

## A NEWLY FORMED STATE ASSOCIATION

April 2010

### BACKGROUND

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Through associations in 36 states, local nonprofit organizations collaborate to manage and lead more effectively, increase their impact in their communities, and strengthen their collaborative voice on issues that affect both society and the nonprofit sector. A state association of nonprofits has the potential of providing services that will reduce the cost of doing business and increase the effectiveness of policy and advocacy agendas simultaneously. These state associations help strengthen the capacity of nonprofit organizations and speak on their behalf with the result of evoking meaningful and lasting change as well as helping to keep the public informed on the latest challenges and achievements in the nonprofit field.

Nonprofit leaders from across Washington have long acknowledged the need for a statewide nonprofit association that could provide a voice for the more than 50,000 nonprofits in our state. A state association would provide Washington's nonprofit sector with better representation in state and federal policy decisions, improved access to programs and funds, and access to services and programs to build their capacity. The first formal efforts to launch such an association began about a year ago when nonprofit leadership from around the state formed a collaborative working committee to identify the what, when and how.

During this same period, a group of funders commissioned an assessment of capacity building in Washington State. Their interest in the capacity of nonprofits reinforces the point that the health of the nonprofit sector is critical to thriving communities.

The final report, developed by The Giving Practice ([Nonprofit Ecosystem Report](#)) is relevant to the state association planning in several ways. The

authors identified eight essential elements of a healthy nonprofit ecosystem and suggested that these basic conditions and resources need to exist “in an ongoing way in order for nonprofits as a whole to survive and thrive.”

- The state association, Washington Nonprofits provides a much needed **anchor and steward** for the ecosystem that supports nonprofits across the state.
- The report called attention to the importance of public policy and effective advocacy to the efforts of nonprofits to positively influence their community. This is a primary role of most state nonprofit associations and will be a key component of Washington Nonprofits.
- The report highlighted the significant disparities that exist around the state in terms of resources and access to capacity building services. Rural areas in particular have far fewer resources, rely more heavily on volunteer staff, and have to travel long distances to access services. The state association will not duplicate services offered in other communities but rather focus on replicating and extending existing services into under-served communities.

### PROCESS

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**The planning process** underway since March, 2009 is facilitated by Melora Hiller. The committee has included representatives from around the state:

1. Sara Ballard, Volunteer Center of Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties
2. Put Barber, Idealist and Nancy Bell Evans Center, Seattle

3. Melany Brown, Executive Alliance, King County (resigned December 2009)
4. Elizabeth Clawson, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center (formerly with National Council of Nonprofits)
5. Sandy Gill, Nonprofit, Northwest Nonprofit Resources, Spokane
6. Liz Heath, The Nonprofit Center, Tacoma
7. Jeanne Kojis, Nonprofit Network of Southwest Washington, Vancouver
8. David Landers, Philanthropy Northwest (temporary member)
9. Nancy Long, Executive Service Corps, King County
10. Trula Nicholas, Whatcom Council of Nonprofits, Bellingham
11. Jennifer Witherbee, Washington Apple Foundation, Wenatchee

The planning committee has met frequently by phone and in person to discuss nonprofit needs, opportunities to collaborate among existing networks and providers, and what activities the association is best positioned to offer its members.

## RESULTS TO DATE

The group is now in the process of developing a business plan for the first three years of Washington Nonprofits – the name chosen for the group’s formal incorporation. In addition to articulating a mission and vision for the association, the planning group has identified the kinds of services and products it should offer, and determined the most appropriate membership structure. The organizing board of WN is in the process of establishing formal recognition as the state association member to the National Council of Nonprofits.

## MISSION

The **mission** of Washington Nonprofits is to build a strong collaborative nonprofit sector serving

Washington communities. We do this through advocacy, education, capacity building, and networking.

## VISION

Washington nonprofits are contribute to, and are recognized as, essential elements of healthy and thriving communities across the state.

As a result of the state association:

1. Nonprofits are better positioned to respond to external challenges and to capture new opportunities.
2. Nonprofits join together to assure that government's policy and resource decisions support nonprofit effectiveness in meeting community needs.
3. There is greater collaboration, sharing of information and resources, and a stronger sense of common cause between nonprofits.
4. Nonprofits have tools and information that allow them to be more effective.
5. The public and policy makers see nonprofit organizations as an equal partner with government and the business sector

## PRINCIPLES

In addition to the mission and outcomes, the planning committee adopted a set of **Guidelines for Collaboration**. These include a commitment to be

- Truly state-wide in our membership, leadership, governance, and programs;
- Transparent in our planning process and our resolution of differences;
- Trustworthy in our relationships with various stakeholders of the association.

## SERVICES OF THE ASSOCIATION

Across the country state associations provide a wide range of activities and services for its members. WN has focused on a set of initial programs that will be available at start-up. The

range of services will grow over time. Membership in Washington Nonprofits will give organizations and individuals access to the following services:

1. **Policy and advocacy** - WN will focus on issues of importance to the nonprofit sector at the state and national levels. WN will provide training and resources that allow staff, board members, and volunteers to engage effectively in policy and advocacy work. WN will focus on public policy issues that affect the sector as a whole in terms of funding, taxation, regulations, and other issues. Results will include:
  - A strong communications system that allows WN members to share news, create action plans; regarding potential state and federal legislation and to identify funding opportunities;
  - Broad engagement of organizations and nonprofit leaders in public policy issues that affect the sector as a whole;
  - A reliable process for discussion among the membership of key policy priorities;
  - Greater understanding among policy makers about nonprofits' strengths, needs, and concerns; and
  - An awards program to recognize nonprofit leadership in the state.

The planning group is also quite mindful that many sector-specific state associations exist here such as the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance, Washington Arts Association, Washington State Community Action Partnership, and the Environmental Education Association to name just a few. These associations play a critical role in supporting and advocating on behalf of their members on issues specific to their field whether it be affordable housing, arts, community action agencies or environmental education agencies. WN does not intend to assume the role and purpose of these organizations. Collaboration with these associations will be critical to reaching new members, aligning nonprofit needs, and

reflecting the voice of nonprofits across Washington.

2. **Communications** – WN members will have access to tools that help members identify resources, keep current on news that may affect their organization or find needed services or resources. Results will include:
  - Statewide print and electronic newsletter that educates members on trends, opportunities, best practices, and resources;
  - Surveys and other tools for gathering input in order to ensure that WN is meeting the needs of nonprofits in Washington State; and
  - Articles and research, including a profile of the nonprofit sector, that help those within the sector as well as government, philanthropy, and business/community leaders understand the value, composition, and challenges of the nonprofit sector.
3. **Promote access to capacity building services** - WN will facilitate access for nonprofit statewide to appropriate capacity building and leadership development opportunities.. Results will include:
  - An interactive website with links to nonprofits consultants, capacity building resources, and best practices (Provided through Executive Service Corps);
  - Encouragement and support from WN for the replication of management support services to new areas of the state. This includes bookkeeping and payroll services and may include human resources in the future;
  - Help in identifying and accessing high-quality consultative services;
  - Leadership Development programs including opportunities for members to gain leadership skills through task forces and committees of WN;

- Hosting or co-sponsoring of conferences and training sessions; and
- Insurance coverage purchased through a group of nonprofits. This should result in significant savings. WN is exploring a variety of strategies for either linking members to existing pools or working directly with a provider to develop a program specifically for WN members.

4. **Encouraging Collaboration** - WN will also facilitate connections and conversations among nonprofits in order to encourage collaboration, resource sharing, and opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction.

## GOVERNANCE AND MEMBERSHIP

As a state association, Washington Nonprofits will seek to have broad representation among its leadership and membership from nonprofits across the state in terms of geography, sector, size, and capacity. Our voice on behalf of nonprofits is strengthened by numbers.

Washington Nonprofits is currently recruiting its permanent 13-member board that will include one person from each of the Congressional Districts plus four at-large members. Board members are expected to have a deep understanding of the issues and concerns of nonprofits and the communities they serve.

Final membership rates will be determined after the Listening Sessions being held across the state in the spring and summer of 2010. It is clear that members must perceive a clear value and that the benefits of membership are clear. Membership categories include regular nonprofit members, supporters, and providers and sponsors, each with a specific fee schedule and benefits.

Other aspects of the membership model include:

1. WN organizational membership dues for nonprofits are set on a sliding scale based on the annual operating budget;
2. Organizations that are members of another network (sector-specific association or regional

network or center) receive a credit toward dues in WN;

3. People associated with all classes of membership are encouraged and invited to participate on work groups, task forces, committees, etc.; and
4. We will consider offering a special tier of membership to founding members and those who become sustaining members.

## NEXT STEPS

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The following are the steps the organization needs to take over the next 3-12 months:

- Recruit a diverse board of directors.
- Conduct outreach meetings with nonprofits across the state listening to service priorities.
- Further develop products and services based on nonprofit feedback.
- Develop a detailed business plan to identify revenue sources and expense levels.
- Develop a diverse, sustainable funding plan with commitments that will serve as a solid startup base.
- Hire an executive director and other staff as needed.
- Develop and launch a membership campaign.
- Conduct outreach to sector -specific associations.
- Develop a marketing plan, logo, and positioning language.

**We welcome your questions and suggestions. For more information or if you would like to get involved with Washington Nonprofits, please contact Sandy Gill, board president at (509) 325-4303.**