



SHARING SERVICES AMONG BERKSHIRE COUNTY NONPROFITS

**Report prepared by
Jim Ayres of Strategies for Collaborative Impact and
Justice Consulting.**



BACKGROUND

Since 2016, the Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires has functioned as a resource, convenor, and catalyst to Berkshire County, Massachusetts’s broad and diverse nonprofit sector. Much like a Chamber of Commerce, the NPC serves as the “connective tissue” between area nonprofits and a clearing house for information, resources, and best practices for the sector. The Center offers a listserv for nonprofits, manages a county-wide gala calendar, provides educational workshops and webinars, and publishes an annual “Giving Back” guide that includes a directory of over 1,000 nonprofits and 100 nonprofit profiles summarizing their missions and describing how donors and volunteers can support these vital institutions. At its core NPC is a responsive organization—fielding requests from its member-organizations and offering achievable solutions that make life easier

for those working on the front lines.

Over the past six years there has been a groundswell of interest among Berkshire nonprofits in the topic of shared resources. This has been driven by organizations’ various mandates to reduce costs, gain efficiencies, improve service access, broaden donor reach, improve visibility, and maximize revenues—all with the aim of better advancing both their charitable missions and social impact. The Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires has responded to this in several ways that have included initiating dialogue, surveying members, convening planning events, researching best practices, and sharing learnings.

This report seeks to summarize activities undertaken to date and to outline options for further targeted implementation and learning.



GOAL

The Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires aims to advance the understanding and utilization of shared resources so as to strengthen nonprofits across Berkshire County.

TIMELINE

To advance this goal NPC has outlined a six-part strategy that includes:

1. Conducting research on sharing services – ongoing
2. Surveying Berkshire nonprofits – April 2024 (Appendix A.)
3. Holding a Shared Resources Summit – June 2024
4. Forming a Shared Resources Implementation Task Force – Summer 2024
5. Piloting promising and achievable strategies – Fall 2024
6. Documenting and sharing results – December 2024 / January 2025



LEARNINGS TO DATE:

NPC Research:

Research conducted by the NPC has identified these elements as important to successful resource sharing:

- mission alignment
- organizational culture
- clear communication
- geographic region
- size of organization
- revenue structure: grant funded vs. revenue generating vs. fixed rate contracts

Information gleaned from area NPOs:

- Many Berkshire nonprofits are already engaged in informal shared service arrangements.

- The desire for more shared services seems to center on the practical: grant writing, lawn service, back-office tasks.
- There is a need for a strong, effective and neutral backbone organization to guide planning and coordinate services that emerge from it.
- There is a need for neutral, trusted facilitation throughout the process.
- There continues to be much conversation around duplicative and competing services – real or perceived, including the question of “Are we now more cooperative vs. competitive than in the past?” “Did the COVID pandemic affect this dynamic?”

IDENTIFIED BENEFITS, BARRIERS AND CONCLUSIONS ASSOCIATED WITH SHARED RESOURCE SYSTEMS

BENEFITS:

- Obtaining more and bigger funding opportunities
- Taking advantage of all resources available
- Expanding reach of impact
- Serving clients more comprehensively
- Building capacity
- Increased time availability
- More authentic program creation (as opposed to funding-driven)

BARRIERS:

- Geography
- Buy-in from staff / board
- Demonstrating value
- Initial costs
- Mission drift
- Losing autonomy / losing jobs
- Lack of trust
- Misaligned interests

CONCLUSIONS:

- Implementation of shared service approaches in Berkshire County has potential to shift the greater countywide narrative from one in which nonprofits are seen as resource drains to one in which they are recognized as true regional assets.
- Implementation of shared service approaches in Berkshire County presents a significant opportunity to strengthen the sector and attract new funding.

2024 SURVEY FINDINGS

- **Over 60 unique organizations** of all sizes and subsectors (mostly nonprofits) participated in the 2024 NPC Survey on Shared Resources.
- Most were from **South and Central Berkshire County**
- **36% reported that they were already sharing services** of some kind. Examples of these are:
 - Equipment, such as freezer space
 - Nonprofit software / databases
 - Volunteers and part-time staff
 - Space
- There is **swapping of resources** taking place including memberships, social media cross promotion, and sharing space in exchange for other goods or services.
- Respondents expressed desire to share the following services:
 - Grant writing
 - Marketing
 - Social Media
 - Fundraising
 - Graphic Design
- **Areas where more research is needed:**
 - How should shared service agreements be structured?
 - What new opportunities are just being developed, such as fractional staffing and AI assistance that we need to further understand?
 - What are the respective benefits of local and remote structures.

PROMISING MODELS FOR CONSIDERATION FOR BERKSHIRE COUNTY

1. Shared Service Alliances:

Improve outcomes by pooling resources to build organizational capacity, improve job quality, strengthen community partnerships, and promote long-term sustainability.

Shared Services alliances are a way to “feed” the core mission of an organization by pooling needs and sharing resources with others. While the design of any particular shared service alliance is unique to its participants, all share the goal of helping to achieve financial sustainability and improved outcomes.

Virtually any resource that does not directly fulfill an organization’s mission has the potential to be shared. These indirect resources include, but are not limited to:

- equipment
- staff
- IT - information technology
- software
- purchasing
- payroll
- HR – human resources
- bookkeeping
- database setup, management and data entry
- printing and duplicationw



2. Asymmetrical Partnerships:

Shared services can be a great way for smaller nonprofits to reap the benefits of larger institutional players in the sector while achieving savings they can reinvest in the programs that help those they serve.

3. Informal structures, with facilitated coordination can be used to implement the following:

- More robust sourcing i.e. MNN's affiliates
- Joint contracting, brokering or alliances using simple MOU's
- Cooperative purchasing groups
- Sharing staff or volunteers, either long term or on a project basis
- Fractional staffing
- Time banks for skills-sharing
- Online platform creation
- Regional roundtables to build community, build trust, and share best practices
- Swap shop for unused items



IDENTIFIED BEST PRACTICES:

Common elements of successful shared resource models typically include one or more of the following:

- Enlisting a neutral third-party to facilitate the process.
- Conducting a feasibility assessment.
- Identifying and securing support from a lead funder to subsidize start-up costs.
- Establishing a robust financial model to capture and assess the viability of cost savings.

Funders are in a position to enforce and motivate the kind of sharing that actually creates impact

ADDITIONAL LEARNINGS:

- It may take several years to see savings.
- We'll need a critical mass of nonprofit involvement
- There is value in building economies of scale and purchasing power, as well as increasing efficiencies and access to services.
- Organizational collaboration can lead to program innovation.
- We can enhance the view of the nonprofit sector by providing examples of organizations working together to develop innovative solutions.
- Funders find this work appealing

SHARED RESOURCES CONVENING:

On June 7, 2024, the Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires convened a gathering of roughly forty nonprofit and public sector leaders to formally launch this shared service initiative for Berkshire County nonprofits.

The event was captured on video and there are links to some segments in this report.

The summit was facilitated by Liana Toscanini of the NPC and Jim Ayres of Strategies for Collaborative Impact and Justice Consulting, with a welcome from State Representative Smitty Pignatelli.

There needs to be philosophical alignment between the organizations that are working together. That's really critical because that drives what you're going to do. This also leads to trust between the participants.

There's a lot of turnover in these organizations, so making sure that people are buying in and can continue to be heard long term is important.

The event began with the sharing and summarization of information collected by NPC through surveys, research, sector dialogue, and prior meetings. This was then followed by a chance for participants to share their current involvement with shared service. This portion of the program can be viewed [here](#).

The third component of the event was an opportunity for participants to meet in groups to share thinking, prioritize findings, and propose next steps for planning and implementation. A brief video of the group report outs can be viewed [here](#). Excerpts are also called out in the text boxes throughout the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ASSESSMENTS FROM THE GROUPS ARE AGGREGATED BELOW:

Critical Elements for Success:

Participants identified the following elements as crucial for successful service sharing (listed in order of identified importance):

1. Trust
2. Mission alignment
3. Philosophical / value alignment
4. Strong / clear communication
5. Technological compatibility

Showing up here today, finding the time and space to be in a room with another organization and figure out what we need ... that's the hardest part.

Organizational Priorities:

Participants named the following benefits of resource sharing as most important to their own organizations (also listed in order of identified importance):

1. Expanding organizational capacity
2. Realizing savings (particularly in relation to staff salaries)
3. Increasing skills / expertise
4. Expanding access for clients to the programmatic services they offer
5. Increasing efficiencies

Putting in place policy and protocols that directly reflect our culture, and making sure this culture is showing up in the decisions and relationships between the organizations is crucial.

NPC'S ROLE:

Participants cited the following as ways that NPC can advance, support, and/or anchor these efforts:

- Establish a shared one-stop procurement model (e.g. a localized, sector-specific version of Mass COMMBUYS)
- Establish communities of practice
- Tap into statewide networks (e.g. MNN-Mass. Nonprofit Network)
- Serve as a repository of resources and knowledge
- Serve as a marketplace / connecting place for those looking to share capacities
- Serve as the hub for planning and coordination
- Share best practices

Low-Hanging Fruit / Biggest Benefit:

Lastly, participants identified the following as being either most achievable or beneficial areas to address:

- Health Care / Health Insurance procurement
- Establishing a needs-matching database/hub
- Administrative capacity sharing (HR, finance, DEI, sustainability, grant writing staff)
- Training/professional development / knowledge-sharing
- Space/facilities sharing
- External communications / marketing / promotion / visibility (e.g. social media, newsletters, advertising)

NEXT STEPS:

To move these ideas and priorities forward, volunteers were requested for a task force that would be charged with honing these ideas, developing clear implementation strategies, and initiating one to three pilot projects.

The committee aims to meet in July, September, October and December of 2024.

Volunteers

Volunteers for the task force include:

Lori Bashour	Marybeth Mitts
Cindy Brown	Karen Richards
Genee Coreno	Kelly Rybczyk
Julia Dixon	Abbie von
Sally English	Schlegell
Randy Kinnas	Devin Shea
Heather Kowalski	

The first virtual meeting of the task force will take place **Wednesday, July 31st at 10:00 am** by Zoom.

Anyone interested in serving on, or supporting the task force, may reach out to NPC Executive Director Liana Toscanini at liana@npcberkshires.org.

*Video by Patrick Danahey

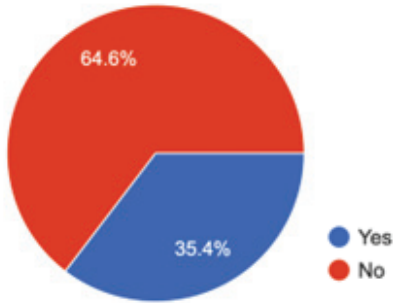
** Special thanks to Rep. Smitty Pignatelli & Lenox Town Hall

APPENDIX A

Results of short survey on sharing resources conducted in April 2024

Have you shared or are you currently sharing any services with another nonprofit? Examples: sharing a space, a piece of equipment, a staffer, an intern, a subscription.

65 Responses



If you answered YES to question 1, please briefly describe what services you shared or currently share.

25 responses

- volunteers at events
- We sponsor interns for other nonprofits...we pay them, if they apply. We also use space at BCC
- space, equipment, staff; services (for a fee)
- Goodwill Industries provides transportation of food from Western Massachusetts Foodbank in Chicopee to 5 Northern Berkshire County food pantries/meal sites/shelter.
- We often provide space at nominal charge for theatrical readings and performances, other events, and annual meeting space for other organizations. We also share templates of contracts (e.g., site rentals, catering engagements, etc.) when requested.
- Annual Galas/fundraisers are often recorded/shared through CTSB. News and information about what other nonprofits are doing in our community are always welcomed at CTSB. Video cameras, training and editing are available to all nonprofits to help them communicate more effectively and to a larger audience.
- We share memberships with other chamber/like businesses.
- Space for People's Pantry and our Facilities manager works to support the pantry in a variety of ways
- We let other NP's use our space

- We share our refrigerated and passenger vans, outdoor freezer and offer other nonprofit agencies to use our conference room at 14 Maplewood Ave at no charge. We also host a shared database for the HARP (Holistic Approach to Reducing Poverty) initiative.
- Production staff/stage crew
- We share our property with the All Abilities Gardeners, a group that gardens and does land care. They are taking care of our garden space, cultivating our flower and herb gardens, and helping clear pasture space from invasives. We help with tools, the closeness of the animals, and shared down time. They use our composted manure for their projects.
- We have a staff person who works for us but serves at another nonprofit, assisting specialized services and clientele.
- We use BCAC's van for Food Bank runs.
- We use outside cleaning, IT, and bookkeeping staff, but it is all service for hire, not any kind of "sharing" arrangement with other organizations.
- Nonprofit software/data management I
- We provide emergency housing for one homeless family that is in case management with the Family Resource Center.
- Promoting another nonprofit on social media.
- Our marketing assistant works 2 days at the Mahaiwe and 3 days at NRM
- Space -- we have donated our facilities for use for other nonprofit's events. We have also donated our construction facilities to other theatres and nonprofits
- Our nonprofit shares training material with two other nonprofits, we are in process of partnering with other nonprofits for cold storage space use
- Shared space
- We share cold storage facilities with Berkshire Grown in Great Barrington. We also share our cold storage facility in North Adams with food pantries, providing no cost overflow storage options.
- We use a bookkeeper that other nonprofits use.

Which of the services below would you consider sharing with one or more nonprofits? (65 responses but only the items with multiple responses are listed here)

