

# State of the Field During COVID-19

WisNRG Town Hall on the Opportunities and Challenges Impacting Wisconsin's Nonprofit and Community Organizations

October 2021

The [Wisconsin Nonprofit Resources Group](#) (WisNRG) hosted a virtual Town Hall to provide an opportunity for nonprofit professionals and leaders to discuss strategies they are using to push their work forward during these uncertain times. Attendees also talked about the continuing impacts of COVID-19 on Wisconsin's nonprofit sector and shared their perspectives on how WisNRG can help address organizational needs.

## Challenges and uncertainty facing the nonprofit sector

Presenters from the CommNS highlighted COVID-19 impacts on the nonprofit sector. The workforce decreased dramatically at the start of the pandemic, but is on track to recover to pre-pandemic levels in late 2022.

Resources for personnel was the most pressing challenge facing nonprofits at the Town Hall. Organizations were struggling to recruit and retain staff given budget constraints on compensation and benefits. Pandemic funding was critical to nonprofit survival, but some feel hesitant to make needed investments in hiring without the guarantee of long-term resources.

## Organizational strategies and assets in the COVID-19 era

Using the [Asset-Based Recovery Framework](#) developed by Massimi and Keam (2020), participants explored strengths, strategies, and opportunities that have arisen over the course of the pandemic.

The shift to virtual created opportunities for regional and statewide relationship building. Many nonprofits also felt that the multiple pandemic context fostered a responsive and equity-focused approach to services and programs, which they hope to carry forward.

Though funding is still a challenge, individual donors and foundations have stepped up during the pandemic to help cover shortfalls and meet increased need. Several attendees lifted up funder efforts to communicate more continuously with nonprofits, and many noted the positive impacts of new unrestricted funding streams and resources for operating costs.

"COVID has laid our broken systems wide open. Some people are seeing things differently, some refuse to, and I think we have a moment to be a catalyst for bigger, more [holistic] solutions."

## Opportunities to strengthen the sector and create change

Attendees also highlighted resources that they felt could help their organization and the nonprofit sector move forward. They spoke to the need for marketing and communications support and continued long-term and flexible investment from funders. There was also a strong call for organizations to continue working across silos to push for systems change and a more justice-oriented nonprofit sector.