



**Strategic Plan FY21-FY23
August 2020**

Developed with support from



PAPER CRANE ASSOCIATES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 4 years, the NPC has established itself as a major resource for nonprofits in Berkshire County, offering over 20 programs and services including a workshop series, Nonprofit Awards, Giving Back guide, Volunteer Fairs, Legislative Town Halls, and a Philanthropy Curriculum. Currently in “growth” phase, the organization needs to build capacity to meet increasing demand for services by a large and unorganized sector. In order to achieve its vision of an organized, healthy and efficient sector, the NPC has identified key priorities for the next three years which includes:

- Elevating the voice of the sector
- Strengthening programs for rising and veteran nonprofit leaders
- Exploring a shared services model
- Regularly reviewing its program portfolio
- Developing a case for funding
- Fully funding its budget
- Maximizing human capital

In just a few short years, NPC has accomplished a great deal with limited resources and responded quickly to sector needs. Even in these times of change caused by COVID-19, NPC is well poised to continue its work to support Berkshire nonprofits to become increasingly united, healthy, collaborative, well-trained, and sustainable. The work of the NPC over the next few years will be both inwardly and outwardly focused, strengthening its own viability and sustainability while growing and deepening its work and impact on the sector.

Introduction

The NPC has successfully established itself as a clearinghouse for information and services and an advocate for nonprofits in the region. NPC has been sustained through multiple income streams including membership dues, advertising sales, sponsorship opportunities, program/event revenue, technical consulting fees, and donations.

In its first year, the Founder ran the organization primarily on her own with a shoestring budget. With the addition of a paid staff person, NPC has firmly established its role in the Berkshire County community. There is an active Board and Advisory Board; an effective website with valuable resource information; an established annual series of workshops; and a popular Giving Back guide to philanthropic opportunities in the Berkshires. Through direct outreach, public relations, networking and marketing of its programs and products, NPC signed up 145 nonprofit organizations for membership, and connected with hundreds more. In addition, NPC fields calls for information and referrals, meets individually with nonprofits, provides coaching services for boards and management, and represents the Berkshires on the Board of the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network.

Mission

The NPC is a support and capacity building organization for Berkshire nonprofits. The mission of the Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires (NPC) is to facilitate growth for charitable organizations through shared resources, affordable services, and creative collaborations.

Vision

The NPC becomes an umbrella organization for an organized nonprofit sector where opportunities for collaboration are plentiful and actionable. Duplication of efforts is minimized, organizations share more resources, communication is strong, and geographic challenges are met with thoughtful solutions and systems.

Key Programs

The NPC has developed a number of programs which have significantly responded to needs in the community, including:

- Giving Back guide
- Volunteer Fairs
- Legislative Town Hall
- Workshops/webinars
- Philanthropy Curriculum
- Nonprofit Awards Breakfast

A Look at Berkshire County Today

Today, Berkshire County has one of the highest number of nonprofits in the Commonwealth and approximately one quarter of residents work for the more than 1000 nonprofits in this geographically trifurcated county with no regional government. Most of these nonprofits are small and under-resourced. But the work they do is critical including protecting community members from abusive relationships, offering free medical care, inspiring audiences through performing and visual arts, and providing after school programs. There is no countywide volunteer organization to which organizations or potential volunteers can turn. The nonprofit sector is one of the county's largest economic engines and needs an umbrella organization to facilitate collaboration, communication, advocacy, volunteerism, and the sharing of resources.

Berkshire County spans 950 miles and comprises 31 rural towns and one city of 42,000 (Pittsfield). A mountainous area, it lacks full cell phone and broadband coverage, a gap which has become ever more apparent during the time of covid's demands on working and learning from home. It takes over an hour by car to get from one end of the county to the other. The county's population is aging and declining so the NPC leverages existing assets such as consultants and retirees to provide programming in all regions of the county.

The Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires Today

NPC's 2020 budget was \$156,000 but the Coronavirus crisis has forced a 60% cut, leaving just enough for the critical programs and overhead. 50% of NPC's revenue is contributed (grants, donations, sponsorships and in-kind donations) and 50% is earned through program fees, membership (18%), advertising, ticket sales and fundraising events. Due to COVID-19, NPC is experiencing a 38% reduction in revenue, but has successfully pivoted its programming to address new needs and the new reality. The annual Awards event was transformed into a 2-day virtual summit on nonprofit sustainability and the Giving Back guide was published by The Berkshire Eagle to reach 3x as many people who are looking for ways to help during this unprecedented time. Going forward, there are multiple new program ideas to support nonprofits including leadership training in the event that the pandemic speeds up retirement of nonprofit leaders, the creation of a nonprofit council to advocate for lasting sector improvements, the securing of a fundraising advocate to assist small nonprofits with no development team, and the creation of a shared service alliance.

NPC's biggest challenge is fundraising as an intermediary organization which it tackles by making itself indispensable, not only to nonprofits but to businesses and the community at large. It is ironic that NPC is a capacity-building organization which itself suffers from lack of capacity to meet current demand for services. NPC has initiated conversations and requests for funding from Barr Foundation, Fidelity, and AARP for general operating support but has not been successful with these highly competitive awards. With COVID-19, the situation becomes more challenging as funders focus on urgent needs.

Strategic Planning Process

The Board and staff of the NPC met for several strategic planning sessions in July 2020 to:

- Assess the organization's internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats
- Develop a vision for what NPC should look like in ten years
- Identify what it would mean to achieve financial and people sustainability for NPC
- Discuss the impact of COVID and the economic recession on Berkshire county, Berkshire nonprofits, and NPC
- Identify priorities for the short and mid-term

Key Priorities for NPC for the Next Three Years

NPC articulated their programmatic into the following goals for the next three years:

- **Elevate the voice of the Berkshire nonprofit sector**
The nonprofit sector comprises a significant proportion of the Berkshires' economy and jobs. NPC will serve as a convener connecting the nonprofit community to advocate to local, state and federal decision-makers to bring attention and resources to the sector. An important part of this will be ensuring that data is collected about the sector and shared to drive recognition of and resources to the sector.
- **Strengthen the programs for rising and veteran nonprofit leaders**
NPC's education and training programs and its meetups for Executive Directors have had a substantial impact on the field. In particular, NPC's training and education programs have served as an important foundational program supporting new and rising nonprofit staff members. As COVID hit, NPC began convening roundtables of nonprofit executives providing them with a safe space with peers to explore their most pressing questions. Over the next few years, NPC will solidify its offerings for nonprofit staff and deepen its programs for rising and veteran nonprofit leaders.
- **Explore a shared services model**
The program or service most frequently requested by nonprofits is shared back office services. As the impacts of COVID and recession begin to be felt in earnest, there is increasing need for NPC to explore the feasibility and viability of offering such services.
- **Institute a practice of regularly reviewing and assessing the program portfolio**
NPC has identified many gaps in sector services and has risen to fill them. As with many organizations moving from the start up phase through the growing phase, the organization needs to build a practice of reviewing and assessing its program portfolio to make sure it meets current needs in the community, is something that NPC can do excellently and sustainably, and that NPC is best positioned to deliver.

NPC also distilled their organizational sustainability efforts into the following goals for the next three years:

- **Develop a strong case for why NPC is essential and critical**
NPC fills important roles in Berkshire county, including many roles that might be filled by separate organizations in other communities. With so many programs aimed at so many different audiences (from donors to nonprofit board members to nonprofit founders to volunteers to legislators), NPC's message has been challenging to convey with the clarity needed to engage funders and other investors in NPC's work. With a few years under its belt, NPC is well positioned to rearticulate its case for investment, brand, and core messaging.
- **Establish a robust fundraising strategy**
NPC set out to buck the nonprofit norm of relying on charitable donations and grants to support its work in order to avoid the appearance of competing with its members for funding. Over the last few years, the organization has successfully raised earned revenue from programs, membership dues, and advertising but this earned revenue hasn't been sufficient to fully fund the organization's expenses, given how program-heavy the NPC has become. As NPC looks to bring stability and sustainability to its staffing model, program model, and operations, it recognizes the importance of adding fundraising into its revenue mix. By defining its case for why it is essential and the impact it is having, it will be well positioned to attract funders and donors with a shared vision for change. Of course, identifying and cultivating those funders and donors will require additional time and commitment from NPC's staff and board members.
- **Fully fund its budget**
NPC has maintained a breakeven budget by relying on the in-kind contributions of the Founder's time. NPC will develop a full-cost budget and will fully fund these costs by focusing on fundraising.
- **Maximize its human capital**
NPC has a dedicated board of directors and advisory board of nonprofit members and a lean but high functioning staff team. As NPC embarks on this plan, it will need to deploy its people against the highest and best use of their time. The Board will need to support the new fundraising goals. At the same time, bringing the current staff into full-time paid roles and rounding out the staff team through interns, additional part-time staff, and/or contractors will help to ensure that this plan is accomplished.

Conclusion

In just a few short years, NPC has accomplished a great deal with limited resources and responded quickly to sector needs. Even in these times of change caused by COVID-19 and the recession, NPC is well poised to continue its work to support the Berkshire nonprofit sector to become increasingly united, healthy, collaborative, well-trained, and sustainable. The work for the NPC over the next few years will be both inwardly and outwardly focused, strengthening its own viability and sustainability while growing and deepening its work and impact on the sector.

This action plan needs work. Flesh out and revise.

Goal	1 Year	2 Years	3 Years
Elevate the voice of the Berkshire nonprofit sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to collect data from nonprofits Continue to connect decision-makers with the Berkshire nonprofit community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold lobbying, advocacy, and communication training for staff, board, and NPC members Increase frequency of meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be seen as the authority for the nonprofit community Be mobilizing nonprofit organizations as appropriate to take action
Strengthen the programs for rising and veteran nonprofit leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research and plan a new or upgraded program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot the new program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solidify the program portfolio for nonprofit leaders
Explore a shared services model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research and consider a small scale pilot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand the pilot if early results are promising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operate shared services at scale if feasible and viable
Institute a practice of regularly reviewing and assessing the program portfolio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct an initial program review & assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a decision-making matrix for potential new programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct program reviews and assessments as part of the annual organizational planning cycle
Develop a strong case for why NPC is essential and critical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write case statement Update organization's language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have rolled out new language and brand positioning across all platforms and programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have updated and refreshed language as organization continued to evolve
Establish a robust fundraising strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify potential institutional funders and initiate conversations Have each board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an individual fundraising strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a robust fundraising program in place which is commensurate with the

	member make a personally significant charitable gift		organization's goals and needs
Fully fund its budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a full-cost budget showing in-kind contributions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise sufficient funds to expand the paid staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be fully covering the costs of the organization
Maximize its human capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch training for staff and board on fundraising • Conduct a board self-evaluation • Update and align board committees with this plan & develop annual workplans for each 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add members to the Board and committees • Develop a strategy for deploying the advisory council • Develop a strategy to use interns to build capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a human capital plan which has staff positions that offer work/life balance, growth opportunities, and appropriate compensation and which has meaningful volunteer and impactful roles