



Published on National Council of Nonprofits (<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org>)

Original URL: <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/articles/respect-through-data>

Respect Through Data

It can be a sincere statement or a meaningless throwaway line when a politician tells a nonprofit audience that local charities are valued and appreciated. But when policymakers cite a statistic about nonprofit reach or impact, that's when you know they are paying attention. (See, e.g., Senator Schumer's quote in sidebar.) That's a key reason why state associations of nonprofits and others put so much effort into economic reports and why we regularly bring them to readers' attention through this newsletter. They demonstrate and accelerate advocacy in action.

Earlier this year, the **Montana Nonprofit Association** published the [2021 Montana Nonprofit Economic Report](#), the organization's biennial study of the economic impact of the charitable nonprofit sector in Montana. The subtitle of this latest report sums up the advocacy potential of the data quite nicely: "501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit organizations drive the economy, keep government lean, bring efficiencies and resources to communities, and are essential to Montana's vitality and prosperity."

Among other findings, the report shares that, prior to the pandemic, Montana's charitable nonprofits employed 51,719 people, which is 11.4% of the state's workforce. Nonprofits paid those employees just over \$2.4 billion in wages. Charitable organizations generated nearly \$10.5 billion in revenue, which was returned back to Montana through mission-driven work. The report breaks down the nonprofit data by each of the state's 56 counties, detailing the number of nonprofits and income generated, allowing lawmakers to see the local impact for their constituents.

The report concludes by observing, “Charitable nonprofit organizations are efficiently and effectively operating in every county and in all Tribal nations in Montana in partnership with the business sector and government.” It adds, “Nonprofits are providing essential services, supporting Montana’s quality of life, and serving as our state’s social safety net.” The report continues, “Nonprofits are frontline workers, guardians of community well-being, employers, and economic drivers.” And finally, the call to action for policymakers: “As we all work to reinvigorate Montana’s economy, the nonprofit sector will be an essential part of the equation, bringing community-based, resourceful, people-centered solutions.”

The Montana report is only the latest example of organizations going the extra mile to generate data that tell the nonprofit story. Regular readers of this newsletter have already seen reports this year on new data from the [Delaware Alliance for Nonprofit Advancement](#), the [Center for Non-Profits](#) in **New Jersey**, and [Momentum Nonprofit Partners](#) in Memphis, **Tennessee**, as well as the report in today’s sidebar from [Together SC](#), the state association of nonprofits in **South Carolina**.

The point? Data can tell a story that anecdotes and relationships can’t convey. And when repeated by politicians, they can indicate that advocacy efforts are sinking in.