

# How Do You Avoid Liability after Name Change?

Can changing your name lead to legal problems?



**Q** Our nonprofit organization will be changing its name next month, and I'm wondering if there are any legal considerations. What legal areas do we need to cover so we don't leave ourselves open to liability from our old namesake? For example, should we maintain our old web-based domain names to protect them, or will we be completely separated from those types of things once the name has been changed?

**A** I'm not sure what you mean when you say you want to avoid liability "from our old namesake." Since the organization itself won't change next month, it will be liable for anything that it did before then in its old name, regardless of what it may be calling itself at the moment. Another organization that takes your old name after you give it up

shouldn't create liability for you, although you may have to spend a lot of time and money to clarify that any liability it created after taking your old name belongs to it and can't be attributed to your organization.

It may make sense to retain your old domain names and redirect visitors to your new sites, at least for a while. That will make it slightly more difficult for a new organization adopting your name to operate as if it were you. But the basic principle is that liability belongs to the organization that created it, without regard to what the organization calls itself.

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## Help Us Bid Farewell to the Society's Long-Time Leader

The Society for Nonprofits has announced the retirement of its founder and CEO, Katie Burnham Laverty. The Society was founded in 1983 when few resources existed for small and midsized nonprofit organizations. Before then, the idea of creating an umbrella organization to advance and support all nonprofits, whatever their size or mission, existed only as Katie's dream. A truly charismatic and visionary leader, she has worked tirelessly for all nonprofits for 35 years, pioneering many innovative advancements and keeping the Society ahead of the many changes that swept through the world during those turbulent decades.

**Nonprofit World** is just one of many products and services that the Society offers. (For a complete listing, see [snpo.org](http://snpo.org).) Under Katie's guidance, the Society was the first to produce an online Certificate in Nonprofit Management, beginning in 1998.

Katie has served on numerous boards, pioneered many innovative ideas to advance nonprofits and the sector as a whole, and been a sought after speaker. Katie and her husband, Jim Laverty, now reside in Temecula, CA. She plans to continue her work with the Society as a consultant.

Succeeding Katie as CEO will be Jason Chmura. Jason has served as the Membership Director for the Society since 2002. The transition to new leadership will be complete by March 31, 2017.

Join us in congratulating Katie on her retirement by signing the group card at <https://www.snpo.org/katiesretirement>.

