an indispensable part of the social and economic well-being of New Jersey and its residents.
- **Advance knowledge and promote learning** to foster effective, equitable and ethical organizations in furtherance of the public good.
- **Convene and foster 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.
- **Advance diversity, equity and inclusion** within our own organization, the non-profit sector and the broader community and beyond.

GOALS for 2021-2024

The following goals are organized within the framework of our strategic pillars. The achievement of these goals is closely tied to the Center's own infrastructure needs and the internal organizational capacity-building which must occur in order to position the Center to realize these high-level, sector-facing strategic goals. Infrastructure capacity-building strategies are detailed immediately following the goals section.

Pillar: Champion and Advocate for the non-profit community as an indispensable part of the social, economic and equitable well-being of New Jersey and its residents.

GOAL

Amplify the stature, value and understanding of the immense societal impact of the non-profit community among policymakers, business and philanthropic leaders, journalists, and the general public, and partner with other statewide and regional organizations, in order to leverage the increased notoriety and drive support for the development of:

- favorable non-profit public policy;
- equitable and sustainable funding practices and priorities; and
- a diverse statewide non-profit community with fair and equitable access to human, knowledge and financial capital so that, together, the public and private sectors can solve societal problems and build sustainable, healthy, and prosperous communities.

Work with the Council of New Jersey Grantmakers and other like-minded organizations to reframe the conversation with philanthropy and donors to foster more equitable and helpful funding practices (e.g., more general operating support grants; more multi-year funding; streamlining applications and reports; eliminating the overhead myth; etc.)

Pillar: Advance knowledge and promote learning to foster effective, equitable and ethical organizations in furtherance of the public good.

GOALS

Build capacity for non-profits to achieve their missions, with a focused commitment on engaging organizations led by and serving people of color by:

- surveying and assessing current capacity building needs, readiness, providers, access, investment and impact;
- formalizing strategic partnerships to strengthen reach and effectiveness, ensuring that we collaborate when possible; and
- designing and deploying a suite of programs, educational, and cost-saving tools that assist organizations and their staff in building both [adaptive and technical](#) competencies, in order to increase mission impact and build and sustain high-performing organizations.

Pillar: Convene and foster 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.

GOAL

Strengthen social and civic cohesiveness and trust throughout New Jersey by:

- sharing non-profit impact stories highlighting the diverse array of missions;
- building relationships between people and organizations with a heightened focus on fostering multi-racial and multi-ethnic connections;
- cultivating connections between members (and across missions, budget size and geographies) in order to fortify a statewide community of practice among non-profits; and
- promoting, fostering, and celebrating partnerships between and among non-profits and allies in government and for-profit business.

Membership (nests under all strategic pillars)

The Center for Non-Profits has been a membership organization since its inception. Membership provides a vital catalyst for non-profit connections, collaborations, and engagement; heightens the collective strength, solidarity and public policy clout of the non-profit community; provides opportunity for pooling resources and cost efficiencies; and fortifies the Center's effectiveness and sustainability by providing an active voice in, and financial support for, the Center. Integral to this is strengthening a culture of membership and advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in our membership activities and services.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Reaching the Center's 2021—24 strategic vision requires that the Center strengthen its own infrastructure and build capacity equal and necessary to meeting its ambitious goals. The Center has identified a number of strategies nested under a capacity building framework which, when successfully implemented, will position the Center to achieve its 2021-24 strategic goals.

CAPACITY 1. Vision and Impact Model: a clear and detailed description of the impact the organization is trying to create, mapped to the set of organizational activities that help produce that impact.

CAPACITY 2. Governance and Leadership Capacity: a board and staff leadership that have the skills needed to work effectively together in service of the Center's mission.

CAPACITY 3. Program Delivery: staff, technology, facilities, and other capabilities needed to deliver programs effectively and in fidelity to the impact model

CAPACITY 4. Resource Generation: a strong funding model to guide resource generation, and the capabilities to secure resources over time.

CAPACITY 5. Evaluation and Learning: tools, processes, infrastructure, and culture that support continuous program and organizational improvement.

CAPACITY 6. Strategic Relationships: the ability to nurture and maintain the external relationships necessary for success, including program delivery partners, funding relationships, and public policy support.