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# The Value of Nonprofits: What Candidates Are Saying

Elections give charitable nonprofits the opportunity to raise candidates' awareness about both the impact of their organizations and the needs in communities. An excellent tool for generating profound insights is the nonpartisan candidate questionnaire.

In recent months, several state associations of nonprofits, including the **North Carolina Center for Nonprofits**, **Maine Association of Nonprofits**, and the **CT Community Nonprofit Alliance**, invited candidates running for local, state, and federal offices to share their insights on issues of interest to nonprofits and communities at large. To remain nonpartisan, charitable nonprofits cannot rank the candidates or comment on their responses. Still, reading the candidates' responses often reveals how experience working for or with charitable organizations can give a candidate insight into the policies and legislation that improve their communities. Our point here is to focus on the effectiveness of candidate questionnaires; we refrain from naming the individual candidates or their state to avoid giving even the appearance of preference.

## The Impact of Nonprofit Experience

Each of the candidate questionnaires asked participants to describe their personal and professional experiences with nonprofit organizations. The connection between that experience and world view is unmistakable:

- “I have seen directly the impact of nonprofits from the Center for Empowerment and Education to Ability Beyond to the Cultural Alliance,” a state senate candidate responded. She continued, “Nonprofits are the core of our community. I have wanted to help secure funding and to raise the profile of these and many more nonprofits” in the district.
- A town council candidate demonstrated her awareness of nonprofit operational challenges by highlighting her engagement on monthly calls with other nonprofit leaders. “We discuss issues that affect nonprofits on a daily basis including human resources, software, technology, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.” She observed further, “This group of individuals has changed my heart and given me so much hope about the future of our community. So many great folks working hard to make our community better!” In advancing her policy priorities, she stated, “It is going to take all of us, including public, private, and nonprofit organizations working towards this crisis in our community.”
- A legislative candidate shared several experiences working as a staff member of three nonprofits and serving on several nonprofit boards. As a result of her engagement with nonprofits in her communities, the candidate included a chapter on the impact of local nonprofits in a book welcoming people to the state. “That is because I know how important a role they play in our state.”

## **Policy Priorities**

Charitable nonprofits are strictly nonpartisan, but that doesn’t mean we can’t ask candidates where they stand on the issues of the day. These questionnaires gave candidates the opportunity to tell voters who care about the missions of nonprofits where they stand.

- A House candidate laid out a substantive policy agenda for challenges nonprofits are facing in the Tarheel State and beyond. Among his priorities are legislation to overcome systemic government grantmaking and contracting challenges, and charitable giving tax provisions that “incentivize all North Carolinians to give generously to the work of charitable nonprofits.”

- A candidate for county treasurer recognized the job “may not have a huge impact on broad policy changes,” but identified contracting opportunities with nonprofits “expanding the services for substance use disorder and mental health” going forward. The candidate also flagged a desire to work toward “greater coordination at a county level to address homelessness in the region.”
- “I have always been a staunch advocate for nonprofits in my community and beyond,” reassured a legislative candidate. Offering more detail, she wrote, “I believe that we need to provide more support to nonprofits and do a better job of integrating state resources/needs with the support that nonprofits can and do provide.”

## Partnering with Nonprofits

The candidate questionnaires asked for specific ways in which, if elected, the candidates would partner with the nonprofit sector to achieve the goals of their campaign.

- A county commissioner candidate pledged to “meet with and learn from individual nonprofits in order to gain a greater understanding of their missions and purpose, with the goal of amplifying their visibility and impact to community members.” The candidate added, “I am also very comfortable reaching out to or partnering with municipal leaders, council/select persons, or State representatives should legislative issues arise that have the potential to impact nonprofits.”
- “Community nonprofits provide essential services and have been drastically underfunded by the state for too long,” acknowledged a candidate for the legislature, recognizing that “needs have increased exponentially, yet these vital community organizations have not seen their funding even keep pace with normal caseloads.” The candidate pledged, “I will continue to advocate for increased funding.”
- A state senate candidate wrote, “The policy that I support most enthusiastically is promoting new and expanded tax deductions and credits that encourage individuals and businesses to give generously to support their communities through the work of charitable nonprofits.” Demonstrating some nonprofit awareness, the candidate explained, “This would help nonprofit organizations in three ways: 1) it would encourage larger donations for nonprofits to utilize; 2) Increased donations would help create increased revenue to address the

employee shortage faced by nonprofit organizations; and 3) This would also reduce the need for nonprofits to depend on overly complicated government funding mechanisms.”

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The bottom line of these responses and the process of asking for input is that when confronted with the experience and impact of charitable nonprofits, candidates of all stripes are reminded that they must be helping local organization solve local problems in their communities. Advocates are doing this awareness raising every day. Fortunately, state associations of nonprofits are taking full advantage of the elections process to focus the candidates on the important issues of the sector and communities.

## **Additional Information**

- CT Community Nonprofit Alliance: [2022 Legislative Candidate Questionnaires](#)
- Maine Association of Nonprofits: [Candidates on Nonprofits](#)
- North Carolina Center *for* Nonprofits: [2022 Candidate Questionnaire Responses](#)
- Nonprofit VOTE: [Candidate Questionnaire and Voted Guides](#)