

NONPROFIT NEWS



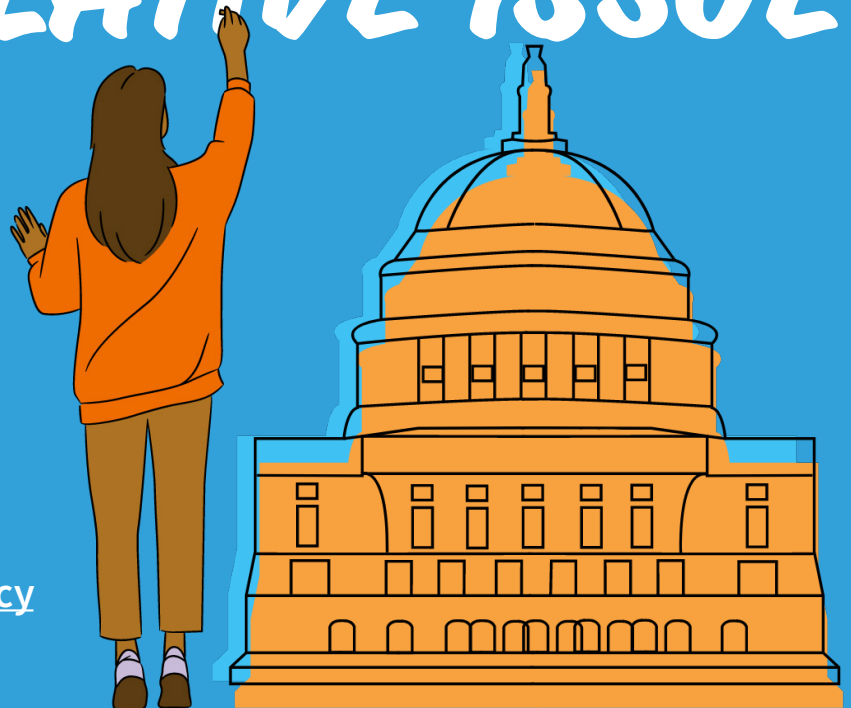
LEGISLATIVE ISSUE

Legislative session left too many Minnesotans behind

Staying nonpartisan most asked questions

Guest column with Nonprofit VOTE

Nonprofits as agents of democracy



Get-Out-The-Vote: \$340,000 granted to Minnesota nonprofits

Government oversight: optics & outcomes





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Our Mission

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

Together with our 2,300 members, MCN helps nonprofits accomplish their missions for a healthy, cooperative, and just society.

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Nonprofits as agents of democracy

The original article was published in the [National Committee for Responsible Philanthropy's July 2022 issue of Responsive Philanthropy](#). This article has been edited for space and brevity.

There is no better way to genuinely support communities' self-determination than to actively invite community members into the democratic process. Roads towards meaningful, community-centered change all lead to the ballot box, and community-based nonprofits have played relatively silent, but significant roles in ensuring people most often marginalized can use their power and voices and participate in our democratic process. While Minnesota boasts a high overall voter turnout rate, in large part due to same-day registration and our culture of voting and civic engagement, the disparities widen by race, ethnicity, age, geography, socio-economic status, among others, due to a history of voter disenfranchisement, unequal access to polling places, and language barriers. The lack of trust, engagement, and participation in our democratic process by our most marginalized communities compounds other disparities in policies, laws, and procedures that have long protected systems that only benefit people with wealth and resources.

As most nonprofits are 501(c)(3)s and laws prevent us from engaging in partisan policy work, we are well-positioned to be agents of democracy. Many nonprofits have the trust of the communities they serve and can support communities to mobilize for positive changes they need to thrive. Community-based nonprofits have played significant roles in ensuring people most often marginalized participate in the democratic process. Nonprofits also have unique expertise in their specific area of focus. Who better to testify about the need for affordable housing than an expert from a housing organization? Our sector is strong, powerful, and well-connected, and yet our constant challenge continues to be lack of capacity.

We cannot continue to expect community nonprofits and their staff to do more with less, when they barely have enough to keep up with basic, but rising, demands from the communities they serve. The inability to add more work, even for something as important as civic engagement, is understandable when nonprofits do not have the time and resources they need. Yet the consequences of inaction are devastating. Public trust in the nonprofit sector is critical to sustain our work, and it is a constant effort to educate the public and policymakers about the unique structure and role

of nonprofits. The past two years alone have demonstrated the distressing consequences when lawmakers lack understanding of the nonprofit sector. MCN's research has shown that nonprofits were generally left behind on one-time relief funds due the lack of capacity to identify and navigate complicated state and federal guidelines.

During the 2022 legislative session, MCN successfully advocated against a bill created without any stakeholder input, which would have forced nonprofits to comply with duplicative and unnecessary government oversight. We pushed hard for a dedicated [Nonprofit Relief Fund](#) to distribute much needed funding to some of the most vulnerable nonprofits in our state. It was an uphill climb to explain to lawmakers that nonprofits are not flush with cash as a result of federal COVID relief funding, and that many are still experiencing higher demand for their services. In the end, the legislature left many opportunities on the table, not enacting a Nonprofit Relief Fund or many, many other important proposals. Still, we increased legislators' overall knowledge of nonprofits and built a coalition of nonprofit advocates.

At the federal level, we fully support the federal [Nonprofit Sector Strength and Partnership Act](#) (co-introduced by MN's Rep. McCollum) that would ensure nonprofits have a seat at decision-making tables; and the [Volunteer Driver Tax Appreciation Act](#) (introduced by MN's Rep. Stauber & co-sponsored by Rep. Angie Craig) would increase the federal tax deduction mileage rate for volunteer drivers. MCN is proud to partner this year with the McKnight Foundation and other philanthropic partners to re-grant hundreds of thousands of critical dollars to small, rural, and/or culturally-specific organizations to ensure communities that are too often under-counted are supported to use their power and voice to vote.

We are proud of the strength and resiliency of the nonprofit sector and our communities. There are strong coalitions of people and organizations working together on a wide range of issues and utilizing collective wisdom, voice, and knowledge to push for systemic changes at the local, state, and national levels. Our sector's ability to persevere and sustain momentum will depend on strong support of our philanthropic partners and all of our abilities to invest time, energy, and resources as agents of democracy. We hope you can join us.

In community,
Nonoko

Guest column by Marcia Avner, MCN's first board chair

Moving up: ladder of civic engagement

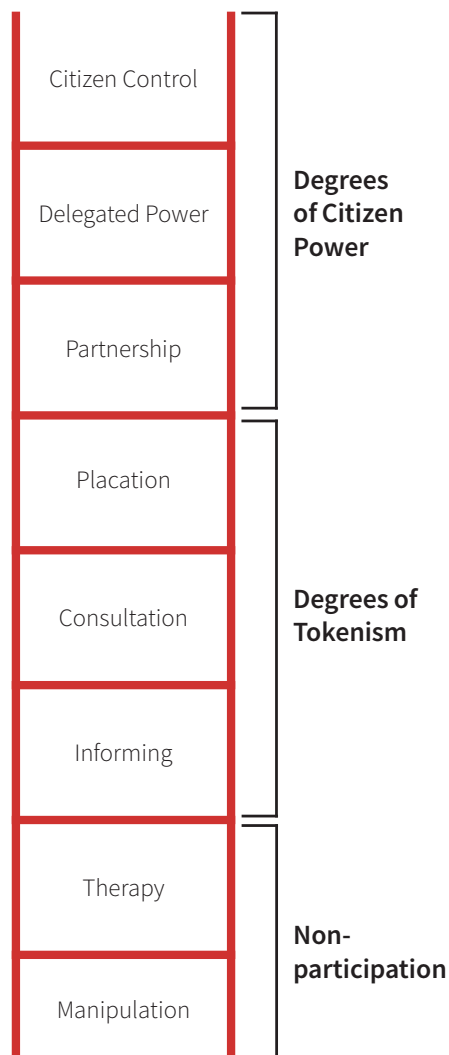
Involvement with a nonprofit is a central way many people participate in their community. Purely public charities 501(c)(3)s, public welfare organizations 501(c)(4)s, and unions 501(c)(5) are all key vehicles for civic engagement in Minnesota.

Engagement is essential to a democracy; civic engagement ensures that people affected by decisions have an impact, an influence on those decisions. Civic engagement is how people who have been unheard achieve power, and nonprofits foster this collective power. Civic engagement is sometimes perceived to begin and end with voting. It is that and so much more! Engagement covers a broad spectrum of activities and nonprofits draw communities into a robust range of engagement opportunities.

Consider the ways you invite people to understand and support the issues central to your nonprofit's mission; to see more clearly how systems and policies impact your programming.

At the most fundamental level, a person who is accessing news and first-person narratives from reliable sources is an informed resident and likely to be enthusiastic about improving systems to better serve the community. Civic engagement starts with caring and knowing about an issue, and nonprofits are essential sources of this information, whether we do direct services or advocacy. Through our work, nonprofits know that barriers exist to prevent people from engaging in advocacy or accessing reliable information. A key value of the nonprofit sector and authentic civic engagement is expressed eloquently through the verse "Nothing

about us without us." A classic framework for assessing authentic engagement was developed by Sherry Arnstein: *The Ladder of Citizen Participation*.



Non-participation

The bottom of the ladder is engagement where public officials and institutions of power mislead people into thinking they are sharing power in a process that is actually constructed to deny power. These non-participation levels of engagement avoid any responsibility to address core problems, including racism, misogyny, economic disparities, and victimization.

Degrees of Tokenism

The middle of the ladder is symbolic engagement. Information is valuable but it doesn't create change without a path to action. Nonprofits need to be the trusted resources for communities we serve and decision makers, but our contributions shouldn't be symbolic and designed to lack influence. Are actions about appearance or sharing power?

Degrees of Citizen Power

Real power comes through authentic partnerships with power; when community representatives have influence and control in decision-making of the programs and systems impacting their lives. What do authentic partnerships with public officials and institutions of power look like?

This ladder framework is simplistic in the neatness of layers that flow in a hierarchy. But an awareness of all levels of building power with the people we serve should guide our outreach, advocacy, and organizing efforts.

Going forward: acknowledge and assess power in civic engagement, and aspire to build authentic power-sharing in your nonprofit's advocacy and mission. It is the democratic way to create change.

Marcia Avner was MCN's first board chair and then was public policy director from 1995-2011. She now consults with nonprofits and foundations on public policy strategy, campaigns, planning, governance, and coalition building. Marcia teaches in the Masters in Advocacy and Political Leadership program at Metro State and was the founder of the Nonprofit Management Program at Hamline University. [Learn more about her work.](#)

Get-Out-The-Vote: \$340,000 granted to Minnesota nonprofits

by Ileana Mejia, public policy advocate

MCN has a long history supporting nonprofit advocacy. In Fall 2019, we re-granted funds to nonprofits to ensure every Minnesotan was counted in the 2020 Census. The following year, we re-granted funds to nonprofits for voter engagement in the 2020 election. Despite COVID, both Census and voter engagement nonprofit grantees found innovative ways to connect with their communities on these important civic engagement issues. Because of those successes and the great advocacy work of Minnesota nonprofits, we wanted to do it again!

To encourage and support community voting in the upcoming 2022 mid-term elections, MCN launched a voter engagement grants program in June. We had conversations with funders, submitted grant proposals, and discussed how our proposed grants would increase voting in Minnesota. The McKnight Foundation and another anonymous funder gave us great news – we were awarded \$197,000 in total to re-grant to nonprofits.

We had two grant opportunities: Category 1 (\$5,000) for nonprofits that are able to do critical elections engagement work in their communities and Category 2 (\$10,000 - \$25,000) for nonprofits that have a history of organizing their communities around voter engagement or other important community issues. While we expected significant interest from nonprofits, we were surprised by the final numbers. **90 organizations applied for a total of \$1,225,816 in total grant requests.**

After internally reviewing the applications and innovative engagement strategies organizations were planning, we were

compelled to go back to our funders and request more funds for these grants. MCN received an additional \$143,000 for voter engagement grants bringing our grand total to \$340,000.

We gathered a grants review committee comprised of six individuals – a mix of nonprofit partners, MCN board members, and staff with diverse racial and geographic backgrounds and experience in grantmaking and advocacy. We reviewed grant applications and made recommendations based on the grant framework, including prioritized populations, geography, voter engagement and budget plans, and for Category 2 applicants, also having a history of successful community organizing. **MCN is pleased to announce 31 nonprofit grantees across Minnesota will receive a total of \$340,000.**

Grantees range from disability organizations in the Twin Cities to Latinx organizations serving Spanish-speaking residents in southeast Minnesota. [Nonprofits who conduct voter engagement this election cycle](#) will be educating eligible voters on newly redrawn districts, correcting misinformation following 2020 elections, increasing voter registration, and encouraging voting to make sure Minnesotan voices are heard and represented.

Thank you to all organizations that applied for this funding, as well as those that spread the word about this opportunity. And thank you to the McKnight Foundation and another anonymous funder for supporting democracy work in Minnesota and building capacity for nonprofit advocacy. [Remember to vote November 8, 2022!](#)

Congratulations 2022 MCN Voter Engagement Grantees!

CATEGORY 1 GRANTEES (\$5,000)

Access Press	Living Well Disability Services
Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA)	Minnesota Independence College and Community (MICC)
Community Stabilization Project	The MN Village Organization
East Side Freedom Library	Partnership Resources Inc.
Epilepsy Foundation of Minnesota	Project FINE
Hired	Rise, Inc.
Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota	The Aliveness Project
Indian Cultural Association of MN (ICAM)	Transforming Generations
Karen Organization of Minnesota	Urban Homeworks
LifeGate Services	Unite Cloud
Lincoln Park Resource Center	

CATEGORY 2 GRANTEES (\$10,000 - \$25,000)

African Career Education and Resources, Inc. (ACER)
 American Indian OIC
 CAPI USA
 Council on Islamic Relations (CAIR-MN)
 Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Accion Latina (COPAL)
 Hmong American Partnership
 Pillsbury United Communities
 SEWA-AIFW
 The Anika Foundation – Black Votes Matter MN
 The Arc Minnesota, Inc.

Legislative session left too many Minnesotans behind

by Laura Mortenson, communications director, Minnesota Budget Project

Nonprofits create strong, thriving communities across the state. Through the work nonprofits do, we understand the importance of funding the things our people and communities need, like affordable housing to feel safe, child care so we can work, full pantries to feed us, clean lakes and prairies, and all the other ways we ensure our collective well-being. And we expect policymakers to make funding those things a priority as well.

In the 2022 legislative session, state policymakers had urgent needs to address. After two years of a pandemic and economic disruption, too many of our neighbors continue to struggle to put food on the table and a roof over their heads.

With a historic projected \$9.3 billion surplus in FY 2022-23 as well as federal ARP dollars, we had the resources to address the challenges that Minnesotans face and build a stronger, more equitable recovery.

[The House and Senate took very different approaches to the surplus.](#) The House proposed using the majority of the surplus for investments in things like education, child care, housing, and paid family leave. Their tax bill included funding for local services and expanding tax credits for low- and middle-income Minnesotans focused on bringing down the cost of raising a family and keeping a home.

In contrast, the Senate prioritized large, permanent, and unfair tax cuts that gave the biggest benefits to high-income Minnesotans. Devoting so much of the surplus to tax cuts meant they proposed much smaller investments in public services.

Policymakers were unable to bridge the divide between these approaches, and [ultimately only agreed to allocate about one-quarter of the surplus.](#) Game-changing proposals to expand tax refunds for renters, make child care more affordable, and address barriers to affordable health care were left as unfinished business. The bills that passed largely were not strongly focused on Minnesotans hardest hit by the pandemic or targeted approaches to build a more equitable future.

By far [the bill with the greatest fiscal impact that passed this session](#) was the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Trust Fund/frontline workers bill. **This bill allocated \$2.7 billion to the state's UI Trust Fund, which had been drawn down**

to pay jobless benefits during the pandemic. Rather than refill that fund gradually over time through additional UI taxes and assessments on employers, this action provides an untargeted benefit to all employers that pay into the Trust Fund, regardless of whether they are small and struggling or large and highly profitable.

More positively, the bill also allocates \$500 million for one-time “hero pay” benefits to approximately 667,000 frontline workers who stayed on the job during the pandemic. Many of these front-line workers are lower-income and workers of color, who were harder hit by the pandemic and had less resources to get through it.

The second largest bill that passed this session costs \$717 million over 3 years for reinsurance, which provides payments to health insurance companies with the goal of holding down premiums in the individual insurance market. Unfortunately, the Legislature did not pass other proposals focused on Minnesotans who currently fall through the gaps and struggle to afford the care they need.

The Legislature passed a few other supplemental budget bills into law. One bright spot was a last-minute compromise bill that allocated \$93 million over three years to start to [address the crisis in Minnesota's behavioral health system.](#)

Minnesotans needed bold policy action, and nonprofits raised their voices. Many of you signed letters, sent emails, or talked directly to your legislators, highlighting the needs and issues important to your missions and communities. Policymakers received nearly 700 emails in support of the [Nonprofit Relief Fund](#) through an MCN action alert; and nonprofit and other partners signed onto letters opposing large and unfair tax cuts and expanding property tax refunds for renters and homeowners.

We have more work ahead of us. Much is at stake in the upcoming 2022 statewide elections. In 2023, policymakers will set the full state budget for the next two years, and will likely have a projected surplus to work with. Once again, we will have critical decisions as well as resources to meet the challenges before us. Nonprofit leaders, organizers, board members, volunteers, and supporters should continue to [use the tools and avenues available](#) to ensure policymakers hear our solutions to build the kind of future we want to see.

Nonprofit news & advancements



The African American Leadership Forum welcomed Amber Jones as senior director of network insights and Leondra Mitchell as vice president of network acceleration; Leondra sits on MCN's board of directors.



DARTS hired Sarah Lindner as its new director of advancement, effective July 11.



The Family Partnership selected Dianne Haulcy as president and CEO; she succeeded Molly Greenman who retired June 30 after 18 years in that role.



Dr. Ronda Marie Chakolis joined the board of directors for Prepare + Prosper.



PRISM hired Alisha Weis, MSW, LGSW, as advancement director.



Legal for Good welcomed three new staff, Marisa Garcia as junior associate, Jen Waters as senior associate, and Emma Uecker as project manager.



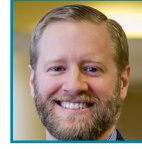
Takara Henegar joined The Minneapolis Foundation as grants coordinator.



Ambar Cristina Hanson is the new executive director of the Mortenson Family Foundation after Donna Dalton stepped down after 12 years.



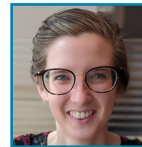
The Peace House Community board of directors announced Marti Maltby as the new executive director.



Greg Leeper is the new executive director of the Eden Prairie Community Foundation, succeeding Mark Weber who retired.



Becca Lopez was promoted to vice president of career education and employment services at Avivo.



The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits welcomed Anna Stolte as VISTA program coordinator.

Emma Cover-Carper joined the Sexual Violence Center as development associate.

Project for Pride in Living hired Dr. Maria Pabón Gautier as vice president of talent, equity and culture.

Submit Your Announcements

MCN member organizations are invited to submit your organization's awards, staffing announcements, and other news to [Laura Dunford](#). MCN cannot guarantee that all announcements will make it into *Nonprofit News*.

B

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Government oversight: optics and outcomes

by Marie Ellis, public policy director

A lesson I've learned working in public policy is that optics matter. What's true and what the public perceives to be true can be very different, and it's to our own detriment if we refuse to recognize those false perceptions.

What's true is that the vast majority of nonprofits in Minnesota are scrupulous in following laws, complying with oversight requirements, and acting ethically. That isn't always what the public perceives, unfortunately. When there is news that a nonprofit employee has allegedly committed fraud or otherwise acted unethically, people who already are distrustful of nonprofits feel that their opinion is validated, and people who are trustful of nonprofits in general lose a bit of that trust.

Our sector might be a bit odd in that we welcome appropriate oversight of ourselves. Nonprofits rely on trust, from donors, communities, and government, and complying with regulations is one way to earn trust.

In response to a specific instance of alleged fraud at a nonprofit in the news, individuals and elected officials call for more government oversight of every nonprofit organization; this is like trying to heal a sliver with a full-body cast. What we should be doing is figuring out where the sliver came from and sanding down that wood. In other words, tightening whatever oversight allowed that specific fraud to occur.

A few legislators proposed a full-body cast of new nonprofit oversight measures in the 2022 legislative session, that, if they had passed, would: impose a compensation cap on all nonprofit staff tied to the Governor's salary (currently \$127,000), mandate that a nonprofit be in existence for at least two years before being eligible to receive any state grant, prohibit state agency employees and state and local elected officials from serving on nonprofit boards of directors, and require additional specific information in state grant applications and reporting. (Note that this legislation did NOT become law. [Read our article on the legislation for all the juicy details.](#)) These proposals did not become law in large part because of the advocacy work of nonprofits across the state, advocacy partner organizations like the Minnesota Council on Foundations, and strong, detailed, timely advocacy by MCN.

Unfortunately, new oversight proposals like this come up pretty regularly at the state capitol, and it's necessary

that our sector is ready and able to respond when they do. You can help! In fact, we NEED you to help! As much as MCN worked against the 2022 proposal, we didn't get strong traction until nonprofits around the state connected with their decision-makers. (Shout out to the Living At Home Network for their incredible advocacy on that legislation specifically!)

Get to know your legislators and other elected officials. Invite them to your site or converse virtually. Let them know about the communities you work with, the biggest challenges you have, and some of the ways your organization positively impacts the people in your district. Approach these meetings knowing that you are doing the elected official a service by educating them about what's happening in their districts.

Specifically, find opportunities to talk with your elected officials about outcomes. There's a pervasive misunderstanding at the legislature that nonprofits should be able to track our outcomes easily and in very detailed ways. There are no easy ways to measure the deep and long-term impact of a nonprofit's work. Our missions tend to be about broad social change, tackling issues and disparities that can't be solved from one angle.

Nonprofits are expected to report on a deep level of outcomes – often outcomes that won't happen until long after the money from the government contract has been expended. Legislators MCN worked with in 2022 shared frustration that nonprofits don't supply specific numbers on the impact of state contract funds. Mind you, those nonprofits could report on how the funds were spent, but not on the exact impact those funds had on the community.

To all the evaluation teams, grant report writers, and everyone trying to quantify the unquantifiable: we see you! MCN will continue to educate lawmakers on the big picture of nonprofit reporting challenges and why specific metrics often don't show the breadth of an organization's impact.

The only way to combat incorrect optics is to get the right information to the right people. Government oversight is important, and the only way for that oversight to be appropriate for our work is for elected officials to understand the work you all do.

25 years of strengthening Minnesota, nonprofits through the Minnesota Budget Project

by Laura Mortenson, communications director, Minnesota Budget Project
and Nonoko Sato, executive director

For 25 years, the [Minnesota Budget Project](#) has been one of the ways MCN has pursued our vision for a healthy, cooperative, and just society. The Minnesota Budget Project identifies and advances public policies to make Minnesota a state where everyone can thrive, regardless of who they are or where they live. It ensures nonprofits, other organizational partners, and community leaders have information and skills to advance tax, budget, and economic policy changes, and build a more equitable future.

How policymakers raise revenues and where they direct our collective resources has a profound impact on whether our state's opportunity and prosperity is truly available to all of us. Their decisions influence how well children are thriving; whether families have what they need to be safe, healthy, and financially secure; whether we have clean air and water; and many other elements of a high-quality standard of living.

“The Minnesota Budget Project has been an invaluable advocate for economic fairness. Because of their successful advocacy and coalition leadership on many tax issues, tens if not hundreds of thousands of low-income Minnesotans have benefited.”
- Ron Elwood, Legal Services Advocacy Project



In 2019, the Minnesota Budget Project & MCN urged policymakers to maintain the health care provider tax.

In 1997, MCN joined a national network of state-based nonpartisan research and policy organizations focused on tax and budget choices to ensure the needs of low-

and moderate-income people were being met. MCN was well positioned to build the capacity to produce high-quality research and get it into the hands of those influencing policy change: policymakers, advocates, nonprofits, the media, and engaged members of the public. MCN created the Minnesota Budget Project to be our state's member in the network that today is known as the [State Priorities Partnership](#), whose members advance economic

opportunity and justice in more than 40 states. Since then, the Minnesota Budget Project has grown, and its six team members provide essential analysis and deploy advocacy, collaboration, communications, and engagement strategies to influence some of the most crucial tax, budget, and economic policy decisions before our state.

Tax policy: a tool to level the economic playing field

The Minnesota Budget Project's tax policy work advances two major goals: first, the state raises the revenues needed to sustainably fund public investments in a strong, equitable future; second, the state has a progressive tax system – one in which those with the greatest resources pay more than those who are struggling to get by.

By advancing these goals, the Minnesota Budget Project and its partners work to ensure there are public resources to invest in our collective future, and make our tax system more equitable and just. Some examples of this work include:

- Delivering nation-leading progressive tax policies:** In response to the recession and deep state budget deficits of the early 2000s, MCN joined with the Minnesota AFL-CIO and the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition to create the cross-sector coalition *Invest in Minnesota*, for which the Minnesota Budget Project provided essential coordination, policy leadership, and communications. Uniting nonprofits, organized labor, and faith-based organizations, *Invest in Minnesota* documented and fought back against deep cuts to public services and made the case instead for progressive revenues. In 2013, the work of *Invest in Minnesota* and its allies culminated in the passage of nation-leading tax reform that raised new revenues fairly, ended a decade of frequent budget deficits, and delivered essential funding for the things Minnesotans need to thrive, including education, affordable child care, and affordable health care.

Expanding tax credits for workers and families:

The Minnesota Budget Project has been a leader in collaborative policy change efforts to expand tax credits that boost the incomes of workers and families trying to get by on low incomes. Today, Minnesota has some of the strongest income-targeted tax credits in the country, including the Renters' Credit; our Working Family Tax Credit includes policy innovations that make the credit work better for different kinds of families. These policies improve the daily lives of workers and families all across the state, and make our tax system more fair.

Launching Together We Rise Minnesota:

Minnesota is a state of abundance and has what we need to take care of each other and build a stronger and more equitable economy. In Fall 2020, MCN and the Minnesota Budget Project launched [Together We Rise Minnesota](#), a public policy campaign through which nonprofits, other organizational partners, and individual Minnesotans can work together to fairly raise and protect needed state revenues, and invest in a healthy, safe, and just state.

Public investments in a thriving Minnesota

The Minnesota state budget should reflect our values as a community. Through smart budget choices, children can get a quality education, Minnesotans can find and keep good jobs that allow them to support themselves and their families, and seniors and people living with disabilities can live with dignity in their own communities.

MCN and the Minnesota Budget Project have collaborated with nonprofit and other partners on some of the most important public investment policies of our day. We have long recognized that affordable health care is essential for Minnesotans and their families to thrive, and for nonprofits to be attractive employers. Through analysis and advocacy, we have actively engaged in federal- and state-level efforts to expand affordable health care coverage, and have fought to protect it when it has

come under threat. The Minnesota Budget Project's expertise on tax and budget policy, capacity to dig into the policy weeds, and effective partnerships make it a strong value-add to these

efforts. Minnesota has some of the highest rates of health care coverage in the nation, thanks to our public policy choices through Medicaid, MinnesotaCare, and the Affordable Care Act. And there's so much more that must be done, including dismantling racial gaps in coverage, health, and well-being.

Building a just and equitable Minnesota

The Minnesota Budget Project's research and advocacy has evolved to acknowledge the urgency of advancing racial equity and dismantling state policies that have their roots in systems that perpetuate harm to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Minnesotans. Inequitable tax

policies, barriers to the state's resources and services, and inadequate public investment in health care, housing, education, and other services in BIPOC communities continue to exacerbate disparities in economic opportunity between BIPOC and white Minnesotans. The Minnesota Budget Project has also revamped its skill-building and technical assistance resources with our racial equity partners and BIPOC

advocates, so that they better meet our partners' priorities and support them to influence the state's budget-setting process.

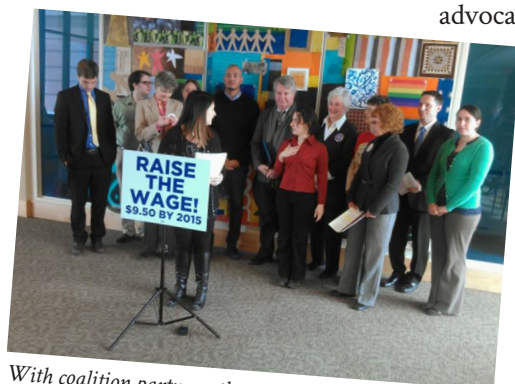
Nonprofits as advocates

Nonprofits are essential for a just and thriving Minnesota. Your missions feed the very heart of our communities. Your voices must be heard when policymakers are deciding how our collective revenues are raised and where our shared resources are directed.

The Minnesota Budget Project is a partner for you. Over 25 years, nonprofits have counted on the Minnesota Budget Project to provide timely, accessible information about the state's economic and state budget landscape, the potential implications for our Minnesota neighbors, and the major policy ideas at play to respond to them. Join with us in ensuring policymakers know what your organization and your community needs. Be part of the work to create a stronger future for Minnesota where prosperity truly is for every one of us.

In pursuit of 4 long-term goals:

1. A fair tax system that raises the revenues needed to sustainably fund public investments in a strong, equitable state.
2. Investment in public services that expand opportunity and improve the economic well-being of lower-income and BIPOC Minnesotans.
3. Policies that help Minnesotans succeed in the workplace and the marketplace so that economic security and opportunity is available to all.
4. A sound budget process characterized by sustainable budget choices, the absence of arbitrary spending caps and formulas, and meaningful opportunities for participation.



With coalition partners, the Minnesota Budget Project & MCN advocated to raise the minimum wage in 2014.

ARPA tracking: one-stop-shop for nonprofit funding

by Laura Jones, development manager and Anne Kilzer, Capitol Hill Associates

Navigating funding opportunities provided through government entities — whether at the federal, state, or local level — can be challenging for organizations of any size. The influx of American Rescue Plan Act pandemic relief dollars (often referred to “ARPA” or “ARP”) has many nonprofits anxious to learn what opportunities may arise as a result.

Minnesota has been allocated \$8.5 billion in ARPA funds:

- \$2.8 billion in flexible aid to the state (the State Fiscal Recovery Fund);
- \$2.1 billion in flexible aid to local governments (Local Fiscal Recovery Fund); and
- \$3.5 billion in federal program-specific funding.

[Federal program-specific funding](#) provides an increase to already-existing federal programs delivered in the state. As a result of decisions made by the governor and the legislature, [State Fiscal Recovery Funds](#) have been budgeted and are almost expended. Local units of government (cities, counties, towns and townships) and tribal governments are receiving funding in two allocations – the first in May 2021 and the second in summer of 2022. Entities have from March 2021 through December 2024 to obligate funding, with all expenditures concluded by December 2026.

MCN has learned that while there is no requirement to contract with nonprofits to provide relief or partner in ARPA-funded services many already are, or are considering

doing so under future awards. In addition to money directly allocated to Minnesota’s local units of governments, there are federal competitive grants still under review. Many require community partnerships, which may present opportunities if awarded in Minnesota.

MCN continues to work with key contacts to identify how counties, cities, and towns/townships are planning for and utilizing their relief dollars.

The bottom line is that while federal funding has been in Minnesota for over a year already, new initiatives will be rolled out over the next 12-18 months.

[MCN has developed a one-stop-shop website](#) featuring opportunities for nonprofits that are new or increased by ARPA funding. It will be updated frequently with open RFPs and includes additional tools and resources for those who are pursuing funding.

This resource was made possible through a grant from the McKnight Foundation to track APRA dollars, ensure nonprofits have the information needed to pursue funding, promote the inclusion of nonprofits in relief opportunities, and advocate for simple and accessible application processes.

Please check frequently for [updates and other useful information!](#)



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Building capacity for summer meal program with MCN's VISTA program

by Warsame Warsame, VISTA program manager

Did you know MCN manages an AmeriCorps VISTA program? Our program places members with Minnesota nonprofits to provide resources, capacity, and connections for organizations to grow their impact and operational sustainability.

This is the third year our VISTA program is partnering with nonprofits in Greater Minnesota. MCN's geographical expansion outside of the Twin Cities Metro area has enhanced our ability to be a capacity building resource for nonprofits throughout the entire state.

Nonprofits have faced new and evolving challenges over the past three years, but the program partnerships with Greater Minnesota nonprofits have proven to be a beneficial gap-filler to the organizations and the communities they serve.

We are thrilled to share that MCN has partnered with six Greater Minnesota nonprofits to host VISTA members.

Throughout the three-year partnerships, VISTA members will support the lasting growth and development of the organizations and initiatives within their host communities.

One of the six organizations is the [Yes Network](#) of St. Cloud, whose mission is to strengthen communities by providing the social emotional needs of children and families with community-based programming and learning initiatives. The Yes Network hosts two VISTA members during the year, and in the summer months, they are MCN's only VISTA site to host summer associates for eight to 12 weeks who support their summer food program.

MCN partnered with the Yes Network

to host summer associate VISTA members after learning that many kids who rely on school meals struggle to get enough to eat during the summer months. Especially for children from food-insecure families, summer vacation can be a time to dread. "It is the hungriest time of the year," the Yes Network explained.

Saint Cloud School District #742 reported that approximately 5,460 kids (56.7 percent of their student population) are eligible for free and reduced-price meals.

In Sauk Rapids-Rice School District #47, 28 percent of their students qualify, yet only 20-30 percent of the meals that are available through the USDA's Summer Food Service Program are being accessed. In addition, many families experiencing poverty do not have access to community programs for their children during the summer months.

The VISTA program provides the additional capacity needed for the Yes Network to address this need by placing members to increase program participation in ten neighborhoods with lower incomes and serving food at large apartment complexes and mobile home parks. The VISTA members serving this project prepare meals each morning to be distributed to and served at sites, as well as provide age-appropriate activities that keep children active, help them develop new skills, and keep them safe.

The VISTA members also develop mentoring relationships with high school students from each of the ten neighborhoods, working to help students feel valued and included in the

community.

In conjunction with the food, outdoor games, enrichment activities, art, and music are organized in the neighborhoods. Together, these components encourage good nutrition, summer learning, physical health, and social emotional wellbeing.



Photo credit: The Yes Network

Over the years, the Yes Network has provided over one million meals to kids in neighborhoods with lower incomes and is now among the top five Minnesota nonprofits for the number of summer meals served. The summer meal program has provided an avenue for a much broader focus on child health and wellness in their community that has become the essence of the Yes Network's mission.

We are extremely pleased that our program facilitated the placement of 18 summer VISTA members with the Yes Network. Learn more about how the [Yes Network supports the greater St. Cloud community](#) with the help of MCN's VISTA program.

Interested in hosting an AmeriCorps VISTA member at your nonprofit or want to become a VISTA member yourself? [Learn more about MCN's VISTA program.](#)

Guest column by Nonprofit VOTE

Staying nonpartisan most asked questions

Can my nonprofit participate in advocacy?

Yes! The IRS affirmatively states that 501(c)(3) organizations may conduct voter engagement or connect with candidates on a nonpartisan basis. The main principle of being nonpartisan is to not conduct voter engagement and education in a way intended to support or oppose a specific candidate.

What is ok for nonprofit staff to talk about?

Staff working for 501(c)(3) organizations should also be nonpartisan when representing their nonprofit onsite, at events, or doing voter engagement activities. Staff cannot suggest which candidate to vote for or political party to support.

You can provide information about the voting process, such as dates and deadlines, early voting hours, getting a mail ballot, or helping register to vote. You can let people know about a candidate forum or debate.

What if someone asks who the nonprofit supports or who they should vote for?

Remind them that as a nonprofit you must remain nonpartisan. You can:

- Encourage them to talk to a friend or family member they trust and share values with.
- Direct them to a sample ballot or nonpartisan voter guide, if available.
- Share the Minnesota Secretary of State's resource – [What's on my ballot?](#)

What if my nonprofit is asked about a ballot measure?

Ballot measures are about laws not candidates. You may discuss the pros and cons of a ballot measure, unless it is your organization's policy not to.

Can staff support candidates in their personal time?

Yes. Staff may support candidates when not "on the clock" working for your nonprofit.

Can my nonprofit use social media to promote voting?

Social media is an important tool to communicate with supporters and the public, mobilize public opinion, and promote civic engagement. The law requiring nonprofits to remain nonpartisan is the same for social media. Nonprofits may encourage people to register and vote, but you may not use social media to indicate support for, or opposition to, candidates.

Is my nonprofit responsible for how our social media posts are shared?

No. You are not responsible for how and with whom others share your posts.

Can staff use their personal social media accounts to support candidates?

Individuals have a right to express preferences for or against candidates. This applies to staff personal social media accounts. The exception would be if that account is primarily used by the individual or others as a communication vehicle for the nonprofit.

What about the executive director or CEO?

The chief executive officer of the nonprofit has the same rights of free expression as any other staff member, when not officially representing the organization. However, to the extent they are seen by stakeholders and constituents as representing the nonprofit, a CEO should exercise more restraint in what they say on the internet to avoid any appearance of partisanship.

PERMISSIBLE ELECTION ACTIVITIES CHECKLIST

501(c)(3) organizations may:

- ✓ Conduct or promote voter registration.
- ✓ Encourage people to vote.
- ✓ Continue issue advocacy during an Election.
- ✓ Educate voters on the voting process.
- ✓ Distribute sample ballots or nonpartisan voter guides.
- ✓ Host a candidate forum.
- ✓ Create a candidate questionnaire.
- ✓ Support, oppose, or host a community conversation on a Ballot Measure. Unlike candidates for office, nonprofits may take sides on a ballot measure.

To stay nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) organizations, or staff members speaking or acting on behalf of the nonprofit, may not:

- ✗ Endorse a candidate.
- ✗ Make a campaign contribution or expenditure for or against a candidate.
- ✗ Rate or rank candidates on who is most favorable to your issue(s).
- ✗ Let candidates use your facilities or resources, unless they are made equally available to all candidates.

Innovative approach to children’s brain science leads to nonprofit award

by John Wurm, membership and communications director

Each year, nonprofits across Minnesota make incredible contributions to our state’s high quality of life. [The Minnesota Nonprofit Mission Awards](#) were created specifically to honor these contributions. Since 1987, MCN has been showcasing the work of Minnesota’s outstanding nonprofits through the Nonprofit Mission Awards in the categories of Innovation, Anti-Racism Initiative, Advocacy, and Responsive Philanthropy.

We are honored to celebrate the [2021 Mission Award recipient for Innovation](#), [The Family Partnership](#).

For 144 years, [The Family Partnership](#) (TFP) has worked to understand and address the needs of vulnerable families and children in the greater Minneapolis area. The organization believes that families, no matter what their form, are the foundation of strong communities.

TFP is at the forefront in implementing evidence-based practices and emerging brain science to close opportunity gaps for children and families. One such effort is Executive Functioning Across Generations, an effective and creative solution developed to address a challenge facing many young children, especially children living in poverty: the negative impact that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as child abuse and household dysfunction, have on the executive functioning development needed for school success, healthy relationships, workforce participation, and parenting.

TFP’s Executive Functioning Across Generation innovative approach demonstrates new and different strategies to boost children’s executive

functioning, including:

- **Two-Generation approach:** The curriculum provides parents with the tools they need to build children’s healthy brain architecture every day at home.
- **Utilizing brain science:** There is a 20 year lag between discoveries in research and practical translation into human services. This intervention provides the opportunity to incorporate not-yet-utilized brain science learnings into existing programs that serve families.
- **Focus on language:** This intervention is unique in its focus on building language-based skills to boost executive functioning, grounded in research that shows that executive functioning development is language-based.

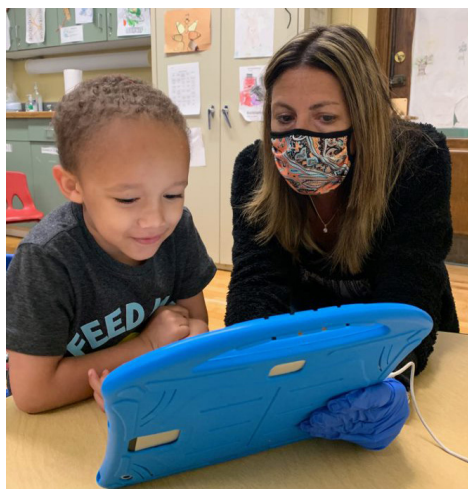


Photo credit: The Family Partnership

TFP developed the original curriculum for preschool classrooms and later designed and tested home visiting and parenting group adaptations of the curriculum in 2020-2021 with support from Harvard. The project demonstrated further innovation by adapting the home visiting and parenting group

interventions to virtual delivery in light of COVID-19. The organization began a second statewide round of home visiting pilots in the fall of 2021 in partnership with Minnesota Coalition for Targeted Home Visiting and the Medica Foundation.

Executive Functioning Across Generations has greatly benefitted children’s executive functioning and parents’ ability to support children’s healthy development. In TFP’s preschools, which serve children with high ACEs, children began below the age-adjusted national average on executive functioning. In post-intervention evaluations, they scored *ABOVE* the national average.

The families TFP serves have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, the trauma of George Floyd’s murder, and increased violence in 2020 and 2021. Innovative strategies that meet families where they’re at to boost executive functioning are more important now than ever to buffer children in Minneapolis communities from the impact of toxic stress on healthy development.

By boosting executive functioning two generations at a time, The Family Partnership and their partners are addressing the persistent social issues of ACEs and intergenerational cycles of poverty, making a lasting difference in the lives of families.

MCN is pleased to present the organization with the 2021 Minnesota Nonprofit Mission Award for Innovation.

[Learn more about The Family Partnership.](#)

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Reuniting for good at MCN's Annual Conference

Good things come in threes and fall 2022 is showing nonprofits an abundance of good through this trilogy:

- Election!
- The Minnesota Budget Project's 25th birthday!
- A return to in person for [MCN's Annual Conference!](#)



At MCN's [Annual Conference in St. Paul](#), discover meaningful ways to deepen and expand your nonprofit knowledge, reunite with colleagues at intentional wellness, creativity, and networking spaces, and activate your nonprofit policy and advocacy power.

Featuring [50 breakout sessions](#), including:

- **Tax Policy & the Power of Advocacy:** Learn what is at stake in our state's budget and why nonprofits need to be engaged in tax policy at the Minnesota Budget Project session, with activities to build your tax policy skills.
- **How Far Can a Nonprofit Go?** MCN's policy team is bringing together a panel of statewide experts for a session on legal nonprofit advocacy, plus test your organization's risk tolerance for advocacy work and build stamina for sustainable integration beyond elections.

Get inspired with [Main Stage speakers](#), LeAnn Littlewolf (Gaa-zagaskwaajimekaag) of the American Indian Community Housing Organization and a live recording of the podcast [Conversations with Chanda](#) featuring **Chanda Smith Baker** of The Minneapolis Foundation. Plus you'll find Get-Out-The-Vote activities throughout the [Exhibitor Hall](#).

We're reuniting for good at the 2022 Annual Conference - join us October 13 & 14!