NONPROFIT NEWS

NONPROFITS OVER CAPACITY: WHAT’S COMMUNITY TO DO?

REBUILDING THE NONPROFIT VOLUNTEER WORKFORCE.
Guest column by MAVA

FINDING A PATH FORWARD IN THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS.
Guest column by NAMI Minnesota

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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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We’ve arrived at the two-year mark of the COVID-19 pandemic and it’s no surprise nonprofits remain inundated with monumental shifts in operational thinking, resource development, and service delivery. Particularly when properly supporting the very people who make the work happen is more difficult than ever.

While one-time infusions of cash have certainly helped some nonprofits, 50 percent of respondents to MCN’s latest Nonprofit COVID-19 Impact Report say they will see financial distress within the year, all while community needs continue to rise.

The same data showed retention and hiring as unique and growing challenges. Frontline staff, particularly in health and human services nonprofits, are facing higher degrees of health and safety risks, emotional burnout, and low morale, which results in higher turnover and increased difficulty in hiring for these critical positions. This is only exacerbated by the inability to offer affordable and robust healthcare to employees.

Our leaders are burnt out, lonely, and struggling to keep the organization functioning; staff are burnt out, frustrated, and leaving for sectors that offer more flexibility and living wages. To people outside of nonprofits, the common thread in so many issues facing our sector may not be clear.

For staff working on the front lines across our state, we know its capacity. CAPACITY. CAPACITY. CAPACITY.

Nonprofit successes are often measured by our ability to do more with less. Administrative costs and having “too much” in reserves are frowned upon, some grants do not fund personnel costs, and capacity-building grants are infrequently accessible. Many small nonprofits, especially organizations that serve culturally-specific or rural communities, simply do not have capacity to navigate the complicated grantseeking and reporting structures, especially through the government.

So what is community to do?

If you are a funder, nonprofit professional, or supporter:

1. Contact your elected officials to voice your support of the $200 million Minnesota Nonprofit Relief Fund, which would provide general operating grants to nonprofits across the state.
2. As leaders, nonprofit professionals, and community members – strive to be open to feedback and constructive criticism – conflict can sometimes be a catalyst for good, transformative change.
3. Commit to transparency, inclusion, and access as much as possible, and center voices of people most impacted in decision making processes. Ask questions, read your organization’s strategic plans and financial statements so that you can contribute meaningfully to strategic conversations that impact staff.
4. Ensure staff at all levels are set up for success and set realistic expectations, especially if they have intersectional identities often underrepresented in our sector.
5. In a critical election year, encourage voting and Get Out the Vote campaigns. Nonprofits have power to advocate for your areas of expertise in public policy, learn how (MCN has trainings on this!)
6. If you have privilege, speak up against injustices and systems that continue to put up unnecessary barriers and cause harm, especially for our neighbors of color.
7. Support local, small organizations that are doing a lot of the on-the-ground work. They know their communities the best. If you want to support large, well-known organizations, know that many national organizations have local affiliates.
8. Be human and community centered. I know you are tired. We are all tired. Give yourselves and others around you grace, flexibility, and support.

I believe in us, you should too. In community,

Nonoko
At MAVA, we keep hearing about a volunteer shortage. We know that since the pandemic started, many nonprofits furloughed volunteers and laid off volunteer engagement staff. However, other organizations were able to bring on more volunteers than ever to meet the needs of their communities. We also know that anyone can be a volunteer, so saying there is a “volunteer shortage” is like saying there is a “people shortage.”

Right now, nonprofits have a golden opportunity to examine systems, dismantle inequities, and innovate to rebuild the volunteer workforce.

Address Racial Inequities
Volunteer engagement has a critical problem: volunteers serving at nonprofits don’t reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the communities they support. Furthermore, modern volunteerism — the formal structures and processes by which most organizations engage volunteers — is built upon multiple characteristics of white supremacy culture. (Read MAVA’s “Recognizing Racism in Volunteer Engagement”). Here are some tips for prioritizing race equity in your volunteer program:

- Advocate for equitable hiring practices. Inform leadership of the importance of representation at both the staff and volunteer levels.
- Promote an inclusive culture by making DEI education a priority for volunteers; speak up when you encounter biased or racist practices.
- Listen to BIPOC voices: convene listening sessions of BIPOC volunteers at your organization and potential volunteers within new communities you’d like to engage; compensate participants and let them know how you use the information they provide.
- Review policies and systems with an equity lens, including your volunteer application, handbook, background check policies, on-boarding system, training practices, and recognition.
- Educate volunteers on race equity topics. Build anti-racism into your volunteer orientation and provide additional race equity trainings.
- Build relationships in BIPOC communities: reach out to culturally led organizations in your area, be present at community and cultural events, and do the long-term work to build authentic partnerships based on mutual trust.
- Engage in MAVA’s Race Equity in Volunteerism Assessment Program and trainings.

Reach out to Informal Volunteers
We need to loosen our definition of volunteerism in order to recognize the value of contributions of all kinds. Informal volunteerism may be the foundation of a new type of volunteer engagement. Acts associated with informal volunteering (visiting an older neighbor, giving advice, house-sitting) often don’t register as “volunteering.” It’s also important to recognize that informal volunteerism is a way of life for many communities of color and immigrant communities, who incorporate volunteerism into their way of life; but don’t call it “volunteering.”

More adaptive and inclusive models of volunteerism are needed to harness the capacities and resilience that exist within communities. We should also recognize that our current practices and structures may be counterproductive; if 70 percent of volunteerism in the world is done informally, now is the time to ask why they are not coming to organizations.

Expand Virtual Volunteering
Digital volunteerism — resulting from greater accessibility and sophistication of information and communication technologies — also reflects changing preferences for more informal volunteering. According to a report published by Volunteer Match: “Virtual volunteering is increasing in popularity among nonprofits as they seek out safer ways for people to give their time. In a survey performed in May 2020, 45 percent of nonprofits are now offering more virtual opportunities — up from 32 percent in March. As more nonprofits are feeling financial strain from COVID-19, virtual volunteering is an effective way to get the support you need to help raise or improve productivity.”

Virtual volunteer opportunities can include: writing fundraising letters or grants, responding to email inquiries, bookkeeping support, designing websites, social media, writing greeting cards, and so much more. Your organization can also develop “at-home” opportunities that do not rely on technology with ways to stay engaged if they do not have reliable access. The type of work will depend on your organization, but writing notes to program participants, making phone calls to elected officials, and many other options are a possibility.

MAVA (Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement) is the premier statewide organization uniting, educating, and advancing Minnesota communities through excellence in leadership of volunteers and best practices in organizational volunteerism. Learn more about their work.
This year, Minnesota has a historic opportunity to tackle the ongoing health and economic effects of the pandemic, and make transformational changes to build a more equitable recovery in which all Minnesotans are healthy, safe, and financially secure. That’s because there’s an unprecedented amount of resources at play in the 2022 Legislative Session.

The state’s February Forecast projects a $9.3 billion general fund surplus for the current FY 2022-23 budget cycle. To put that in perspective, that’s about 16 percent of the state’s baseline two-year general fund budget.

Additional resources continue in the next two years: a $6.3 billion structural balance is projected for FY 2024-25. However, if we adjust that number for what it would take for all existing state services to keep up with the cost of inflation, it drops to $5.2 billion. In addition, Minnesota has $1.2 billion in remaining American Rescue Plan (ARP) flexible funds; in 2021, policymakers agreed that $250 million of these funds should go to frontline workers but they haven’t yet agreed on how to distribute it. These higher state resources reflect stronger economic growth, higher incomes, and larger corporate profits than expected in the state’s prior budget projections.

But that means that some things driving the strong economy and state budget picture are temporary. The additional federal aid to states is coming to an end, and families across the nation have already seen their buying power drop because Congress allowed the federal Child Tax Credit expansion to expire.

Also keep in mind that these positive forecast numbers do not mean the state has more revenues than needed. The forecast simply measures projected revenues against the budget passed in 2021, which fell short of fully responding to the pandemic and the deep disparities in opportunity and areas of disinvestment that were worsened by COVID-19. For example, despite the widely recognized shortage in affordable housing, the forecast assumes that spending on housing largely stays the same.

And we don’t yet have a broad-based recovery. Too many Minnesotans are struggling to get enough to eat, are behind on rent, having trouble covering basic household expenses, or left the workforce during the pandemic and have not yet been able to return. And because of past and current policy choices that erect barriers to fully joining in the state’s prosperity, Black, Indigenous, and Minnesotans of color are disproportionately more likely to be struggling to get by.

In this session, policymakers should focus on building an equitable recovery. They should invest in health care, child care, paid family and medical leave, affordable housing, a quality education from the earliest years through college and training, clean air and water, and other building blocks of a high quality standard of living for all Minnesotans. Policymakers should not waste this opportunity by instead enacting large tax cuts for people who are already doing so well in today’s economy. Over $1 billion in tax cuts have already happened as a result of last year’s budget decisions.

Read more about the Minnesota Budget Project’s policy priorities on our website.

Unprecedented state resources present unprecedented opportunity

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

It’s not a surplus when Minnesotans are struggling to thrive.

148,000 Minnesotans can’t afford to give their kids enough to eat.

130,000 Minnesotans are behind on rent.

920,000 Minnesotans are having trouble covering basic expenses.

Minnesota policymakers cannot waste this opportunity to make bold investments in a more equitable future. Add your name in support!
Advocating for MN’s first, nonprofit-specific COVID relief funding

by Marie Ellis, public policy director

Say it with me: “Nonprofits can advocate! Nonprofits should advocate! We are the experts!”

Now call up a colleague and get them to chant with you! Get the whole office involved! You’re not going to do that? It would be weird? Fine, write it a on a sticky note, put it on your monitor, and remind yourself every day then. Because now more than ever, we need elected officials to know about all the good and honest work our sector is doing.

In conversations with legislators, be sure to mention your organizations’ support for a $200 million Minnesota Nonprofit Relief Fund. To date, nearly 100 Minnesota nonprofits have signed their support, add your’s today!

To continue providing the support our communities need during COVID-19 and to accelerate a more equitable recovery, Minnesota needs to invest in our nonprofits. To date, nonprofits have been largely left out of state and federal relief programs. While many industries and sectors had access to one or more programs with dollars specific to meet their needs, the nonprofit sector has had no designated relief dollars for recovery.

New MCN data shows that 44 percent of nonprofits are still seeing an increase in demand for services, while 47 percent said they could only operate for 12 months or less before exhibiting financial distress.

Funding shortfalls and a diminished workforce, paired with an increased demand for services, is making it difficult for nonprofits to continue operating at the level our communities need to recover and rebuild from COVID-19.

That is why MCN, with key partners, is advocating for a one-time $200 million Minnesota Nonprofit Relief Fund.

If the relief fund proposal passes the Legislature and is signed by the Governor, general operating grants would range between $50,000 - $150,000, and prioritize small nonprofits in Greater Minnesota, nonprofits that provide human services, and culturally-specific nonprofits (BIPOC-led and serving). Half of the funds would be for organizations in the seven-county metro area, with the other half reserved for Greater Minnesota nonprofits.

We have been in conversation with members and partners about which features of a fund would be most important to ensure equitable access to the funds. Based on the feedback we received, we are working to include these elements in a Nonprofit Relief Fund:

- Dollars are for general operating support;
- The fund prioritizes the categories previously noted; and
- Application and reporting requirements are as simple as possible, while providing necessary eligibility information and oversight of the dollars.

Another great proposal to support this year, is a robust Equity Article in a bonding bill. This year a lot of focus will be on infrastructure projects like roads, bridges, wastewater treatment plants, and buildings, paid for by the state selling bonds. Hence, it is called a “bonding year” at the Legislature.

While nonprofits can benefit from bonding with a specific project included in the bill, the process does not work well for nonprofits or the municipalities they need to partner with. Two years ago for the first time, an Equity Article was in a bonding bill which provided dollars for community-based organizations led by and serving communities of color, and importantly, those dollars did not come with the same restrictions as other infrastructure funding.

Bonding bills in previous years have included $30 million and $18 million for these targeted infrastructure projects, and the Governor’s budget proposal this year suggests $100 million. MCN strongly supports that proposal, and look forward to helping legislators understand the unique positions of nonprofits in the world of infrastructure investment.

On behalf of Minnesota’s nonprofit sector, other issues MCN will be keeping a close eye on and supporting, or opposing as necessary, include:

- sales tax exemption for 501(c)(3) nonprofits (including an issue specific to construction materials);
- a state-run Paid Family and Medical Leave program;
- expanding trust and access to voting; and
- targeted assistance for nonprofits related to unemployment insurance financing.

Take another look at your sticky note, and remind your colleagues that nonprofits can advocate, nonprofits should advocate, and we are experts!

Get out there (even virtually) and talk to your lawmakers!
The Loft Literary Center announced Arleta Little as new executive director.

The Coalition of Asian American Leaders board appointed ThaoMee Xiong as the next executive and network director; Xiong replaced founder Bo Thao-Urabe who stepped down after nearly a decade.

Julie Atella, Mary Buck, and Sonal Markanda have been elected to serve a three-year team on the NAMI Minnesota board of directors.

Aeon announced that Dr. Eric Anthony Johnson would be the next president & CEO.

After more than a decade with Prepare + Prosper, Anne Leland Clark transitioned to executive director with Exodus Lending.

The Women’s Foundation of Minnesota added a number of new staff members, including Nina Robertson as director of systems change, Cynthia Bauerly as public policy executive in residence, Hannah Elias as grants manager, and James Arroyo Miller as community impact project manager.

Girl Scouts of Minnesota and Wisconsin River Valleys announced the retirement of chief executive officer Tish Bolger, effective December 2022.

The Hmong American Partnership announced May yer Thao as their next president & CEO.

The board of directors for ServeMinnesota elected a new chair, Phil Rutherford.

Rebekah Hartman was named executive director for Aging Services for Communities.

The Center for Economic Inclusion announced Abby Wellan joined their staff; Abby previously worked at Charities Review Council.

Open Book welcomed Bethany Whitehead as its new general manager on January 12, 2022.

The Shavlik Family Foundation welcomed Kelsey McKenna as their first grants manager.

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.

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Finding a path forward in our mental health crisis

There is nothing simple about living through a pandemic and ongoing racial trauma. Feedback from members, training attendees, staff, and community have all said loud and clear that our mental health crisis is worsening. Below is a conversation with Sue Abderholden, executive director of NAMI Minnesota, that we hope provides some clarity and context around this crisis, and resources to find a path forward.

Q: Accessing quality mental healthcare is a major barrier contributing to the crisis. How can we advocate to increase accessibility?

A: There are two large barriers to accessing mental healthcare. One is narrow networks, meaning plans have a limited number of mental health professionals in network. Minnesota law states that plans must have mental health providers within 30 minute/30 miles — but nothing regarding wait times or taking new patients. Reports on mental health parity find that people seek mental healthcare out of network at far higher rates than other types of healthcare, thus pay more out of pocket.

The second large barrier is a workforce shortage. Most of Minnesota is declared a workforce shortage for mental health professionals, with some rural counties having no psychologists or clinical social workers. The shortage is acute in very rural areas of the state and for diverse cultural communities. The Minnesota Department of Health conducted a survey and found that 73.4 percent of psychiatrists, 88.3 percent of mental health clinicians, and 86 percent of licensed alcohol & drug counselors identified as white.

We need health plans to expand their networks, including enrolling “any willing provider” during this crisis. Plans must also begin paying for psychiatric residential treatment programs for children and fully embracing mental health parity.

There are several bills moving through the Legislature to address the workforce crisis by paying for licensure supervision, expanding the loan forgiveness program, and providing grants to culturally-specific organizations to hire train more professionals.

Don’t wait until you or your family needs mental healthcare — advocate for bills that will increase access and further build our mental health system.

Q: BIPOC communities consistently experience racial trauma, including frequent acts of racially-motivated violence and hate crimes, that deeply impact mental health. Does NAMI have recommendations for BIPOC individuals to find culturally-informed mental healthcare?

A: It is important to find a mental health provider that shares similar identities and culture. They will understand what you have experienced, especially this past year. When looking for a provider, we recommend lists on Psychology Today, Therapy For Black Girls, Hued, and our own website.

If you are unable to find a provider who is from your same culture, we recommend looking for providers who are trauma informed and provide culturally responsive care. Also, check out resources in the community that focus on healing, such as the Minnesota Healing Justice Network or the Cultural Wellness Center.

Q: How can nonprofits as employers holistically support staff mental health?

A: Employers need to increase their understanding of mental health in the workplace. This means making it a safe space to talk about mental health challenges, providing wellness activities and resources, and publicizing the benefits of your Employee Assistance Programs.

Holistic support also means looking at your health insurance policy — does it include treatment for mental health and substance use disorders? Is the deductible low enough to not to be a barrier in accessing treatment? And lastly, learn about accommodations for a mental illness. The Job Accommodation Network and the APA Foundation’s Center for Workplace Mental Health are resources we recommend.

For over 40 years, NAMI Minnesota (National Alliance on Mental Illness) has been dedicated to improving the lives of children and adults with mental illness and their families.

Throughout the year, NAMI Minnesota offers family education, suicide prevention classes, peer led support groups and special presentations. Check out their website for more details; new classes and events are added every week.
Mission Award Spotlight: YWCA St. Paul, addressing history, legacy, and ongoing impact of racism in Minnesota’s capital city

by John Wurm, membership and communications director

With a mission to eliminate racism and empower women in St. Paul and its surrounding communities, YWCA St. Paul has been a champion for racial and gender equity in the community since 1907.

Through its supportive housing, employment, and youth development programs, the organization served more than 1,100 women, men, and youth in 2020, 94 percent of whom are low-income people of color, primarily African American. In addition, YWCA St. Paul’s Racial Justice Initiatives have reached 3,500 people, and its Health & Fitness Center supports positive wellness habits for an average of 3,250 members annually.

Following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 and ongoing community trauma, YWCA St. Paul expanded its work to provide educational programs on the history, legacy, and ongoing impact of racism, and inspire action to work toward eliminating it. This work was intentionally designed to unite community, build understanding, and call out the systems, laws, and policies that perpetuate inequitable outcomes for communities of color.

To help the many individuals and organizations looking for ways to further their understanding of racism and equity, and drive positive change, YWCA St. Paul launched the 21-Day Racial Equity and Social Justice Challenge in June 2020. This unique and thought-provoking email series provided participants with daily curated articles, podcasts, videos, and activities covering voting, education, criminal justice reform, and health. A second challenge took place in 2021 covering reparations, housing, environmental racism, and gender-based violence. More than 3,500 individuals participated in the two campaigns.

In summer 2020, YWCA St. Paul held a virtual town hall on “Tackling Racism,” featuring distinguished community leaders, Judge Pamela Alexander, James Burroughs, Justin Terrell, and Dr. Yohuru Williams. Reaching nearly 600 community members, the panel provided context for understanding what racism is, how it has infiltrated laws and policy, how it impacts the day-to-day life of African Americans, and what each of us can do to confront it.

Additionally, to promote better understanding of racism’s impact, YWCA St. Paul launched a monthly Equity and Justice Community Conversations in 2020. Reaching 700 attendees, the compelling virtual discussions set the groundwork for open dialog, sharing, learning, activism, and reform in a unique community forum.

YWCA St. Paul’s racial justice initiatives have promoted increased understanding and equipped community members to better fight racism and advocate for justice. Because of YWCA St. Paul’s efforts, thousands of Minnesotans have been challenged by exploring the history, legacy, and ongoing impact of racism. As a result, the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits was pleased to present the organization with the 2021 Minnesota Nonprofit Mission Award for Anti-Racism Initiative.

Nominations for the 2022 Nonprofit Mission Awards are now open!

If the past two years have shown us anything, it’s that Minnesota depends on nonprofits to rise to the evolving challenges our communities face. From housing, education, and health, to the arts, philanthropy, and community improvement, nonprofits play vital roles in supporting community, fostering solutions, and advocating for the future we want.

This work is exactly why MCN created the Nonprofit Mission Awards. It’s also why we hope you’ll nominate your nonprofit (or one you support) for their efforts in the areas of Advocacy, Anti-Racism Initiative, Innovation, or Responsive Philanthropy.

Recipients receive a professional video highlighting their work, recognition at the 2022 MCN Annual Conference, a feature in Nonprofit News, a one-of-a-kind glass sculpture, a cash award, and more.

Nominate your nonprofit by Friday, May 27!
Early in February, MCN’s “Nonprofit Trends” channel on Microsoft Teams went a little like this:

Q: What have folks heard in the last couple of weeks from members regarding their most-pressing issues?

A: Lack of mental health care services! Staff in particular. And the lack of finding providers and access to coverage.

“Lack of mental health care services” was repeated nine times in this same Teams chat. We are struggling. Let us normalize that reality by saying it aloud.

Every few months the Nonprofit News editorial team gathers to generate content ideas and map out the publication’s next issue. As program director, I am often asked to write about upcoming learning opportunities, which is what I am doing with this piece in an unconventional way.

On March 29 and 31, we will host the eleventh annual Nonprofit Finance and Sustainability Conference with our partner organization Propel Nonprofits. Money and anxiety can have a real connection — when income is scarce or unpredictable, sustainability at the least feels elusive.

Speaking from an organizational perspective, when access to resources becomes strained, the pathways for sustaining your work and your workforce, your people, becomes strained.

What are ways to acknowledge and address this human strain? What are ways to elevate and support mental health care within the nonprofit sector to sustain our people as we create alternative ways to sustain our missions, our work?

Propel and MCN felt strongly that getting explicit about the intersection of finance with human resources at this year’s conference was necessary.

In addition to sessions with a deep focus on the financial underpinnings of nonprofit management and leadership, conference sessions will simultaneously shine a bright light on the present-day and potential future needs of the sector’s workforce.

And importantly, with the intention of addressing the workforce not as a monolith, but a community of people each impacted differently by historic and present day inequities embedded in our work, the spaces we build, and the access to resources that exist but are not equitably distributed.

Workforce conference session presenters will bring to the fore key topics and trends, including:

- happier recruitment and hiring;
- relationship-centered retention approaches;
- creating workplaces that honor a diversity of cultural practices;
- assessing benefits through an inter-generational lens;
- acknowledging the unique needs of working caregivers;
- building participatory practices around budgeting and leading;
- how a vision is born to meet a moment;
- and possibilities for integrating (racial) healing in all administrative strands of an organization.

Additionally, there will be intentional, facilitated time for attendees to gather by role or organizational business model to address these themes and trends impacting nonprofit balance sheets and morale.

Together, we will find ways to sustain each other, not just maintain each other, at this never ordinary and always thought-provoking conference where solutions, plans of action, and relatability are never elusive.
Achieving compensation transparency: we need your help!

According to MCN’s most recent Minnesota Nonprofit COVID-19 Impact Report, workforce shortages and staff turnover were the second and fourth most reported challenges for Minnesota nonprofits.

One way nonprofits can support and compensate employees more fairly, equitably, and on par with other sectors is to first have access to current, reliable compensation and benefits data.

The Minnesota Nonprofit Salary & Benefits Survey, published every two years since 1999, details compensation data for dozens of nonprofit jobs, presenting the results by six budget categories, seven geographic regions, and 12 activity areas so that your nonprofit can compare compensation levels to similar organizations.

Recruitment for the 2022 Salary & Benefits Survey is now open and we are asking nonprofits across the state to share your salary and benefits information.

Compiling data from hundreds of Minnesota nonprofits, the 2022 report will provide:

- Salary and wage data for over 70 nonprofit jobs, including enhanced information for executive leadership;
- Information on medical, dental, disability, life insurance, retirement, and paid time off benefits; and
- Data on compensation practices including raises, bonuses, and other incentives.

Participating organizations will complete the survey in July and August, with the finished report released in October 2022. Additionally, participants will receive 50-75 percent off their copy of the finished report.

To participate in the 2022 survey, please indicate your nonprofit’s interest by Friday, May 27.