

NONPROFIT NEWS

Information and connections for Minnesota's nonprofit sector.

**Special legislative session issue*

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New Minnesota state budget takes important steps, falls short of transformational change

by Clark Goldenrod, deputy director & Nan Madden, director, Minnesota Budget Project

Facing a pandemic and economic crisis, state policymakers had a critical task this legislative session: pass a two-year budget that meets Minnesotans’ health, safety, and economic security needs, and builds a more equitable recovery. After a year and a half of significant disruptions to education, work, family, and community, and the bright spotlight that shone on long-standing disparities and disinvestment, many Minnesotans called for transformative solutions.

Policymakers and advocates had to adapt to a rapidly changing state budget landscape. The state faced projected deficits when the 2021 session began. But it soon became clear [the pandemic’s economic impact was remarkably uneven](#). Many of those with the most resources actually were seeing their incomes and wealth grow, so damage to state tax revenues was less than expected. By February, state forecasters projected a \$1.6 billion budget surplus. Federal policymakers passed additional financial resources for state and local governments as well; state policymakers allocated \$1.1 billion in flexible federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars to support the new state budget over the next four years.

While some budget components will have a meaningful impact on Minnesotans’ lives, it falls short of making transformational change.

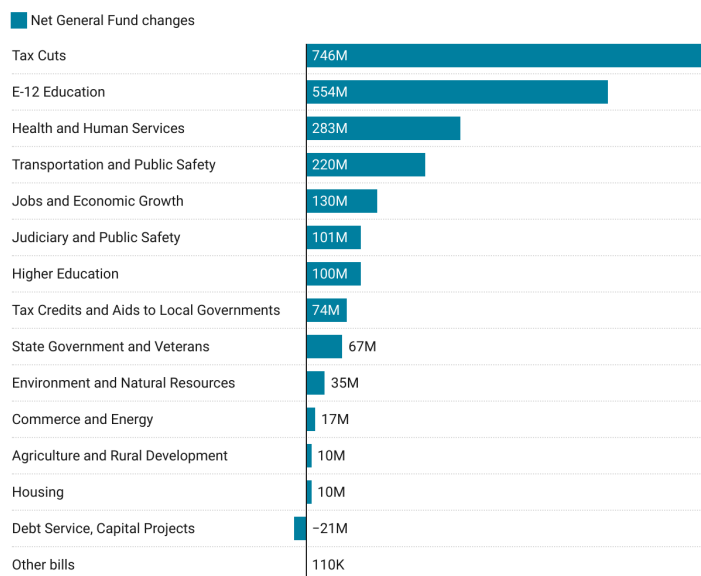
Nearly half of the state’s FY 2022-23 surplus was allocated to tax cuts, primarily for businesses that received federal PPP loans and people who received Unemployment Insurance.

The largest new investment was in E-12 education, which received \$554 million in net additional funding for FY 2022-23. The basic student formula, the largest source of state funding to school districts, is increased by 2.45 percent in FY 2022 and 2 percent in FY 2023. The education budget also includes a handful of proposals related to expanding the number of teachers of color to better ensure a quality education and supports for all students, whether Black, Brown, or white. Addressing deep divides in opportunity through our education system is critical, but Minnesota still has a long way to go.

Several priorities the Minnesota Budget Project and our partners advocated for were included in the budget.

One highlight is a one-time \$435 payment for the very low-income families participating in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), who have been disproportionately likely to suffer job loss but have had less access to pandemic-related economic supports. The budget also includes a long-overdue annual cost of living adjustment to the MFIP grant amount so that these families can better afford basic expenses like diapers and rent.

FY 2022-23 Minnesota State Budget



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The budget also increases provider reimbursement rates in the Child Care Assistance Program, which helps ensure families can choose a child care provider that meet their needs.

Budget elements that promote Minnesotans’ health include extending health care coverage through Medicaid for new parents for twelve months after they have given birth, and reducing MinnesotaCare insurance premiums. But policymakers failed to advance access to affordable health insurance for Minnesotans who fall through the cracks, including workers without affordable insurance through their employers and undocumented Minnesotans.

[This article continues on page 6.](#)

Letter from Jon Pratt, retiring executive director

Fixing foundation forms, quicker DAF philanthropy, and a fond farewell

What are the biggest “pain points” for the people whose job it is to submit grant applications to foundations? That was the underlying question in 2,600 anonymous reviews of 800 grantmakers submitted to [GrantAdvisor.org](https://www.grantadvisor.org), the “TripAdvisor for foundations” site hosted by MCN.

To specifically identify the top changes needed, a survey collected 500 responses from grantseekers across nine countries, representing every shape, size, and activity area of the nonprofit sector.

Three of the top technical time wasters were:

- Inability to see the entire online form in advance;
- Time taken is disproportionate to the amount awarded;
- Forms you can’t save and return to.

How did GrantAdvisor.org take this data and transform it into tangible change that saves nonprofits one million hours? [Read the full story on page 13.](#)

Congress asked to accelerate charitable resources

A growing number of nonprofits and foundations, including MCN, are calling for federal legislation to put more funds that have already received tax preferences to work in charities. The ACE Act (Accelerating Charitable Efforts) would create two categories of donor advised funds (DAFs) – 15 year and 50 year – with immediate tax deductibility reserved for DAF donors whose contributions are put to use within 15 years.

[A July legislative briefing sponsored by MCN](#), along with MCN’s California counterpart CalNonprofits, provided an overview of the legislation and arguments for and against the changes to 450 participants.

A poll during the Zoom event revealed that 90 percent agreed that addressing the issues related to DAFs and private foundations is important for the nonprofit community, and 77 percent said that nonprofits should take a position on this legislation.

[Learn more about this important legislation for nonprofits, and sign-on your support.](#)



Wrapping up and welcoming MCN’s new executive director

As MCN’s executive director since 1987, I have been honored to work alongside an amazing set of Minnesota organizations and their leaders, from arts and human services to environmental and neighborhood groups. One lesson of 2020 is that the world needs more of what nonprofits do, often under difficult conditions and with limited resources.

I have been continually inspired by the incredible creativity and determination on the part of Minnesota’s nonprofit leaders, constantly responding to new communities, ideas, and needs.

I am deeply grateful to the spirit of organizations doing together what they could not do apart – from MCN’s first member 33 years ago to our 2,300th member in 2021.

Bringing on new leadership is a dynamic time for any organization, and I know that MCN is well positioned for its next chapter with [Nonoko Sato as our new Executive Director.](#)

Onward!

2021 legislative session: nonprofit state policy priorities

by Marie Ellis, public policy director

Volunteer Mileage Reimbursement

Let's start with a win! One of the policy issues we have been working toward, volunteer mileage reimbursement, was signed into law. [We worked in a coalition with other nonprofits and state agencies](#) to make this a reality. The solution is an income tax subtraction for volunteer drivers. This means volunteer drivers will not have to count their reimbursement as income-at the state level! Now onto the federal level fix...

'Racial Equity Impact Notes' Working Group

MCN advocated for a working group to design a method or framework to analyze the racial equity impacts of legislation within the timeline of the legislative session. [Racial Equity Impact Notes](#) are similar to Fiscal Notes and Environmental Impact Notes, in that they ask legislators to engage in a process of analysis to determine the impacts of legislation. A significant challenge of the working group would be to figure out a way to conduct a meaningful process of identifying the racial equity impacts of legislation within the Legislature's timeline. Unfortunately, creation of such a working group was not included in final legislation. We will continue to work with [Voices for Racial Justice](#), [Center for Economic Inclusion](#), and other partners to impress upon legislators the importance of a process of identifying racial equity impacts of legislation.

One-Time ARPA Federal Dollars

2021 final legislation did not include creation of a nonprofit relief fund, using one-time federal dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which MCN had strongly advocated for.

MCN will continue to work with our partners to advocate with the Office of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor on the importance of relief for nonprofits!

Capital Project Grants

A somewhat unexpected win is the inclusion of \$24 million for a targeted capital project competitive grant program for nonprofits and government entities that serve "underserved communities or economically disadvantaged persons or groups." MCN will share more information as the program and application are created.

Main Street COVID-19 Programs

MCN was successful in our advocacy to include nonprofits as eligible for relief in two Main Street programs. The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development will administer these programs.

- [Main Street COVID-19 Relief Grant Program](#): This is a \$70 million program to help small businesses, including "nonprofit organizations that earn revenue in ways similar to businesses, including but not limited to ticket sales and membership fees," negatively impacted by COVID-19. A significant portion of this \$70 million will be dedicated to helping Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) owned organizations, veteran and women-owned organizations, and small organizations with six or fewer full-time workers.
- [Main Street Economic Revitalization Program](#): This \$80 million statewide economic redevelopment program will award grants to partner organizations so they can provide grants and

guaranteed loans for economic development and redevelopment projects. These projects are intended to address the greatest needs that have arisen in our communities since March 15, 2020 and spur economic revitalization across Minnesota. Nonprofit organizations, businesses, and developers are eligible recipients.

Elections

We are happy to report that [Voter Photo ID](#) did not make it into the final State Government Finance and Elections omnibus bill. Unfortunately, the effort to expand voting rights to people convicted of felonies did not make it into the final omnibus bill either. One big change this year was creating uniform standard governing for absentee ballot drop boxes-which had bipartisan support. The new statute defines what a drop box is, requires drop boxes to be emptied once per business day, and prohibits electioneering within 100 feet of a drop box, along with other requirements.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Office

We were happy to support the efforts of creating an office focused on addressing the atrocities committed against Indigenous peoples. The MMIR Office will hold the MN Legislature and state agencies accountable for implementing mandates in the [Minnesota Task Force on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Report](#). It will also facilitate further research, evaluate progress toward implementation and impact of MMIW-related efforts, and create relationships between Tribal government and state agencies to examine and end systemic causes behind the violence that Indigenous women and girls experience.

Guest column by Nicole MartinRogers, senior research manager, Wilder Research

How nonprofits can address Minnesota’s Missing and Murdered Indigenous women injustice

You may have heard about efforts to raise awareness about the [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women \(MMIW\) injustice in Minnesota](#) and across Turtle Island (North America). American Indian women and girls make up less than 1 percent of our state’s population but they account for 8 percent of all murder victims. There may be 50 or more American Indian women and girls missing in any given month in Minnesota, according to official statistics.

The MMIW injustice has taken over 500 years to create. It is rooted in systemic racism, misogyny, the sexual objectification of Indigenous women and girls, and colonialism. It is perpetuated by social systems that create inequities for Indigenous peoples including in the areas of poverty, housing, law enforcement and criminal justice system involvement, and child welfare system involvement, as well as the experiences of Indigenous peoples with education, health care, employment, and other systems.

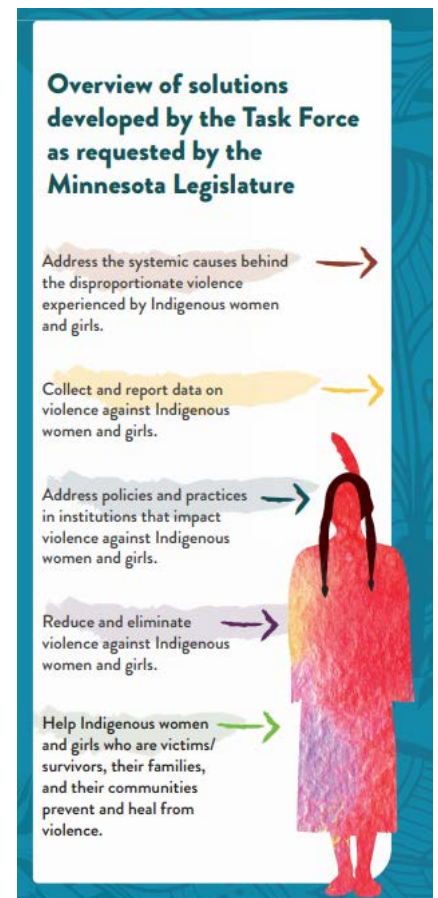
Wilder Research was contracted by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety to conduct the research and prepare the final report for the MMIW Task Force. Here are three things I learned from this project that Minnesota nonprofits can do to address the MMIW injustice:

1. **Find out if & how your organization serves Indigenous people directly.** Then, learn more about resources you and your clients can access to address culturally-specific needs and MMIW risk factors using a trauma-informed and harm-reduction approach. For example, the STRONGHEARTS Native Helpline is an important resource to become

familiar with, at 1-844-7NATIVE or [StrongHeartsHelpline.org](#).

2. **Get to know the Indigenous-led organizations and tribal offices on reservations and in urban areas around the state that are leading efforts to end the MMIW injustice, as well as those that provide victim services or address needs that overlaps with your organization’s area of focus.** For example, if you are a housing or domestic violence provider, you may want to find out more about programs like [Mending the Sacred Hoop](#) to determine what you can do to amplify Indigenous leadership on issues related to MMIW injustice. The [Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition](#) is another leader in this space. Visit [ELEVATE | UPLIFT](#) to find out how your organization can learn from partners and others involved in social and systemic change.
3. **Become familiar with the 20 mandates in the [MMIW Task Force’s report](#), and consider if and how your organization’s advocacy efforts align.** If you work with schools, you should know that mandate #15 recommends age-appropriate healthy relationship and consent education for all K-12 public school students in Minnesota. This could be a life-saving intervention for a child that is being exploited in their foster home or community, who might not even realize that what is being done to them is wrong. (“Normalized violence” is a huge concern among people at risk of becoming MMIW.) Also, if your organization operates

in areas where “man camps” associated with extractive industries operate, make sure everyone is aware of sex trafficking and [how it may show up in your community](#). See mandate #18.



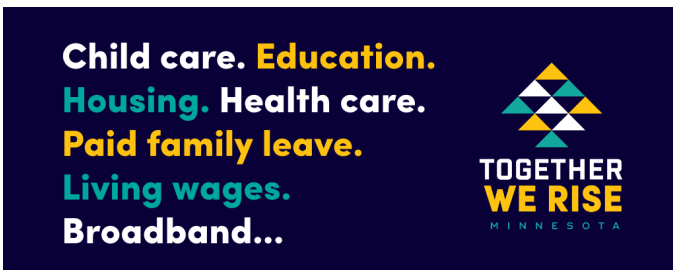
The Public Safety Finance Bill that was passed by the Minnesota Legislature on June 30, 2021, includes funding to create a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Office within the State of Minnesota, recommendation #1 from the report. This office will lead the work of continuing to understand how systems and policies contribute to this problem. All of us, including nonprofits, are important components in addressing the MMIW injustice.

An abundance in which *all Minnesotans* can share, if we choose to

by Meghan Marriott, engagement manager, Minnesota Budget Project

From addressing hunger to homelessness, education to economic opportunity, the environment to the arts, Minnesota nonprofits work to meet Minnesotans' needs and build toward a future where all of us can thrive. Through our service to Minnesotans, we know those needs were only exacerbated from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic recession.

One way the Minnesota Budget Project and MCN sought to call for that future was [launching a public policy campaign, Together We Rise Minnesota](#). More than 100 organizations of various sizes, missions, and geographies signed on to principles urging state leaders to raise revenues from those with the most resources in order to address the public health emergency, economic downturn, and the state's long-standing racial disparities.



We cheered when progressive revenue policies, such as a new millionaire's income tax bracket, were reflected in Governor Tim Walz's budget proposal and the Minnesota House's tax plan. These budget blueprints called on the highest-income Minnesotans and profitable corporations to contribute more to sustain the investments in schools, thriving communities, affordable housing, and more that we'll need to truly recover from the past year.

Our chorus of voices ensured policymaker champions continued to push for additional progressive revenues until the very end of the regular legislative session. However, Senate leaders did not agree to raise tax revenues in the final budget agreement.

Fortunately, federal policymakers recognized the need to rise to the moment, and sent additional funding to state, local, and tribal governments. This provides the opportunity to respond to the pandemic and address disparities and disinvestment. But these additional resources are temporary. We'll need to spend these additional federal dollars wisely, and we'll need ongoing state revenues to sustain those needed investments.

As Minnesota's health and economy improves, let's understand that our pre-pandemic "normal" wasn't good enough. Minnesota's status quo across a range of indicators—from housing to employment to health and education—is deeply inadequate. There is still work to do for all of us to be part of this state's prosperity, including lower-income and Black, Indigenous, and people of color Minnesotans.

[Together We Rise Minnesota](#) will continue to build a network of nonprofits, other partner organizations, and individuals. We know that Minnesota is a state of abundance and we have the resources to build a just and equitable future. Our state simply needs to prioritize our shared values and ask those doing well in our economy to contribute a bit more.

Continued from page 2...

New Minnesota state budget takes important steps, falls short of transformational change'

In response to the police killings of several Black men, the FY 2022-23 budget includes some provisions to help keep Minnesotans, and particularly Black and Brown Minnesotans, safer in their interactions with police. These include limits on no-knock warrants and changes in how 911 operators handle mental health calls. Here too, there is still much more progress to be made.

More of our state's younger workers will qualify for the Working Family Tax Credit, providing an important income boost. However, the tax bill did not include our other recommendations to make the tax system more inclusive and prioritize essential workers and other struggling Minnesotans.

Unfortunately, several of our priorities to build a more equitable economy did not make it into the budget, such as:

- Statewide earned sick and safe leave and paid family and medical leave;
- Access to driver's licenses regardless of immigration status; and
- Creating Racial Equity Impact Notes to make racial equity an integral part of the legislative process.

This article only scratches the surface of the state budget, see more analysis at the [Minnesota Budget Project's website](#).

Nonprofit News & Announcements



The St. Paul Festival and Heritage Foundation announced that Lisa Jacobson has been hired as its new president and CEO.



After a nationwide search, Search Institute has named Benjamin Houlberg, Ph.D., LMFT, president and CEO.



Stepping Stone announced the addition of Jennifer Horton as its program director.



Plains Art Museum welcomes Suzanne Sakske and Christine Jaeger to its Board of Directors, with incoming board chair Brian Halverson.



American Public Media Group, including Minnesota Public Radio and American Public Media, announced that Heather Riddle is the organization's new senior vice president and chief development officer.



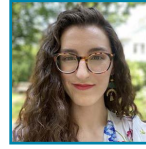
Interfaith Outreach announced Adam Faitek as their new advancement director.



MCN has named Kari Aanestad as associate director; Kari was previously MCN's director of advancement.



Kelly LaCore has been named MCN's Greater Minnesota and Northeast Minnesota regional manager; Kelly was previously MCN's Northeast regional coordinator.



Kat McCaffery has been named Finance and Database Assistant at MCN; Kat was previously MCN's program assistant.



MCN's Board of Directors unanimously voted to appoint Nonoko Sato to the role of executive director, effective August 1, 2021.

Nonoko steps into this leadership role after serving as MCN's associate director since January 2018. [Read the full announcement.](#)

Submit Your Announcements

MCN member organizations are invited to submit your organization's awards, staffing announcements, and other news to ldunford@minnesotanonprofits.org. MCN cannot guarantee that all announcements will make it into *Nonprofit News*.



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BIPOC Nonprofits Index, a free resource to build equity

by Kari Aanestad, associate director

Building on the efforts of people who have been working for decades to expand power, influence, and resources of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities, earlier this year MCN launched a free community resource: the [BIPOC Nonprofits Index](#).

The Index aggregates public information about BIPOC-led and/or –serving nonprofits as a resource for community members, foundations, policymakers, government agencies, donors, and nonprofits looking to partner with, invest in, and amplify the work of BIPOC-led and/or –serving nonprofits.

What’s new in the Index?

MCN first announced the launch of this tool in the beginning of 2021; since that time, a few significant changes have occurred:

- Information on new groups: With additional community input, the Index has been expanded and now contains information on 530+ nonprofit organizations primarily led by and/or serving BIPOC communities.
- Expanded information: Building on the original Index’s publicly available information (organization name, website, mailing address, founding year, financial information, and primary activity area – all disaggregated by primary racial/ethnic community), the latest version of the Index now also includes information on the Minnesota House and Senate state representatives (names, political party) and district according to the nonprofit’s mailing address.

How are people using the Index?

Since launching the free tool, 130+ individuals have downloaded the Index, ranging from members of the state’s largest private and community foundations, staff at all levels of government, nonprofit leaders, graduate students, independent consultants, and more.

- Half are using the Index to expand their networks and explore partnership opportunities.
- 15 percent are using it to direct charitable giving as individuals and/or foundations, or to promote government funding opportunities.
- 10 percent are using it for applied research on the sector.

What people are saying about the Index:

- “[I’m using this Index] to identify BIPOC democracy partners to reach out to and see how we can plan for long-term organizing efforts to educate BIPOC voters on how to navigate spaces of power and effective engage elected/decision makers.”
- “Our small community foundation is just beginning its DEI work and this is important knowledge to have!”
- “We are working on decolonizing our nonprofit and I want to see what community groups we can support.”
- “I’m interested in sharing BIPOC-led and BIPOC-serving organizations with our staff and board so that they can donate both time and money.”

[Download the BIPOC Nonprofits Index today.](#)



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Will American Rescue Plan Act funds go to Minnesota nonprofits?

by Marie Ellis, public policy director

As my kids would say, there are “gobzillions” of dollars coming into the state from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). We’re actually talking about billions of dollars, called “one-time” money, because, well, it only comes once.

It’s likely no surprise to readers of *Nonprofit News* that Minnesota nonprofits have stepped up in unprecedented ways to meet heightened community needs for nonprofit services, due to the pandemic and economic recession. Yet the very programs and infrastructure that strengthen community wellness and economic vitality for people across Minnesota are struggling to stay afloat. Demand for nonprofit services and the resulting costs of operating during a pandemic have outpaced revenues. Philanthropy and private donations alone cannot fill the gap.

Nonprofit missions are aligned with public purposes. Our state, cities, and counties have long relied on nonprofits as partners in creating and supporting thriving communities. Allocating federal emergency relief and recovery funds to support Minnesota’s nonprofit sector is imperative to maintaining their ability to address current needs and improve recovery outcomes for communities across the state.

It will also come as no surprise that the state and our sector are not yet back to “normal,” and here’s the kicker: getting back to normal should not be our goal. The pandemic and recession shone more light on the deep racial and geographic inequities in Minnesota, rooted in place long before COVID. Policymakers have an opportunity to intentionally focus on an equitable recovery as they invest the dollars coming into the state from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

Merging these two ideas, that supporting nonprofits and their communities is aligned with public purposes, and that we need to bring about a more equitable Minnesota, MCN is advocating that the state, counties, and cities receiving ARPA dollars apply some of it towards nonprofit relief funds, and that these funds prioritize BIPOC nonprofits. ([Learn about MCN’s BIPOC Nonprofits Index on page 8.](#))

We urge decision makers to prioritize culturally-specific nonprofits in relief funds in part because communities of color were hit hardest by the pandemic and the economic recession. Culturally specific nonprofits not only support many communities of color, they themselves are a vital part

of the nonprofit ecosystem with their own unique challenges to funding.

Nonprofits are at the frontlines of communities throughout the COVID pandemic and well into the future of recovery. They see what communities and families need and have expansive networks to provide support.

At the state level, [MCN and partners have proposed a state Nonprofit Resiliency and Recovery Fund \(NRRF\)](#), using \$50 million of ARPA funds and prioritizing culturally-specific nonprofits and nonprofits in greater Minnesota.

At the city and county level, [MCN sent a letter to all 87 counties and 21 metropolitan cities in Minnesota](#), urging these municipalities to use some of the federal relief dollars coming to them for grants to nonprofits in their areas, and providing suggested eligibility criteria, best practices for grant applications, decision making and reporting, and other tips for a successful grant program.

How can you help? I’m so glad you asked! Advocate for what your nonprofit and your communities need! [First, sign your organization onto this letter to state leaders.](#)

Able to do more? Bolster our efforts by [sharing our letter with municipal officials you partner with](#), along with a note about how the pandemic and economic recession have affected your nonprofit and the communities you partner with.

You have seen firsthand how nonprofits helped Minnesotans make it through the worst of the pandemic. Now we need to ensure nonprofits, especially culturally-specific nonprofits, can continue to support the recovery and rebuilding of impacted communities across the state, contributing to a more equitable recovery. While the “gobzillions” of dollars are one-time, investing those dollars through nonprofits will yield ongoing returns.

**Share the letter
with county &
city officials.**



Following financial hardship, St. Paul nonprofit discovers vital employee health benefits through BenefitsMN

by John Wurm, membership and communications director

For nearly 40 years, the [National Youth Leadership Council \(NYLC\)](#) has worked to transform classrooms, empower teachers, and captivate students across the country by providing dynamic service-learning content to school districts, classrooms, and after-school programs.

When the St. Paul-based nonprofit experienced significant financial distress in 2015, the organization was forced to make the difficult decision to dismiss all of its staff except the CEO. While NYLC has slowly grown back to four full-time staff members, the organization found itself revisiting challenges many organizations far younger than NYLC face, including how to best support the health care needs of its small staff with relatively limited resources.

“Prior to 2015, NYLC offered health coverage to employees,” said Amy Meuers, CEO of NYLC. “Once we began to emerge from our financial hardship and were able to hire additional staff members, however, we faced a new reality — much higher costs for the same health care benefits we’d had in earlier years.”

[In 2019, Meuers learned about BenefitsMN.](#) After connecting with representatives from [Gallagher, the exclusive broker to BenefitsMN](#), she discovered plan and pricing options that would make it possible for NYLC to once again provide high-quality medical benefits to staff. NYLC signed on with BenefitsMN in January 2020.

“I was amazed by how easy it was to implement BenefitsMN,” said Meuers.

“I thought I was missing steps, because it was actually much easier than working with the other providers when we were a large organization.”

According to Meuers, NYLC staff are grateful for the quality of the benefits that the organization is able to provide through BenefitsMN. Many employees had been purchasing health coverage through spouses or the open market and have experienced savings as a result of the switch.

[MCN launched BenefitsMN on January 1, 2020](#), following years of requests from nonprofits seeking health plan options to help them improve their ability to recruit and retain the best possible staff. In the time since, Minnesota’s first-ever association health plan for nonprofits has leveraged group negotiating power for nonprofits.

To participate, an organization must:

- Be a legally registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit based in Minnesota;
- Be a nonprofit member of MCN; and
- Have at least have at least two benefit eligible employees.

As of August 2021, BenefitsMN is working with 77 nonprofits located throughout Minnesota to provide access to comprehensive and affordable health plans through Medica, covering over 536 nonprofit employees and 875 lives in total. With more nonprofits signing on every month, BenefitsMN continues to successfully pool its members to provide five plan options in six networks throughout Minnesota.

Learn whether [BenefitsMN’s comprehensive, affordable health plan options](#) fit the needs of your employees in 2022 and beyond.

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We need your voice to reimagine nonprofits: MCN Annual Conference & 2022 in-person preview

by Courtney Gerber, program director

Summer arrives and then before you know it the everyday warmth which we have grown accustomed to begins to chill. What better way to mark the return of glowing tree lines and first frosts than with MCN's Annual Conference and the possibility of gathering in-person again in meaningful, gradual, and safe ways to learn from and with each other.

The [2021 MCN Annual Conference](#) will be held over four half days—October 14, 15, 28, and 29—with over 30 virtual breakout sessions and four in-person social hours across the state—from Duluth to Mankato. This year's conference theme, "Reimagine Nonprofits," focuses on how the sector is moving in the direction of equity, healing, and sustained transformation by looking critically at the changes it has (and has not) implemented by reimagining practices, processes, values, and relationships. This year's conference is about operationalizing change.



A few [conference breakout sessions](#) to look forward to:

- Cutting-Edge Strategies for Engaging Volunteers to Meet Mission;
- Building a Fundraising Infrastructure Before a Crisis;
- Power Struggles: Radical Leadership Practices for Advancing Equity;
- Sunsetting Your Nonprofit with Grace;
- Effective Hybrid Meetings: Engaging and Connecting the Roomies and the Zoomies Equally; and
- Systems-Disrupting, Authentic, and Innovative Youth Engagement Practices.

[Just announced, the keynote speakers](#) are [Gaby Strong](#) (Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota), managing director of the NDN Foundation, and [H. Adam Harris](#), artist, teacher, and cultural equity consultant. New this year, session categories to

illustrate the experience you'll have, such as Storytelling & Idea Generation; Practical Tools & Strategies; Action & Movement Building.



2022 in-person event preview

While we are eager to someday gather in-person, we will begin with small, prudent toe-dips into returning to the third dimension. In addition to [in-person social hours throughout the run of the Annual Conference](#), MCN will offer both hybrid and in-person learning opportunities in 2022, if they can occur safely.

As this issue of *Nonprofit News* goes to press, MCN is currently aiming to hold the Greater Minnesota workshops that are offered in concert with the larger [Minnesota Foundations event](#) in-person throughout January and February. Similarly, we're exploring whether the Greater Minnesota components of the [Public Policy team's Session Line Up](#) event can take place in-person.

We hope that spring will be the moment when we re-introduce the [Finance and Sustainability Conference](#) in-person, along with a number of hybrid workshops where some attendees are present at MCN and others are joining via live stream.

While we remain in a wait-and-see period for moving back to being physically together, we are also coming out of a deeply reflective period. Working virtually has opened us up to expanded ways of convening, and even when the masks are off, the variants subside, and our communities tell us they are ready to be face-to-face again, MCN will continue to strengthen its e-learning foundation strategically, intentionally, and in ways informed by all of you.

How AmeriCorps VISTAs are helping Minnesota nonprofits

by Jesse Chang, VISTA program manager

Not even a global health crisis could stop MCN's VISTAs from doing what they do best: fight poverty by building organizational capacity.

MCN VISTAs, placed at 16 different nonprofit organizations in the Twin Cities and St. Cloud, played a hand in creating capacity in all manner of ways at their host sites. VISTAs wrote grants, planned events, developed communication, managed social media content and websites, conducted research, implemented databases, created culturally-specific resources, and plenty more. In all, MCN VISTAs recruited and managed 330 volunteers and leveraged \$67,569 dollars in cash and in-kind resources this service year!

"My most rewarding experience during my service year was getting to see how volunteers can truly change the lives of our site's clients, and vice-versa," says Mahima, VISTA member at the [International Institute of Minnesota](#). "Every day, I got to witness cross-cultural communication and see people of completely different backgrounds develop connections and friendship. I hope to surround myself with community-oriented people in the future, and my time at my site really helped solidify this."



In addition to community work, members were able to learn more about themselves and their interests, and use their VISTA experience to discern career opportunities. Whether members plan on going back to school, entering the workforce, or continuing their service, it is no question their VISTA experience has helped guide their future paths.

Says Megan at [WomenVenture](#): "The most rewarding aspects of my service year was bonding with my coworkers and other VISTAs, feeling like I made a change in my organization, and having the opportunity to do things I love – data analysis

and research! Prior to joining AmeriCorps, I was planning to pursue a PhD in social psychology. I have completely changed my grad school plans and will now pursue a master's degree in Public Policy and Data Analytics."

Mary at [All Square](#) says, "This year has given me more understanding about the nonprofit, community engagement, and grassroots organization landscape. It has informed my decisions to seek out opportunities to learn under groups that conducted community-based research, because it involves community members in the whole process."

An important facet to our successful year was the cohort community itself. Each month, VISTA members met virtually to check in as a group, discuss current events, participate in professional development workshops, share resources, and support each other. As a result, this group was able to bond as friends and plan on staying in touch after their service year ends.

Anya at [Northside Residents Redevelopment Council](#) has really enjoyed the cohort experience, even though much of it was remote. "I had a community of really inspiring young people that I got to learn from once a month. It didn't feel like our Zoom meetings were ever a lecture or a class, but rather a shared learning space where everyone was welcome and appreciated."

Mahima adds, "Considering that our entire year of being part of the MCN VISTA Program was online, I thought that this experience was very rewarding and enriching. Thank you MCN for supporting us throughout this year, and for facilitating important conversations, providing us with thoughtful guest speakers, and for overall being present!"

Congratulations to the MCN VISTA class of 2020-21, and thank you for being amazing changemakers and leaders in your communities. We wish you all the best and look forward to see where your passion takes you next.

MCN is excited to share this opportunity, and [invites interested folks to view open positions and apply](#). Currently, MCN is recruiting VISTAs for full year terms starting this fall. Nonprofits interested in hosting an AmeriCorps VISTA member at their organization are also encouraged to reach out to [VISTA Program Manager Jesse Chang](#).

The campaign that saves nonprofits one million hours

by Kari Aanestad, associate director

Word limits. Manually entering board members' information. Nonsensical formatting of bespoke budgets. Nonprofits consistently report that "technical time-wasters" in grant applications consume 20-30 percent of their time. That's millions of lost hours every year that could have been invested in mission-advancing work.

Four years ago, MCN was one of three nonprofits to launch [GrantAdvisor.org](https://www.grantadvisor.org), an anonymous review site of grantmaking foundations. Since launching, over 2,500 reviews have been written, and a key theme is that grant applications are a top opportunity of improvement for the field.

Building off feedback from GrantAdvisor reviews, MCN's director of advancement (now associate director) Kari Aanestad worked in partnership with a London-based fundraiser and grantmaker, Laura Solomons, to specifically identify what pain points deserve top attention. [In less than four weeks, 500 nonprofits from nine countries responded to the #FixTheForm survey.](#)

The top pain point? Not being able to see the full application.

GrantAdvisor teamed with the [Technology Association of Grantmakers \(TAG\)](https://www.tag.org) to launch the 100 Forms in 100 Days campaign. The goal of the campaign was to enlist 100 foundations to make their grant applications available to the public, responding to the #1 pain point identified in #FixTheForm and contributing to greater transparency and equity in philanthropy.



The Results:

- 128 foundations participated (including some of the largest, most influential in the United States like the Ford Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation).
- Five industry-leading grants management software providers made permanent changes to their platforms, enabling foundations to address the top pain point of grantseekers: not being able to see the full form ahead of time. ([Full list of participating foundations and vendors.](#))
- 5,000 foundation clients will be able to use this new functionality, impacting one million nonprofits who apply to them. [If this change saves a nonprofit one hour, that's one million hours!](#)

What's Next?

- GrantAdvisor will continue efforts to raise awareness and push funders to make changes that address nonprofits' top pain points in grant applications and reports
- You reviewed. We listened, acted, and made changes. Let's do it again. [Register to be a GrantAdvisor reviewer and write a review.](#)

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Our Mission

MCN works to inform, promote, connect, and strengthen individual nonprofits and the nonprofit sector.