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The topics you asked about in 2024

By: The National Council of Nonprofits Team

Here at NCN, we do a lot of listening to come up with the content you view on this website, read in our [newsletters](#), and receive from us in other ways. It's one of our [Core Values](#): serving others by listening and leading. We hear the feedback you provide—and we see the trends in our website traffic and the subjects people call and email us about.

As we hear your queries, our team works to provide trusted and timely information, gleaning trends along the way. For this article, we are bringing together the different experiences and areas of expertise of the NCN team. This compilation of topics reflects some of the most frequently asked questions we received this year, and covers everything from leadership to fiscal sponsorship, and donor stewardship to the power of connection.

Protecting Nonprofit Nonpartisanship is First Priority

by Tiffany Gourley Carter, Policy Counsel



Nonprofit nonpartisanship – the requirement under federal law that charitable nonprofits refrain from supporting or opposing candidates for public office – is the [bedrock principle](#) that sets charitable nonprofits apart from all other tax-exempt entities. Despite protecting charitable organizations and the public, the law has come under attack by individuals who seek to channel money away from nonprofits and into partisan politics. In practice, this could take the form of using donations to pressure nonprofit leaders to endorse candidates, include partisan advertising on websites or in email blasts, or waste valuable time and resources to weigh who to support or oppose. The result is the same: loss of nonprofit trust and integrity with their communities.

Attempts to undermine nonpartisanship have been made in all three branches of government. An early version of the [2017 federal tax law](#) included a loophole that would have politicized the charitable sector for partisan gain. The provision was excluded from the final version. Earlier that same year, President Trump issued an [Executive Order](#), ostensibly to block the IRS from enforcing the law against religious organizations. Currently, a [federal lawsuit](#) seeks to have the law ruled unconstitutional because of uneven or selective enforcement against religious organizations. As we look to the 2025 tax debate and a second Trump Administration, charitable nonprofits are committed to fighting any and all attempts to turn them into partisan ploys rather than safe havens for their communities.

Helping the helpers

by Rick Cohen, Chief Communications Officer/Chief Operating Officer



It's no secret that nonprofit jobs can be stressful. On top of missions that tug at our heartstrings, we feel additional pain if the budget can't stretch far enough to help everyone who turns to us for assistance. We feel the extra weight when the organization is short-handed, something that is [all too common](#).

With so many stressors, we're heartened to see an increasing focus on mental health at nonprofits. That focus takes many forms, including the [19 tips included in this recent Forbes article](#).

While many of these tips carry some cost to the organization—which not all are in a position to absorb —sometimes, it's the small things that make a big difference. Science demonstrates the power of [celebrating not just the victories, but the milestones along the way](#). They can be large or small; personal or professional. And it's not just something the executive director or a supervisor can do: Anyone can recognize and celebrate a colleague who's had a win.

On their own, these acts of recognition and celebration won't overcome burnout, but that gratitude may be the spark someone needs today.

Content for Connection

by Trinity Foreman, Communications Specialist



Creating quality content for social media can be grueling. Spending hours on an amazing video only to have a few “likes” trickle in is a sadness only a social media manager knows. The goal of producing content isn’t always about impressive engagement numbers but reaching *one* person who is moved into action. Keep creating, posting, and sharing your nonprofit’s story for the one person who will find your organization through social media and find a common cause in their heart. If your quality content is *still* getting the cold shoulder, try it on different platforms, in different forms, or pin it to the top of your profile.

The double-edged sword of the collective goldfish brain of the internet is that what is posted is quickly forgotten, successes and failures alike. Experiment with approaches and pay attention to the audience your content engages successfully. Mottos you should live by as you endure the waves of success and failure: respect the time of others by sharing important information concisely, quality over quantity, consistency over frenzy. Keep posting your content and you’ll find your people, supporters, and community.

The power of nonprofit networks

by Allison Higgins, Director of Network Engagement



In the nonprofit sector, collaboration isn't just beneficial—it's essential. As someone immersed in connecting and supporting a national network of [state associations of nonprofits](#), I've seen how fostering trust, embracing diverse perspectives, and working together strengthens nonprofits and increases their reach, resiliency, and community impact.

There is power in numbers. In a game of tug of war, it’s the combined strength of many people that prevails. The same is true with nonprofits. One person, or even

one organization, is not enough to influence public opinion or policymakers. But what if that lone person or organization joins with another and then another, and more?

I've seen how state associations of nonprofits create space for organizations of all sizes and missions to come together, share knowledge, and build a united voice for advocacy and action. When we find those common spaces to support each other, learn together, and advocate together, we are stronger together.

Nurture lasting partnerships through grantor stewardship

by Rob Hoshaw, Senior Grant Writer



Your careful planning and hard work have paid off with a successful grant award. Congratulations! With funding now secured for your project, you might not think about engaging your grant program officer again until it's time to submit the report. However, don't neglect valuable opportunities to keep them connected to your work. Much like [donor stewardship](#), grantor stewardship during, and after, the grant period is just as crucial to maintaining a strong grantor-grantee relationship as cultivating that initial connection.

Creating a [stewardship plan](#) early on will help you identify possible activities and establish a frequency for engagement—often quarterly or monthly. Stewardship activities can take many forms and are often fairly simple. Ask if the program officer would like to receive your newsletter. Share regular success stories via email about both your project and the organization. Share pertinent photos, videos, and testimonials. Tag them in social media updates about the project. Invite them to attend an event. If you already have a meeting near their office, ask if they'd like to

get together.

Also—and this is key—don't overlook your program officer as a thought partner. Listen to their ideas, suggestions of collaborators, or offers to make introductions to other potential partners. Remember, the relationships you steward with your grantors will often [pay dividends](#) by fostering lasting partnerships and potentially opening doors to new opportunities.

An increasing focus on fiscal sponsorship

by Bruce MacIver, Executive Assistant



In the past several months, we have seen a noticeable increase in calls requesting information regarding fiscal sponsorship. Fiscal sponsorship can provide a pathway for organizations—particularly those that are emerging or lack 501(c)(3) nonprofit status—to access funding and resources needed to advance their missions.

Through fiscal sponsorship, a nonprofit umbrella organization can offer its legal and tax-exempt status to a project or initiative, allowing it to receive grants and donations that it otherwise could not. This arrangement not only streamlines the administrative process, but also enhances credibility with potential funders. Fiscal sponsors often provide additional support—such as financial management, compliance oversight, and capacity building—enabling the sponsored organization to focus on its mission and program development.

Overall, fiscal sponsorship fosters collaboration and innovation within the nonprofit sector, empowering diverse initiatives to thrive. This article from the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy discusses the [increasing popularity of fiscal sponsorship](#) within the nonprofit sector, and highlights different types of fiscal

sponsorship models. Additionally, [the National Network of Fiscal Sponsors](#) is a great resource that we frequently refer callers to so they can learn more.

Leading by centering others

by Donna Murray-Brown, Vice President of Strategy and Development



In all my leadership roles—whether as a CEO, board chair, or project leader—I’ve learned a fundamental truth: The wisdom we need to navigate challenges doesn’t come solely from the leader. It comes from the people and communities we serve. Recognizing this isn’t just humbling—it’s transformational. When we center others’ expertise and lived experiences, we create a culture where trust thrives, ideas flow freely, and people feel inspired to do their best work. Mistakes aren’t failures; they’re learning moments that push us forward.

As we step into 2025, one thing is clear: Leadership is about guiding and facilitating, not controlling. It’s about creating the conditions where your team’s collective brilliance can shine. When you trust, empower, and embolden others—and approach problem-solving and decision-making with radical curiosity and respect—the results can be extraordinary. There’s no greater reward than witnessing the magic that unfolds.

For additional insights into leadership approaches, consider exploring the concept of collaborative leadership, which emphasizes empowerment, shared decision-making, and trust-building. Studies highlight its effectiveness in fostering innovation and adaptability, even in resource-constrained or high-stress environments. For a deeper dive into practical strategies, the *Harvard Business Review* offers guidance on psychological safety in teams, while *Next Level Nonprofit: Build a Dream Team + Increase Lasting Impact* by Dr. Chris Lambert provides a disciplined approach to

building great teams and highly-effective organizations.

Problem, Solution, Action, Repeat

by David L. Thompson, Acting CEO and Vice President of Public Policy



Thanks for reading this far. Here at the end of the staff alphabet, I too have had the opportunity to read the wisdom and brilliance of my NCN colleagues, and I am struck by the common thread of the power and impact of listening. This commonality is either the reason for one of our mantras or the natural result. Either way, we like to say, “[What’s the problem? What’re the solutions? Let’s get them done.](#)”

Often, the calls we receive—or the concerns raised during a webinar or at conference—don’t lead to a quick fix. But it does start the ball rolling toward a solution. During the depths of the pandemic, many of us based in Washington, D.C. learned that the solutions we were proposing—and seeking grassroots support for—weren’t the most pressing matters that nonprofits were facing “out in the real world.”

For example, hearing that nonprofits were more worried about finding and retaining staff to do the work in communities that needed to be done, NCN knew we needed more input. Through two national surveys, we listened to the challenges of frontline organizations and also collected their ideas for solutions. The result was NCN’s intense focus on the [Nonprofit Workforce Shortage Crisis](#), a focus that has resulted in important policy changes at the federal, state, and local levels.

Here’s one more example from the policy realm that’s hot as this edition of *Nonprofit Essentials* goes to press. When natural disasters hit, charitable organizations in the affected areas reach out to their state associations of

nonprofits, and to NCN, asking about what resources are available and what more government officials can do. Typically, Congress rushes to enact temporary relief but, just as often, neglects to include solutions that apply to charitable nonprofits. Think income tax credits that tax-exempt entities can't use.

Right now, a bill pending in the House of Representatives would redress this constant complaint by proposing a [temporary, targeted tax deduction](#) that all taxpayers could claim for donating to the relief and recovery efforts of charitable organizations in disaster areas. It's not clear whether the bill will be enacted this year, but clearly some Members of Congress are listening to the problems raised by thousands of organizations and promoting positive solutions. It's still up to us to get them done. Together.