

Build on Brand

*The case for using your core identity
to shape your strategic plan*

October 2020

Inside this report find:

- » Insights from more than 300 nonprofit leaders on brand, strategic plan, and the relationship between these two essentials
- » Real-world examples of how nonprofits like yours are using brands and strategic plans to guide their work during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic
- » Concrete, practical recommendations for aligning your brand and strategic plan so the result is a powerful daily playbook instead of something that sits on your shelf



Overview

Why read this report?

Three-quarters of nonprofits have written strategic plans and half have documented their brands in writing. In fact, most of these nonprofits have likely spent dozens if not hundreds of staff-hours in meetings working on these two essentials.

But despite investing massive amounts of time and effort, **more than 70%** are not confident that they have a clear, well-defined brand or a timely, relevant strategic plan. And **only 19%** have taken a fully integrated approach to brand and strategic plan. Many in the field are missing a critical opportunity to use their core identity to create a stronger strategic plan, and ultimately, more impact on the issues they care about.

This report is for:

- > **The executive director** who wants practical, efficient ways to create a more powerful, aligned brand and strategic plan.
- > **The board member** who wants to participate more effectively in brand refresh or strategic planning meetings or provide better feedback on their results.
- > **The communication director** who wants her organization's brand to be a touchstone across the organization, not just in the communication department.
- > And anyone else who wants to learn **how a clear, well-defined brand leads to a more impactful strategic plan** – better equipping nonprofits to deliver on their missions and overcome unexpected challenges.

Our research

Springboard Partners and Edge Research work with nonprofits on their brands and strategic plans all the time – Springboard from a facilitation and development perspective, and Edge from a market research perspective. Among our partners, we see patterns of both strength and struggle. We wanted to find out whether these patterns are common in the broader nonprofit community:

- > Do most nonprofits have their brands and strategic plans documented in writing?
- > How strong are they and how are they used in day-to-day work?
- > Are brands and strategic plans more often integrated or siloed?
- > And does taking an integrated approach help nonprofits adapt more easily to challenges like the unprecedented crisis of the coronavirus pandemic?

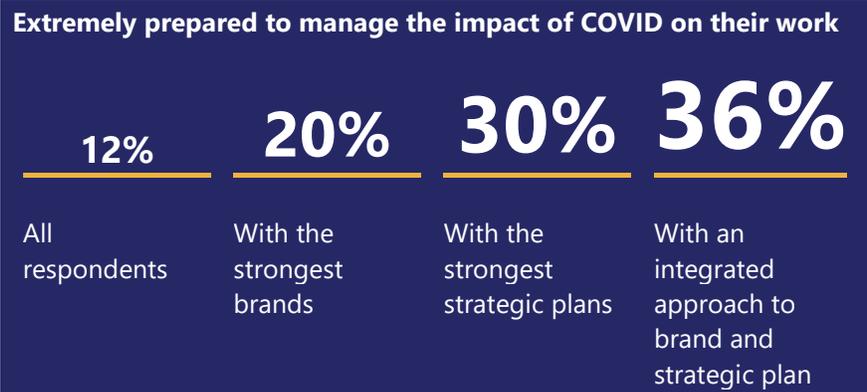
We surveyed more than 300 nonprofit leaders during June and July 2020, distributing the survey through Independent Sector's membership list as well as to our own networks, and conducted follow-up interviews with 20 survey respondents to explore these questions.

What we learned

The stronger and more integrated the strategic plan and brand, the more likely a nonprofit was to feel prepared to manage the disruption caused by COVID-19.

Of those who have an integrated approach to strategy and brand, 36% felt extremely prepared to manage the impact of COVID-19 on their work, compared to just 12% of respondents on average.

Of those who have well-integrated brands and strategic plans, 84% say their strategies will stay the course or need only minor updates.



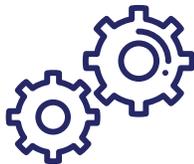
But most strategic plans and brands are not as strong as they could be, and the two are rarely integrated.



Only 28% are confident that their organization has a clear, well-defined brand.



Only 24% are sure that their organization has a timely, relevant strategic plan.



Only 19% have a fully integrated approach to developing and managing their brand and strategic plan.

And even among those who are most confident about their brands and strategic plans, only half reported a fully integrated approach to these two essentials.

What we recommend

1. Clarify your brand by writing it down.
2. Use your brand to shape the three must-have elements of your strategic plan (rather than allowing your strategic plan to define your brand).
3. Make referring to your brand and strategic plan part of your routine and culture.

Get in touch

To ask questions about this report, or explore how Springboard Partners and Edge Research can help you strengthen your brand or strategic plan, contact:

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What do we mean by...

We define **brand** as your organization's core identity – who you are, the big-picture what you do, and why it matters.

We call things like name, logo, colors, tagline or other messaging – and really anything else your organization says, does, or creates to reflect its identity – **branding**. These are important tools, but they are not your brand.

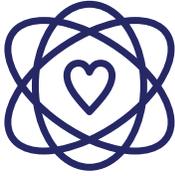
A good **strategic plan** includes at minimum three must-haves: the long-term change you are working to achieve, the near-term objectives you will pursue to move toward that change, and the high-level actions you will take to meet your objectives.

How Nonprofits See Their Brands and Strategic Plans

Brands and especially strategic plans are a priority for most nonprofits who responded to our survey

	Brand	Strategic Plan
Formalized in writing?	<p>51%</p> <p>Have their brand formalized in writing. Another 12% are working on it, and 37% don't or aren't sure.</p>	<p>77%</p> <p>Have a written strategic plan. Another 9% are working on it, and only 14% don't have a written strategic plan or aren't sure.</p>
Why not?	<p></p> <p>The most common reason for not having their brand in writing was not having time, followed by not knowing how.</p>	<p>81%</p> <p>Of those who do not have a formal strategic plan, 81% at least set long-term goals or near-term objectives.</p>
How recently updated?	<p>3/5</p> <p>More than 3 in 5 have updated their brand within the last five years.</p>	<p>4/5</p> <p>More than 4 in 5 have updated their strategic plan within the last five years.</p>
Importance?	<p>90%</p> <p>Agree that nonprofits need a strong brand to be successful.</p>	<p>92%</p> <p>Agree that the most effective nonprofits are guided by a strategic plan.</p>
Use to make decisions?	<p>57%</p> <p>Use their brand on a daily or weekly basis to make decisions – most commonly related to communication, fundraising, and program changes.</p>	<p>57%</p> <p>Use their strategic plan on a daily or weekly basis to make decisions – most commonly related to program changes, budgeting, communication, and fundraising.</p>

But most respondents are not confident in the strength of their brands and strategic plans, and their definitions of each vary



Only 28% are confident that their organization has a clear, well-defined brand. The word brand can mean a lot of different things depending on who you ask. We define brand as your organization's core identity – who you are, the big-picture what you do, and why it matters. About one-quarter of respondents also define brand in this way:

Our story about who we are, what we stand for, and how it impacts the work we do.

A brand is an organization's identity, reputation, and core beliefs bundled into a cohesive and compelling whole.

It's how we describe and share our identity as an institution, which includes our values, aspirations and actual work.

We believe your brand needs to feel true and authentic to your organization and resonate with your most important audiences. Forty percent of survey participants define brand as their organization's reputation or the feeling audiences have when they think of the organization. Your reputation is an important part of your brand, but allowing your audiences to be solely responsible for defining your core identity is limiting, as Karen Tronsgard-Scott, executive director of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, told us in an interview:

A long time ago, a legislator turned to us and said, 'You all sit next to the angels. You have so much credibility and ability to maneuver because everybody assumes you're angelic.' I realized that was an interesting brand to have, but that wasn't really the brand we wanted. There's a paternalism inherent in that perception of us. By going through a process to define our brand ourselves, we have created a much more powerful identity on which to build our work.

Just under 20% of our survey participants define brand as a tagline, logo, or colors. The way we see it, these visual and message elements are your branding. Their job is to reinforce your brand, but in and of themselves they are not your brand. Defining your core identity first makes your branding much more powerful because you get clear on what it needs to convey.



Only 24% are confident that their organization has a timely, relevant strategic plan. Strategic plans can look really different across organizations. Some have incredibly detailed plans created over two years of intense work sessions, while others have only a page or two of priorities created in a two-hour meeting at the start of the year.

At a minimum, we believe a good strategic plan must define the measurable long-term change you are working to achieve, the specific near-term objectives you will prioritize to move toward that change, and the major categories of actions you plan to take to meet your objectives. Some organizations may call this something other than a strategic plan, some may capture it in a narrative report while others may use a spreadsheet, and still others may include additional elements beyond the minimum. These differences are fine so long as those must-have elements are in place.

Nearly half of respondents define strategic plans in this way – 30% focused on the same three must-haves and another 18% focused on goals and objectives only, without the high-level actions to achieve them:

It is the set of goals, objectives, and tactics that will drive the decision-making of an organization for a set period of time and with specific, measurable desired outcomes.

We actually have moved away from strategic planning. We now use a theory of change to frame out our goals, objectives, strategies, and impact.

A list of goals and objectives that are in line with the mission and brand that serve as a guide for the daily work of the organization.

Seventeen percent define strategic plans as focused only on tactics or operational priorities, such as board development or fundraising. These plans could be missing the goals and objectives that ensure your tactics and operational priorities are actually leading you where you want to go.

Twenty percent define strategic plans in vague terms like “the roadmap to success,” “a guideline for how we move into the future,” or “a method for carrying out the mission.” These are not necessarily wrong, but they don’t define strategic plan with enough detail to understand whether the must-have elements are present or not. These responses also indicate that there may be an opportunity to strengthen the nonprofit community’s understanding of the basics of good strategic plans.

Which Comes First, Brand or Strategic Plan?

In our experience working with nonprofits, we often see that weaker brands and strategic plans are disconnected and consequently, not well aligned. They are frequently siloed, with program leadership responsible for the strategic plan and communication leadership responsible for the brand. We were curious to explore how the nonprofits that participated in our research understood the relationship between these two essentials.

We learned that only 37% feel confident in their understanding about how brand and strategic plan relate to each other.



And in practice, the majority of nonprofits are not connecting these two elements effectively in their work. **Only 19% are confident that their organizations have an integrated approach to strategy and branding.** Less than 30% are certain that their organization's strategic plan is consistent with their brand.

We asked nonprofit leaders to describe to us the ideal relationship between brand and strategic plan. Conventional wisdom is that both elements are important, but the strategic plan comes first and drives the brand. Some examples of this include: "In order to understand your brand and communication plan, first there has to be a strategic plan," and "The strategic plan is the foundation, the root of the other two plans. It should guide how you approach your brand and communication strategy."

This isn't surprising given that many think of brand as reputation or visual elements like logo and colors. However, if you define brand as the core identity of your organization, then that approach is backward. **Instead, your core identity can and should play a powerful role in helping to shape your strategies.** Stephanie Morris, CEO of SHAPE America, shared how brand drives the strategic plan in her organization:

I see the brand as the essence of who we are. The strategic plan piece, I consider to be a relatively short-term guide for where the organization is moving. We need to connect to the brand, reflect it, and draw from it as we set priorities in our plan. But our brand is more everlasting – it's our stake in the ground that everything we do is tied to.

Jonathan Hayden, director of operations of Leadership Foundations, told us about how his organization's strategic plan was strengthened when their brand became clear:

We didn't really align our plan with our brand. We never got around to that. That's why we brought in the brand expert to help us align how we talk about ourselves with what we actually do. As we clarified our identity, it put our strategic plan in better focus.

Stronger, Integrated Brands and Strategic Plans Support Decision-making and Resilience

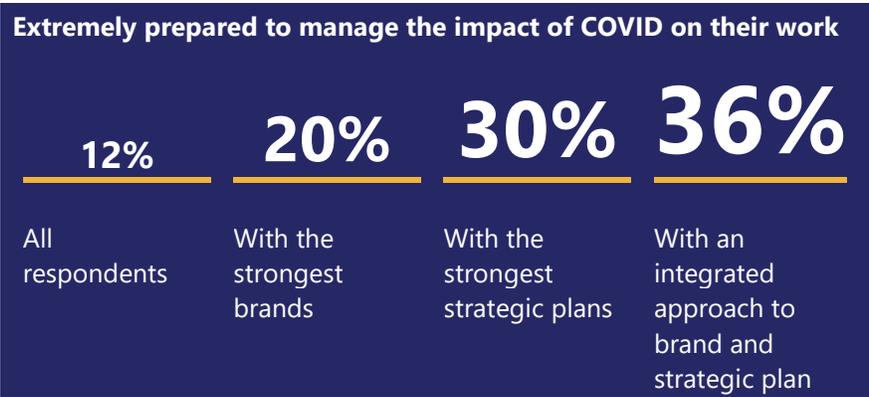
Respondents with well-integrated brands and strategic plans are much more likely to use them frequently to make decisions

The time nonprofits invest in their brands and strategic plans should pay dividends by making their day-to-day work easier. But when brands and strategic plans are weak and disconnected, many nonprofits miss out on the benefits of drawing on these tools to inform organizational decisions.

Well-Integrated Brand and Strategic Plan	83%	Use their brand on a daily or weekly basis to make decisions	85%	Use their strategic plan on a daily or weekly basis to make decisions
Disconnected Brand and Strategic Plan	28%	Use their brand on a daily or weekly basis to make decisions	33%	Use their strategic plan on a daily or weekly basis to make decisions

Respondents with well-integrated brands and strategic plans were three times more likely to feel prepared to manage the disruption caused by COVID-19

Overall, only 12% of respondents felt extremely prepared to manage the impact of the pandemic. Confidence in preparedness was higher for those who had the strongest brands and strategic plans. And it was highest among those with well-integrated brands and strategic plans – these respondents were three times more likely than average to feel extremely prepared.



Some respondents shared that their strategic plans aren't flexible enough to adapt to changes caused by shifting funder priorities or unprecedented events like the coronavirus pandemic. As one said, it feels like you have to "throw strategic plans out the window or create a new one because everything has changed."

However, among respondents with well-integrated brands and strategic plans, 59% reported using their strategic plan a great deal to inform their response to COVID-19 and 82% reported that their COVID-19 communication was informed a great deal by their brand. And most important, only 16% said that their strategies will need significant changes or reinvention entirely following COVID-19. As Tory Martin, director of communications and engagement for the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University, told us, "A strong strategic framework helps you to say, 'Everything's on fire, what do we do now? What are our guiding lights?'"

How nonprofits have drawn on their brands and strategic plans to guide their response to the pandemic

Our theory of change and brand has been fundamental in how we've responded to support our staff. I kept coming back to "all Vermonters thrive," which is a key part of our brand. We adopted flexible hours. We're offering stipends to staff with school-aged kids to help with remote learning. We paid for everybody to have an ergonomic evaluation of their home office, and then we bought what they needed to work comfortably from home. We've done all these things to maximize the possibility of our team thriving under COVID-19. – **Karen Tronsgard-Scott, executive director, Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence**

A lot of our nature-focused programming is carried out in partnership with schools. When the local school system decided at the last minute to stay with remote learning rather than return to in-person instruction, we needed to shift from school-based to family-based programs for the coming school year. With just two weeks' notice, we opened a micro school, including getting a building, Wi-Fi, desks and everything else. Now we're providing childcare, academic support, and nature enrichment to kids each day – with 75% receiving scholarships to defray the costs – while their families continue to work. That was a super-fast pivot. You can't do that if you don't have a strong brand and a strong strategic plan supporting finance and engagement. – **Keith Desrosiers, executive director, Thorne Nature Experience**

Our strategic plan called for us to expand our use of technology to reach new audiences. When the pandemic hit and we knew we couldn't present in-person keyboard performances due to COVID-19, we accelerated our work in this area and immediately pivoted to livestream performances, both over the summer and for our entire 2020-21 season. These are expanding the reach of our brand globally and attracting new and younger audiences. So, the pandemic actually vaulted us ahead on this part of our strategic plan. – **Alice Kemerling, assistant director, The Gilmore**

What We Recommend

1. Clarify your brand by writing it down

Since we define brand as your organization's core identity – who you are, the big-picture what you do, and why it matters – every organization has a brand, whether you've formally written it down or not. But taking the time to write it down can have huge benefits for your organization:

- > Formalizing your brand ensures **you are defining your identity yourself** rather than being defined solely by what others think of you.
- > Going through even a streamlined process to put the key elements of your brand on paper will help you make those **elements clearer and more defined**. In our survey, 78% of respondents who are the most confident that their brands are clear and well-defined have their brands formalized in writing.
- > Documenting your brand will **increase consistency across your organization** – it makes it easier and more efficient for everyone to use the same words to talk about your work. It gives you something concrete to draw from in strategic planning, communication planning, and content development. In our survey, 76% of those with a well-integrated approach to brand and strategic planning had their brands formalized in writing.
- > **A written brand is a sharable brand** – you can include it as part of your orientation for new staff, board, or volunteers. If your CEO retires or your communication director moves on, a brand in writing means it doesn't leave the organization when your leaders do.

We haven't written [our brand] down yet. But with so many challenges on the horizon, having our brand in writing will help us ground ourselves and process those things. – **Stephanie Morris, CEO, SHAPE America**

Alice Kemerling, assistant director of The Gilmore, shared the impact defining their brand has had on her team:

Our brand empowers each person on our staff. They know which direction we're all going together. We have a lot of different programs, but we're all under this one umbrella.

Jonathan Hayden, director of operations of Leadership Foundations, noted a similar positive impact on his board:

We had committed board members who, once we went through a branding process, finally had an a-ha moment about what we do. And then they were able to start doing effective fundraising because they had the tools.

Many organizations engage consultants to help them nail down their brands. But you know your organization best, and it's entirely possible to do it on your own if you don't have the budget for a consultant to support you. The key questions to answer are:

- > **Unique niche:** What is your organization's "zone of genius" – the one thing you are best at or that most sets you apart from allies or competitors in your field?
- > **Values:** What are three to four core beliefs that describe WHY you do your work?
- > **Personality:** What are three to five personality traits that define HOW you approach your work?
- > **Brand promise:** What is one sentence that captures the essence of your organization – who you are, the big-picture what you do, and why it matters?

For each question, consider whether your answers ring true to you and are likely to ring true to your most important audiences. Ideally your brand needs to pass both tests, but you can work to change your audience's perceptions over time if needed. It's most important that your brand feels true to you and your colleagues.

2. Use your brand to shape the three must-have elements of your strategic plan (rather than allowing your strategic plan to define your brand)

Your core identity as an organization – what we think of as brand – is more long-lasting and expansive than a strategic plan, which defines the work you will do over the next one to five years. Your brand can be a powerful filter for shaping the three must-haves of a good strategic plan.

I really understand why people question the value of strategic plans. I think the main thing is, it's really good to look at the big picture. Don't get hung up on doing a traditional strategic plan as a whole. The process of answering key questions is valuable for your staff and board. And the product needs to be something you can use and that tells you something – not a massive report that lands on the shelf. – **Carrie Thomas, executive director, Chicago Jobs Council**

Strategic Plan Must-Have

Goals: the measurable, long-term change you want to see in five to 10 years

Objectives: the specific, near-term outcomes that you will pursue in the next one to two years to move toward your goals

Actions: the high-level categories of work you will undertake to meet your objectives

How to Draw on Your Brand

What's the transformation you're trying to achieve? Your brand can guide you to focus on what you're fighting for rather than what you're fighting against, leading to more powerful, less transactional goals.

Karen Tronsgard-Scott, executive director of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, described how this played out in her organization's planning process: "Our brand creates a vision for what we want rather than what we're trying to tear down. In our theory of change, we never had to say we're trying to reduce domestic violence by a certain percent. Instead of turning toward what was, we made the choice to lean into what can be."

Are you the right organization to pursue these objectives? Assessing your potential priorities against your unique niche is a great way to make sure your organization is best-suited for the job ahead. Simply put, the more your work is focused in your organization's "zone of genius," the more effective you will be.

Kristin Sherwood, program director of FishChoice, explained how her organization's unique niche is a useful check on possible objectives: "What we are best at is creating online tools that give seafood businesses actionable information to move ahead on sustainability. When we update our strategic action plan each year, we consider new objectives through this lens. Assessing what is and isn't squarely in our wheelhouse helps us stay focused on opportunities where we have the best chance of success."

Will these actions move you closer to or away from your values? Do they reflect how you want your organization to show up in the world? Your actions should reflect your values and personality traits. Otherwise you risk looking inconsistent or even worse, disingenuous.

Do you believe companies want to have a positive impact on people and the environment while being profitable? Then a campaign calling out the top 10 corporate enemies of the environment would move you away from that value. Do you describe yourself as scrappy and grounded in the community you serve? Then a black-tie fundraising gala would be a mismatch with your personality. These examples may seem obvious, but in planning meetings it's easy to get excited about bright and shiny ideas and end up with actions that are out of step with your brand. Using your values and personality traits as a filter will prevent this from happening.

3. Make referring to your brand and strategic plan part of your routine and culture

Once your brand and your strategic plan are aligned, they become a powerful daily resource for everyone from the board to leadership to staff, instead of something that gathers dust on your shelf. Here are some concrete ways you can incorporate them into your organizational culture and day-to-day activities.

Hiring and onboarding – In our survey, hiring was the organizational decision where respondents used their brands and strategic plans the least. Here are some specific ways to think about using these two essentials:

- > You can draw upon your brand to make sure a job listing reflects not just what you do, but who you are and why you do it. Bringing in elements from your values and personality can help your listing stand out from others and help candidates gauge whether they are a good fit.
- > Both your strategic plan and brand can be great sources of interview questions so that you can assess whether the candidate has the right skills to support your strategic priorities as well as the right values and work style to match your organization.
- > Once you bring someone on board, include your brand and strategic plan documents in their onboarding and schedule a time for a senior team member or their supervisor to review them and answer questions.

Connecting with your team – Beyond using them externally, your brand and strategic plan are powerful tools for internal communication:

- > Track progress against the goals and objectives in your strategic plan on a quarterly basis to energize your team. Seeing the progress your work contributes to is highly motivating. And if progress is slow, you can share lessons and decide together how to adjust, fostering a culture where missing a target leads to learning rather than punishment.
- > At each weekly or monthly staff meeting, create a standing agenda item for a team member to share a story about how your organization lived its brand since you last met as a team.
- > When making operations decisions, use your brand as a guide. For example, if one of your personality traits is “flexible,” consider how that shows up in your policies around dress code, working hours, and paid leave. Even things like choosing a location for your staff retreat can reinforce your brand, as Kristin Sherwood, program director of FishChoice, told us: “One of our values is, ‘protecting the ocean is why we get up in the morning.’ We’re a virtual organization, so we have some flexibility in choosing where to have our annual retreat. For the past several years, we’ve chosen locations at the coast so that our team can be inspired and energized by time in and near the ocean. Our retreats have actually become more productive as a result.”

Planning to communicate – There is a clear line from your brand and your strategic plan to your organization’s communications. Specifically:

- > Your brand gives you a compass for developing an overarching message that describes your organization’s work as well as ensuring campaign- or project-specific messages don’t end up in conflict with your values.
- > Your strategic plan gives you the objectives that are the foundation of a good strategic communication plan. They are the starting point for determining the audiences you need to reach, the action you need them to take, the messages that will persuade them to act, and the specific activities you’ll use to deliver the messages.

The strategic plan is my blueprint for saying yes or no to a request for service. I always go back to the plan. – Nancy Miller, executive director/CEO, VISIONS

Vetting a new opportunity – Using your brand and strategic plan to assess new opportunities will help you avoid straying too far from your core purpose. Ask questions like:

- > Does this fit within our core objectives for this year? If not, will it help us make progress toward our long-term goal?
- > Will this allow us to do what we are best at, aligning with our unique niche?
- > Does this move us toward or away from our values?
- > What would it look like to bring our organization’s unique combination of personality traits to this opportunity?

Adapting to a crisis – When things get hard, drawing upon your core strategic frameworks can take some of the stress out of decision-making:

- > Some of the organizations we interviewed said that the pandemic actually helped them accelerate work in their strategic plans, such as reaching new audiences through virtual performances or creating the urgency needed to rally support for a community resource center. A crisis may have the unexpected benefit of advancing your strategic plan.
- > Other times, a big pivot in your work may be necessary. Consulting your strategic plan can help you be intentional about what you need to deprioritize in the short-term to make room for the new work you will take on.
- > When preparing a statement about a crisis or getting ready for an interview, your brand is a powerful filter for checking to see if what you plan to say sounds authentic to your organization.

Spending the time to create your decision-making framework is crucial to being able to move fast in a way that’s true to your mission. – Tory Martin, director of communications and engagement, Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University

Survey Methodology, Gratitude, About Us

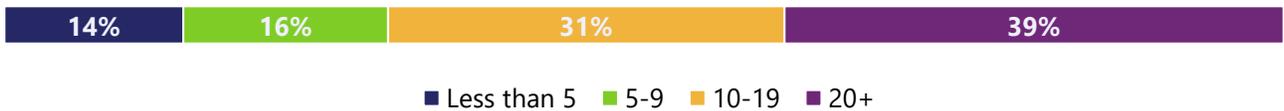
Survey methodology

Springboard Partners and Edge Research designed the survey, which Independent Sector distributed through email invitation to its 35,000 members. In addition, Springboard and Edge invited their networks of nonprofit organizations to participate. We collected 310 completed surveys over six weeks, using industry best practices for promotion and email reminders. Due to the sampling method, the survey is non-random in nature, so certain rules of statistical representativeness do not apply. However, the sample characteristics are reflective of the nonprofit sector as a whole. This graphic summarizes the demographics of survey respondents.

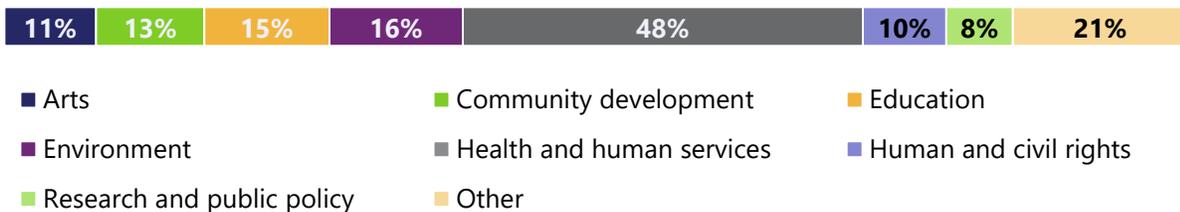
Role in organization



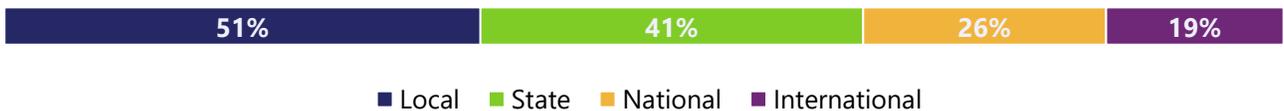
Years in nonprofit sector



Issue focus



Geographic scope



Budget size



Gratitude

We are grateful to the 310 nonprofit leaders who carved out the time to take our survey in the midst of a global pandemic and especially to the 20 who made time to talk with us by phone about their responses:

- > Dana Murn, Director of Membership, **American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry**
- > Laura Harris, Executive Director, **Americans for Indian Opportunity**
- > Debilyn Molineaux, President and CEO, **Bridge Alliance**
- > Gail Perreault, Partner, **Bridgespan Group**
- > Gabby Tilley, Policy Advocate, **California Food Policy Advocates**
- > Carrie Thomas, Executive Director, **Chicago Jobs Council**
- > Jim Cain, Executive Director, **Family Promise of Greater Des Moines**
- > Kristin Sherwood, Program Director, **FishChoice**
- > Tory Martin, Director of Communications and Engagement, **Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University**
- > Maria Rosario Gonzalez Albuixech, Director, Communications and Immigrant Health, **Health Care for All**
- > Jonathan Hayden, Director of Operations, Colangelo Carpenter Innovation Center, **Leadership Foundations**
- > Perry Broderick, Communications and Systems Director, **Ocean Outcomes**
- > Stephanie Morris, CEO, **SHAPE America**
- > Elisha Adelman, Volunteer Coordinator, **Sunshine House Inc.**
- > Sohini Baliga, Director of Communications & Advancement, **Taxpayers for Common Sense**
- > Alice Kemerling, Assistant Director, **The Gilmore**
- > Keith Desrosiers, Executive Director, **Thorne Nature Experience**
- > Karen Tronsgard-Scott, Executive Director, **Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence**
- > Nancy Miller, Executive Director/CEO, **VISIONS**
- > Ketayoun Darvich-Kodjouri, Senior Advisor for Communications and External Relations, **Women Strong**

We also deeply appreciate the work of other nonprofit brand and strategy experts that we've had the privilege of learning with and from over the past 15 years. **Tom Benthin, Alexis Sanford, and Diane Tompkins** in particular helped us shape the idea for this research and the recommendations in this report in direct and indirect ways. We are honored to partner with you.

About Springboard Partners

Springboard helps nonprofits and foundations use the power of communication to do more good. Together, we've worked with the nonprofit sector more than 30 years, and we understand the challenges these organizations face getting clear, getting coordinated, getting attention, and getting people to take action.

Effective communication overcomes the obstacles to progress. It creates connection within your organization or network, inspires action instead of indecision, and accelerates change – from local communities to the halls of Congress to capitals around the world.

Our woman- and minority-led team works with nonprofits to identify the specific challenges they face and craft and implement solutions that allow them to reach their goals. We've helped small local organizations maximize their social media impact, worked with national advocates to shape news coverage of high-profile policy debates, and partnered with foundations to facilitate the communication of grantee networks worldwide.

Our services include nearly everything foundations and nonprofits need to communicate powerfully – from the fundamentals of helping organizations strengthen their brands and develop strategic and communication plans to meeting essential communication needs like holding more productive meetings, running advocacy campaigns, and improving media relations. Learn more at www.springboard.partners.

About Edge Research

Edge Research is a woman-owned marketing research company proudly employing a diverse group of researchers. Our team has spent their careers helping NGOs reach audiences through effective marketing and communications. We regularly partner with nonprofits to optimize donor acquisition and retention, and improve communication, public education, and advocacy efforts. Our client-mix and background differentiate us from the typical marketing research company in that we understand nonprofits and their unique challenges, particularly the need to stand out in a competitive philanthropy marketplace. At the same time, our work in the consumer sector means we innovate with the latest approaches, tools, and technologies from the forefront of consumer marketing research.

In addition to our proprietary work for many large NGOs, we routinely partner with thought leaders on industry-wide studies examining charitable donors, foundation strategies, association programming and more. To see our fantastic clients and download any of our white papers, visit www.edgeresearch.com.