

Action Steps from the March conference on the Future of the Nonprofit Sector

The action steps below are organized in order of the seven conference workshops and address the key initiative in each case. Other recommendations from the conference will continue to be reviewed and many will be pursued moving forward. Please direct comments and suggestions to the contact person listed below for each workshop.

1. ***Nonprofit Collaboration and Strategic Partnerships:*** The Delaware Philanthropy Forum (DPF) in collaboration with Delaware Association of Nonprofit Agencies (DANA) and others are organizing a workshop for nonprofit leaders on successful collaborations and partnerships. The workshop will be scheduled in the fall and all conference participants will receive the announcement. The workshop will examine strategies for collaboration and partnership as well as detailed assessment of successful cases. Presenters will be nonprofit leaders with actual experience in developing productive collaborations in Delaware and beyond. Participants will review the key issues associated with nonprofit partnerships and how those issues have been addressed effectively. Attendees will be invited to raise specific questions or ideas for their own desired collaborations. In addition, presenters will help attendees put together “business plans” to implement their own collaborations. Some Delaware grant-makers indicate that they would place a premium on joint proposals from nonprofits that establish partnerships to improve operations, increase effectiveness in the delivery of services, and enhance community outcomes.
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2. ***Implementing Forward Together:*** A joint DANA and United Way of Delaware Partners in Action Coalition has been formed, incorporating more than a dozen respected nonprofit leaders. The Coalition has initiated a pilot study of RFP- related paperwork requirements in Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) contracts, to begin identifying areas where burdens might be reduced. The Coalition is exploring the potential for creating a new DHSS ombudsman, and/or establishing a nonprofit-sanctioned conflict-resolution process, both of which may be of particular value during tight budget times. To advance government/nonprofit partnership principles and practices, Forward Together staff in the UD Center for Community Research and Service have been working to identify other communities where such partnership principles have been specified (e.g. Chicago and New York), and to determine how these examples might be appropriately replicated in Delaware. Illustrating the value of improved partnership practices, the Partners in Action Coalition worked jointly with DHSS contract managers to sponsor a two hour briefing/education session for 82 nonprofits on the upcoming state rollover to a new financial reporting system and the disruptions this may pose for nonprofit contract payments. The Coalition secured DHSS commitments to provide detailed education for nonprofits about the rollover process and to help nonprofits cope with this transition, including allowing nonprofits to be pre-paid by credit card so as not to impose harmful disruptions in their cash flow.
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3. ***Fulfilling Research and Information Needs:*** Efforts are underway to enhance and link databases that contain information about the characteristics of nonprofit programs and services in the state. The goal is to make these databases as comprehensive, accurate and useful as possible. This initiative involves the prospective merger of Delaware's "Helpline" with United Way and the possibility of adding software that allows for the capture of information about what services are actually being used by the public. As efforts are being made to improve this information infrastructure, a proposal is also being developed by the University of Delaware's Center for Community Research and Service for an ongoing research program to measure and analyze the characteristics of Delaware's nonprofit/philanthropic sector, its contributions to the local economy, its impact on the community, and its capacity building needs.
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4. ***Strengthening Philanthropy:*** DPF has taken the lead in establishing the Delaware Grantmakers Association housed at the Delaware Community Foundation . The Delaware Grantmakers Association held its first board meeting on May 24, 2010. Peter Morrow was elected chairman, Helen Stewart Vice-chair, Fred Sears Treasurer and Gary Stockbridge secretary. Wil Sherk was appointed President. The board adopted a working mission: *To encourage philanthropy in Delaware through education and networking; a community of grantmakers, working to strengthen and expand philanthropy.* Work is currently underway to develop a set of member benefits that will attract a wide range of participants, and to develop a web site that will serve member needs and assist grant-seekers as well.
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5. ***Challenges to Small, Faith-based Nonprofits:*** These nonprofits seek better information and communication among themselves and with philanthropic institutions. DANA is collaborating with the Delaware Community Foundation and the Santora Group in hosting luncheons twice monthly between nonprofit and a philanthropic leaders. To build communication among faith-based organizations and other nonprofits, DANA is initiating monthly networking groups that will enable leaders from these organizations to assemble and consider various modes of cooperation. In addition, Forward Together, DANA, and the United Way of Delaware are finalizing a schedule of quarterly meetings for nonprofit leaders with representatives from DHSS and the Department of Children, Youth and their Families. DANA will distribute a notice of these meetings to nonprofit leaders. DANA will solicit additional recommendations for building the communication and collaboration network among small and faith-based nonprofits.
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6. ***Effective Nonprofit Advocacy:*** On behalf of the Delaware Philanthropy Forum, the University of Delaware has received a grant from the Jessie Ball DuPont Fund for a feasibility study that will identify best practices in leadership, advocacy and service among statewide nonprofit support organizations and assess their applicability and feasibility in Delaware. A Working Group, which includes representatives of the DPF, Delaware nonprofit organizations and DANA, has been assembled to conduct the feasibility assessment and develop a briefing report on its findings and recommendations.

The work plan calls for research and analysis of selected statewide nonprofit support organizations during the fall 2010. The Working Group has targeted delivery of the briefing report for the end of the 2010 calendar year. The Working Group invites suggestions or comments from all members of the nonprofit and philanthropic communities.

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7. ***Challenges Facing Nonprofit Boards***: DPF in collaboration with DANA, the Delaware Community Foundation, Trustees of Color, and the Delaware Public Policy Institute will develop a program of board recruitment, training, and advisory services (on governance, finance, legal requirements) available to nonprofits statewide and structured to engage those who attended this conference session. This effort will build upon and support currently available opportunities and expand in other areas of recognized need. A planning group will be launched later this summer with proposals for programs to be offered in the fall 2010.

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