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# Closing the gender pay gap

By: Laurie Wolf

257 years. That is how long it will take women working in Alaska's nonprofit sector to reach pay equity. Trust me, your state's statistics are not much better. Are you willing to wait? We asked ourselves that question more than five years ago. Our decision was to step up, learn what we needed to do – and then take action.



Laurie Wolf,  
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We have an advantage in Alaska because we can better document the pay gap. Each year Alaskans file for an oil dividend check and that application requires answering a gender question. Through a partnership with Alaska's Department of Labor and Workforce Development, we are able to extract [data for nonprofit employees](#). The results aren't perfect because some people work in Alaska but live outside the state and aren't eligible for the dividend. Also, only binary gender is

recorded. However, with a number like 257 years, we are willing to live with a bit of nuance.

We know that the pay gap has always been around. Economists predict the pandemic will make it worse by erasing progress women have made over the past few decades. Without reliable child care, women are now more likely to drop out of the labor force, cut hours, and turn down projects – hurting their future job prospects. The best way to tell this story is to support these predictions with data. In 2016, President Obama laid out his plan to tackle the gender pay gap by requiring companies to report how much they paid workers based on gender, race, and ethnicity. Unfortunately, full implementation of that plan languished during the last administration, and we don't have important data at the national level. Still, some rough data sets can be found in U.S. Census reports and through state unemployment offices. You'll need to search, but knowing the data for your state is worth your time and is critical to this effort.

So now what? You can find countless reports about the pay gap, but few tell you how to be part of the solution. At Foraker, we are committed to turning data into action. To that end, we have published [eight proven steps](#) that every nonprofit (and for-profit) can take TODAY. And not just in Alaska, but everywhere. One is to use your voice as a nonprofit to support state legislation that stems the pay gap. In the last few years, Washington state and Colorado passed laws that are models for the rest of us. Alaska has pending legislation. Does your state?

As economic drivers in your state, your voice matters. If you are not ready for one of the steps in our list, or to support public policy yet, we have created a set of [generative questions](#) that you can use to start or deepen a conversation with your board and staff. Need more data and stories to back up your conviction? We have started a [bibliography](#) that helps you dive in.

Wherever you are in the journey, the time to start is NOW. Our daughters, sisters, moms, aunts, and friends should not have to wait 257 years. An economy that values equal work for equal pay is an economy where every person thrives.

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*Laurie Wolf, MNPL, CFRE, is President and CEO of The Foraker Group, which stands beside Alaska's nonprofits, working with them to build effective, strategic, and sustainable organizations.*