



It's Time for All Nonprofits to Come Together

A first-of-its-kind meeting — the Nonprofit Congress — aims to unite America's diverse nonprofits.

By Audrey R. Alvarado

Diversity is a central strength of the nonprofit sector. Organizations of varying sizes and missions develop unique approaches to community problems. Yet this diversity has also led to fragmentation and isolation, especially for smaller organizations. It is troubling that, as a sector, charitable organizations have been primarily reactive and unable to prescribe, guide, and influence the sector's direction or our country's priorities.

A group of leaders is seeking to change this situation through an initiative called the *Nonprofit Congress*. The Congress is an unprecedented effort to unite America's diverse nonprofit organizations.

Goals

The goals of the Nonprofit Congress include the following:

- **Forge** a common identity based on shared values.
- **Develop** a unified vision and message for the sector.
- **Exercise** a collective voice.

The Nonprofit Congress seeks to create a forum where nonprofit leaders and allies can look beyond their own areas of interest, recognize the potential of forging new partnerships across subsectors, and realize the political power that comes from such alliances.



As nonprofits come together, they'll recognize the potential of forging new partnerships.

The Process

There are four phases to this long-term initiative:

1. National Campaign. In January 2006, the *Declaration for America's Nonprofits*, a national campaign to build awareness about the Nonprofit Congress, was launched. To date, over 1,700 individuals from all 50 states and the District of Columbia have signed on to the Declaration.

2. Town Halls. Meetings are being held across the country to seek input and guidance from grassroots nonprofits and ensure that small and midsize nonprofits – the majority of charitable organizations – become engaged in identifying priorities and making suggestions

for the sector's future direction. Additional input from grassroots leaders is being solicited via the Nonprofit Congress Web site, www.nonprofitcongress.org.

3. National Event. On October 16-17, 2006, 500 state nonprofit delegates will gather in the nation's capital to review summaries from the in-person and virtual town hall meetings and create an action plan and policy platform for the sector. The town halls will inform the content of the national meeting and shape the Nonprofit Congress platform.

4. Nationwide Follow-Through. From October 2006 through December 2007, the Nonprofit Congress will work with state association leaders, national meeting delegates, and other state and local nonprofits to promote the Nonprofit Congress platform to nonprofits at the local, state, and national level.

Active Involvement Is Key

It's time for the nonprofit sector to unite around its common values and forge a stronger, bolder, and more prominent role in our society. Our communities deserve nothing less than the active and informed involvement of charitable organizations at all levels of society. ■

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