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Reinforcing the Safety Net: A Collaborative Survey with the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network

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Abstract

The more than 35,000 nonprofit organizations in Massachusetts employ 20% of the state's workforce and serve as a vital part of the social safety net. Many of these organizations face challenges concerning fiscal sustainability. Funding often covers current services with little surplus to address organizational capacity issues. Successful public-nonprofit partnerships are key to building a resilient nonprofit sector. This study contributes to the nonprofit sector's knowledge of how best to engage with policymakers at the state and local level.

Objectives

Build the capacity of the project's community partner, the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network (MNN), to collect, analyze, and apply data in support of their mission

Answer key research questions regarding nonprofit participation in the policy process:

- What do nonprofits identify as key (local, state, national) policy issues for a vibrant and sustainable sector?
- How do nonprofits currently engage with government around policy issues?
- Which strategies and tactics do nonprofits use to leverage resources from the government?

Impact

The Massachusetts Nonprofit Network (MNN) is the largest statewide membership organization dedicated to strengthening the nonprofit sector. One of its key objectives is to advocate on behalf of the nonprofit sector. In partnership with MNN, this research project represents an opportunity to learn from other organizations' success and to codify a set of best practices concerning government collaboration.

This research will help MNN and its members plan for direct policy action. Data collection and analysis will assist in the development of MNN's long-term legislative policy agenda by identifying key policy issues that resonate across the MA nonprofit sector. MNN will use this information to draft and file legislation that will reinforce the vitality of the sector.

Methods

Nine policy round tables are underway with MNN nonprofit members from Boston to Northampton. Input from these discussions will form the second phase of the study: an online survey of approximately 500 MNN members across the state. Survey results will be analyzed in combination with additional organizational data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS).

Next Steps

Policy round tables with nonprofits are currently in progress. A pretest of the survey instrument will be conducted (spring 2014) with a small sample of nonprofits. The survey will be administered in summer 2014 and will correspond to key events in MNN's calendar, such as Nonprofit Awareness Day at the Massachusetts State House in June 2014.

Resources

- UMass Boston Public Service Grant (2013-14)
- MNN membership database
- NCCS business master file

Partners and Contact Information

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