



Nonprofit Association of Washington

About NAWA's 2023-2025 Strategic Plan

Nonprofit Association of Washington (NAWA) was founded in 2010 with a clear business plan for establishing a membership organization. Our most recent strategic plan covered 2018-2020 and called for building our programs in the areas of learning, advocacy, and collaboration, as well as taking action to build a stronger organization. During that period, we also were responsive to special opportunities to serve nonprofits and act on our values even if they fell outside our plan, including mobilizing nonprofits to get out the count for the 2020 Census and becoming a hub of information, mutual support, and access to financial assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because our sector was profoundly challenged by the immediate crises of the pandemic, the racial reckoning, and the economic shifts of 2020, we focused on rapid response, community learning and growth, and stabilization, and chose not to develop a new strategic plan until now.

This current strategic planning process began with our full organizational rebrand in 2021-2022. During the rebranding, we solicited significant input from member organizations and the wider nonprofit community and had great discussions about who we are and who we want to be in the future. The result was a new name and logo, an identity statement that included an updated mission, vision, values, and clarity that we wished to maintain our three program pillars: learn, advocate, and collaborate.

Now, the attached strategic plan articulates more clearly how Nonprofit Association of Washington wants to deliver value to our membership and the greater nonprofit sector through each program. In addition, the plan outlines how we will continue to strengthen our organization and team to be able to do this work. This new strategic plan will also help us determine which new opportunities we embrace and what we say no to – which is important since we are often asked to do more than we can take on with our current capacity. Our challenge will be to remain ambitious about the change we wish to see in the nonprofit sector while right-sizing our workload and focusing our energies. We also want to stay nimble and adaptable enough to address emergent issues and maintain alignment with our value of curiosity and our desire to lead through change.

Why and How

The narrative below provides context, including the issues we are seeking to address and the rationale for our work. The guiding principles are foundational beliefs about how we will approach our work in alignment with our values.

Transformational Learning

NAWA aims to offer programming that allows nonprofit workers to take in new information, evaluate their past ideas through critical reflection, and shift their perspectives and practices. To help advance organizations towards their goals, nonprofit leaders need flexible, accessible, and affordable learning opportunities. The majority of nonprofits in our state are small volunteer-led organizations. Even Washington's largest nonprofits are often under-resourced. Because these nonprofits put their mission first, they need support to build strong organizations. Nonprofit staff, board members, and volunteers need accurate and up-to-date information as well as opportunities to develop their leadership.

Based on member input, we will maintain a comprehensive learning program, expand leadership development programming, and establish one-on-one resource navigation technical assistance. NAWA is here for nonprofits of all sizes, offering learning opportunities for a range of audiences including beginners and advanced nonprofit practitioners across all fields of service. During the pandemic, our learning events shifted entirely online to reach people who were unable to gather in person. Now, reaching thousands of participants a year, we are returning to a mix of online and in-person learning opportunities. Workshops, webinars, conferences, and gatherings are complemented by high-quality online resources to provide individuals with multiple points of learning.

NAWA will continue to build on our efforts to improve accessibility of our resources and workshops for people with disabilities and non-English speakers. We are committed to expanding our own learning and implementation of accessibility practices to create welcoming and inclusive learning spaces for people of all abilities. Centering learners in the experience through more holistic facilitation approaches, acknowledges and celebrates the diverse groups of people who come together to explore new perspectives, examine their own beliefs, and gain deeper self-awareness in their work.

Guiding Principles

- Nonprofits need accurate and up-to-date information to support effective governance, management, and legal compliance.
- There is power in representation, making space for diverse nonprofit voices, and peer-to-peer learning.
- People need options to learn at their own pace and have multiple access points.
- Improving the accessibility of NAWA's materials and learning spaces is essential to supporting all nonprofits.

- We facilitate learning around current nonprofit management practices *and* innovative, future-facing strategies in ways that lead to action.
- We center equity and equitable practices and believe this is essential work for all nonprofits.
- Deeper cohort learning experiences are vital to strengthening our sector, especially for developing leaders.
- NAWA staff have strong nonprofit management expertise and should be visible as trainers and facilitators.

Powerful Advocacy & Systems Change

Historically and in the present day, nonprofits have only a small fraction of the resources that for-profit businesses do to engage in public policy advocacy. Business law is continuously reshaped and updated with input and lobbying influence from chambers and other business sector representatives, but the 2021 update to the Washington Nonprofit Corporation Act was a comprehensive modernization of state statutes that had remained largely untouched for fifty years.

Nonprofits are chronically under-resourced, and most funders disallow spending of their funding on lobbying and policy advocacy, thwarting systems change. Although nonprofits have become irreplaceable partners to government in achieving public purposes, current practices do not recognize and honor nonprofit expertise nor compensate nonprofits for the true cost of the work they are performing on behalf of government. Finally, nonprofits must overcome damaging and inaccurate myths about their leaders and organizations being less strategic and worthy of investment than the private sector.

The nonprofit sector deserves advocacy. NAWA's policy advocacy highlights the societal contributions of nonprofits and lobbies for greater respect for and investment in the essential work of nonprofits. We challenge outdated assumptions, seek to remove restrictions that prevent nonprofits from doing their best work, and create a positive climate for all nonprofits, including organizations based in and serving marginalized communities. We seek to rebalance the partnership between government and nonprofits. We do this through lobbying and public policy advocacy, elevating nonprofit voices and stories, and coalition building. We also encourage nonprofits to advocate on behalf of their own missions and on behalf of the nonprofit sector, developing leaders and building the infrastructure to support nonprofit advocacy.

Guiding Principles

- Nonprofits deserve respect and recognition commensurate with the important role the sector plays in supporting the economic health and social well-being of our communities.
- Nonprofits need to shift the way we relate to funders and demand equitable funding practices.
- Nonprofits require sustainable and reliable funding that includes realistic overhead rates.
- Nonprofit workers deserve pay equity and fair working conditions.
- A seat at the table and true partnership between nonprofits and government will result in greater progress toward our common goals.

- NAWA is most effective when we work in partnership with government and other nonprofits, lift nonprofit voices, and act as a convenor.
- Multiple strategies, such as coalition building, legislative lobbying, and influencing policy implementation, are important to achieve our goals.
- Nonprofits have varying levels of access to resources. BIPOC-led and rural nonprofits have been historically marginalized and under-funded.
- We decide on our policy priorities by applying the following criteria: broad impact for nonprofits in Washington State, effectiveness (are we likely to make a difference through our advocacy), demand from our membership to address the issue, interest of partners/ability to form a coalition, equity and the impact on historically marginalized communities.
- We are better together. In collaboration with the many nonprofits in Washington, we can create a nonprofit political powerhouse.

Meaningful Community Engagement

The nonprofit sector in Washington State is a large and diverse group of over 50,000 organizations working on a variety of missions that serve the public interest across a large state. Building visibility for NAWA and a sense of collective identity among nonprofits requires creative and consistent communications, outreach, and engagement complemented by regular opportunities for mutual support and collaboration. We need to build our membership and ensure that nonprofits see themselves in our mission and work so they will join us to increase nonprofit power and influence, as well as tap into an array of resources and learning opportunities to strengthen their organizations and increase their impact.

We recognize inequities within the nonprofit sector and are committed to the inclusion of organizations created by and for BIPOC, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, people living in rural communities, and other marginalized groups. Connecting with BIPOC and other marginalized communities and honoring regional diversity requires a relationship-based approach that is more resource-intensive. We engage communities through compelling communications, general outreach, Equity Ambassadors, affinity groups, local nonprofit networks, and networking activities. We foster networking and collaboration at convenings such as the Washington State Nonprofit Conference and regional summits.

Guiding Principles

- We are committed to nurturing relationships with nonprofits across Washington State.
- NAWA must drive justice work and equity-centered engagement.
- We seek to expand the circle of people who are champions for NAWA.
- We work to build a sense of connection, pride, and belonging for NAWA members.
- NAWA is a door opener, not a gatekeeper.
- We will listen regularly for feedback to remain relevant and support continuous improvement of NAWA's work.

A Strong Base of Financial Support

NAWA will build a strong base of financial support by diversifying funding streams and increasing aligned and unrestricted revenue. Like most other nonprofits, NAWA has both advantages and challenges in raising money to support our work.

We are grateful for a core group of foundation funders that have provided support throughout our 11-year history and sustained funding from two multi-year grants. Yet only a small number of foundations prioritize funding capacity building, and we have faced flat grant awards or cuts due to rising costs and shifting funder priorities. We will grow grant funding by leveraging existing networks and presenting new investment opportunities, inviting foundation partners to underwrite innovative programming and advocacy campaigns. NAWA will also continue contracting with government agencies to reach and build the capacity of nonprofits.

The impacts of the pandemic reduced income from in-person events for many nonprofits, and NAWA was no exception. The proliferation of free webinars also impacted our ability to raise revenue from our high-quality online trainings. To solidify and expand our funding base, we will rebuild earned revenues from program and conference fees, significantly expand membership, and increase corporate sponsorships for the Washington State Nonprofit Conference and other events. In addition, NAWA has been nimble and found new ways to expand our revenue in recent years. We were proud to gear up to participate in the broad effort to get out the count for the 2020 Census, and received some special funding during the COVID pandemic. We will continue to seek out emergent funding opportunities consistent with our mission in the years ahead.

Guiding Principles

- NAWA cannot accomplish its goals without building a strong organization and investing in our people.
- NAWA needs to build momentum and participation by a wide range of partners and members.
- All Leadership Team (director-level staff) members are engaged in the budgeting process.
- All staff members contribute to reaching revenue goals.
- Board members support NAWA directly and make connections to expand our base of supporters.
- NAWA can only grow our impact if we also grow our income, especially unrestricted funding.

Employee Well-being & Retention

NAWA seeks to create an organization that reflects our values, including care for our people. That starts with attracting and retaining excellent employees and building a strong and well-supported team. Our mission to build a powerful statewide network of nonprofits is ambitious, and we have hired talented staff who are committed to working hard to achieve our goals. However, we and many others in the nonprofit sector recognize that asking staff to sacrifice work-life balance or accept low salaries and benefits is unethical, inequitable, and unsustainable. It thwarts nonprofit efforts to attract a capable and diverse workforce, to allow staff members to have space for creativity and doing their best work, and to retain them throughout their careers.

To support employee well-being and retention, we have made great strides forward in expanding paid health benefits and adjusting salaries to be more equitable and competitive. The board and staff engage in diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) learning regularly and we will continue to build a healthy and anti-racist internal culture. We have and will further improve our recruitment and hiring processes; instituted stipends to support remote work, professional development, and wellness; and updated our employment and leave policies. We will create realistic and manageable workloads for staff and utilize technology effectively to aid in this effort. Sustainable workloads will require adjusting grant and contract deliverables over time to ensure that funding covers the full cost of contracted work, as well as recruiting a broader overall base of funding. We will continually seek to develop our culture of care practices and take advantage of new opportunities to support our staff as they present themselves.

Guiding Principles

- We seek to create an organization that reflects our values, including care for our people.
- We are building a culture that celebrates our accomplishments.
- NAWA is most effective when we coordinate and integrate our work across departments.
- Providing professional development, growth, and leadership opportunities will help us retain our staff and increase our impact.
- NAWA can serve as a beacon for other nonprofits around employee well-being.