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A Survey's Journey From Responses to Results



Photograph by [Mike Peel](#)

What if you filled out a survey and could trace your responses to actual changes in public policy that improve community wellbeing? That's the aim of the [current Nonprofit Workforce Survey](#) that nonprofit organizations are asked to complete in April 2023.

This goal is based not on hope alone, but on the positive results flowing from the 1,000+ nonprofits responding to the previous nonprofit workforce survey conducted in the fall of 2021. If past is truly prologue – and ample numbers of nonprofits complete the survey – then public policy advocacy, media attention, and meaningful results will follow.

A little background

A group of DC-based lobbyists were talking in September 2021, when one interrupted the conversation about tax and spending priorities and said something to the effect that none of the policy agenda items matter if her local affiliates couldn't get the staff they need to serve their mission and communities. Rather than lobbyists telling their "clients" what they need to focus on, this was another example of how insights from the field – the real world – influenced the actions of advocates.

The question became: are nonprofits experiencing a workforce shortage nationwide and if so, how big of a problem is it, who is affected, and what can we in the nonprofit sector do about it? A nationwide survey ensued, ultimately garnering more than a thousand responses from nonprofit organizations in all 50 states and DC. The National Council of Nonprofits compiled the survey findings and issued two reports: [The Scope and Impact of Nonprofit Workforce Shortages](#) (December 2021) and [Nonprofit Workforce Shortages: A Crisis that Affects Everyone](#) (July 2022).

The 2021 survey responses from nonprofits revealed that employee vacancy rates were historically high, the public was suffering as shown by waiting lists for nonprofit services were alarmingly long, and all regions, types of nonprofits, and job types were affected. About 80% of nonprofits identified **salary competition** as a factor preventing them from filling job openings, while nearly a quarter (23%) said that the inability to find **child care** affected recruitment and retention.

Shifts in Priorities

The data led Washington lobbyists to shift their focus to solutions to alleviate the nonprofit workforce shortages crisis. The pandemic-focused charitable [coalition issued a new set of priorities](#) calling on Congress to expand charitable giving incentives and restore the employee retention tax credit, both of which are directly connected to the ability of organizations to attract and retain staff. In a [letter to Congress](#) signed by more than 1,700 nonprofits, the coalition also called for robust funding to expand access to high-quality child care – something previously considered only a subsector issue – and greater emphasis on reforming the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program that rewards long-term work at charitable organizations and governments.

News Media Awareness

The news media at all levels and formats took up the story that nonprofit workforce shortages aren't an organization-by-organization problem but a challenge affecting everyone – nonprofits and the public alike. Recently the *Boston Globe* carried an in-depth article, [In a tight labor market, nonprofits are losing out](#). *Delaware Public Media* aired a story, [Explaining the nonprofit workforce shortage and how it's being addressed](#). Last summer, the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* ran an article bluntly titled “[The Nonprofit Hiring Crisis](#),” that is subtitled “The Changing Nonprofit Workplace.” A particularly poignant local television report stated the challenge in its title, “[‘We’re talking life and death stuff here’: Labor shortages hit Oregon nonprofits](#).”

All of these, and hundreds of other stories, relied on the results of the 2021 workforce shortages survey.

But, what about results?

All of which brings us to results. Talking about the problem and saying you want solutions to be adopted can be important, but it's not much good if nothing changes. Things have changed. Not enough to *solve* the problem, but the trends have been shifting in a more positive direction.

In more than a dozen articles in the [Nonprofit Champion](#) advocacy newsletter (and its predecessor, *Nonprofit Advocacy Updates*), the National Council of Nonprofits has chronicled scores of policy and funding changes at the local, state, and federal levels that address, among other things:

- the availability and affordability of child care;
- increased compensation for nonprofit child care providers;
- enhanced charitable giving incentives at the state level to generate resources needed to retain and expand staff;
- government-nonprofit grantmaking reforms to get more funds to nonprofits with less hassle;
- educational relief for nonprofit employees in targeted professions; and
- improved public sector and nonprofit employment student loan forgiveness.

Once again, the common denominator is that policymakers have been relying on the 2021 nonprofit workforce shortages survey and results to identify what solutions are needed and to help make the case for adoption.

So, are there still nonprofit workforce shortages?

To be effective in advocacy efforts, we all need fresh data. Are nonprofits still experiencing workforce shortages? And if so, to what extent do they still matter for nonprofits and the people they serve? That's what the [current Nonprofit Workforce Survey](#) seeks to find out. Given the positive impact of its older sibling, there is every reason for nonprofits to [take the survey](#) and [share the survey](#) with all of their charitable nonprofit networks to increase the response rate. Thank you.

[Take the Survey](#)