



# Front-Line Nonprofits Urge Greater Unity

What's your vision for the nonprofit sector? Here's a chance to add your voice.



COLLECTIVE DIRECTION



GALVANIZE OUR STRENGTH



TELL OUR STORY

By Audrey R. Alvarado

Across the country, hundreds of individuals are coming together through Town Hall meetings that have been convened for the upcoming Nonprofit Congress. As reported in an earlier issue of *Nonprofit World* (“It’s Time for All Nonprofits to Come Together,” Vol. 24, No. 3), the Nonprofit Congress is an unprecedented initiative to unite America’s diverse nonprofit organizations. In the best spirit of democracy, the Nonprofit Congress is bringing together nonprofit leaders and allies across the country to:

- **Identify and affirm** the values all nonprofits share.
- **Develop** a vision and priorities for the nonprofit sector.
- **Exercise** a collective voice.

During the almost one hundred Town Hall meetings, nonprofit

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leaders and their allies have come together with their precious limited time — for if nonprofit staff have anything in common it’s too few resources and too little time — to talk to one another about what we have in common and what we hope tomorrow will bring.

During the last few years, there has been negative attention focused on the nonprofit sector; some of our colleagues have engaged in questionable if not downright illegal practices that have contributed to critical examination of our internal practices. The questions are legitimate and the scrutiny welcomed if we are to uphold the laws we agreed to

because of our tax-exempt status and public service commitment.

But these past two years have also raised our awareness, indeed built a sense of urgency, about the need to come together to focus on the sector’s positive contributions to society. During the Town Halls, representatives from front-line nonprofits have consistently expressed the need for the nonprofit sector to develop a collective direction, galvanize our strength, and more effectively tell our story.

A key aspect of the Nonprofit Congress is the National Meeting that will take place October 16-17, 2006. At this meeting, delegates representing the depth and breadth of the nonprofit sector will deliberate and vote on the most pressing issues identified through the Town Hall meetings. Over 400 individuals from 48 states and the District of Columbia applied to be

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delegates at the National Meeting. Potential delegates were asked the following simple question during the application process: "Why should you be selected as a delegate?" The responses reflect the readiness of the nonprofit sector's representatives to stand up and be counted. Examples of responses from potential delegates, in their own words:

"I have a passion for the challenges that face nonprofits, challenges which in many cases could be avoided or managed more effectively if nonprofits made a more assertive effort to solve the root causes and not simply treat the symptoms."

"I hope this Nonprofit Congress can enable the sector to highlight its strengths and chart its own path for the future."

"It's a unique time in the history of this country for nonprofits, and it's my hope that this initiative will provide both help and hope for all of us. We have much to share and much to learn!"

"It is our hope that out of the National Meeting we can establish a unified voice — one that's willing to accept certain realities but is also committed to ensuring that our collective success cannot be undermined by external forces."

"This dialogue is long overdue — and I'm excited about it!"

"I believe the future of civic engagement depends upon a strong, nationally recognized nonprofit voice; and with the experience I bring as a boomer, I hope to be part of that movement."

"I look for the Nonprofit Congress to raise awareness of our sector's power to make our communities and nation stronger and healthier. Additionally, I expect the Congress to develop a singular voice across missions that will help us become more effective. Finally, I expect the [Nonprofit] Congress to develop an action plan that will guide us for the next several years in forging a stronger nonprofit sector."

Clearly, nonprofits in the field want to plot their own course and address the question of why nonprofits are important to society. The Nonprofit Congress National Meeting will create just that opportunity. To get involved, or for more information, go to [www.nonprofitcongress.org](http://www.nonprofitcongress.org). ■

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