



Feature

Congress is in Session

By Judith Earley

The Nonprofit Congress, that is.



Established by the National Council of Nonprofit Associations (NCNA), the first ever Nonprofit Congress will convene next month in Washington, DC. More than 500 employees, board members, and community volunteers representing nonprofit groups from 40 states and the District of Columbia will come together as delegates at the Nonprofit Congress National Meeting to be held October 16-17, 2006.

The rationale behind its creation is to build unity among charitable organizations and encourage them to work together for the continued improvement and increased effectiveness of the nonprofit sector. Organizers hope to identify and address the challenges facing the industry during the meeting. Delegates will also represent the concerns of traditionally underrepresented groups. Everyone who is interested in and concerned for the future of nonprofit organizations in this country is invited to participate.

Mission statements from represented organizations embody wide-ranging social interests and include a multitude of geographic and diversity issues; the largest assembly of participants comes from small and midsized nonprofit organizations. More than 70 percent of all charitable organizations have annual budgets of less than \$1 million.

The official goals of the Nonprofit Congress are to reaffirm the identity of the sector as a vital force in our society; strengthen the resolve of nonprofit leaders to engage in public policy and use the sector as a mechanism for enhancing the democratic process; embrace the sector's responsibility as stewards of democracy; encourage nonprofit leaders to develop communication strategies to convey the daily work, vision, and future of the sector; deliver critical information; and encourage shared knowledge in key content areas of nonprofit management, including risk management, board governance,

public policy, and advocacy.

The Nonprofit Congress is divided into four phases:

1. **Personal Declaration**

More than 2,200 individuals have signed the Declaration for America's Nonprofits., which encourages nonprofits to come together as an industry and develop a unified and forceful agenda.

2. **Town Hall Meetings**

As of September 1st, 37 town hall meetings in 16 states have convened for participants to share their dreams, express their concerns, define their values, and unite around opportunities. Another 50 meetings are scheduled in 18 other states. Issues raised thus far include accountability (i.e. governance and regulations/oversight); advocacy and public policy; communication with constituents; collaboration within the sector and with external partners; attracting new people to work in the sector; funding; public relations; technology; and, finally, volunteer recruitment, retention, and management.

3. **National Meeting**

It is here where issues generated from Town Halls will be prioritized and used to create a collective action plan for the nonprofit sector.

4. **Taking Action**

After the meeting is adjourned, the goal of the Congress is to implement plans at the local, state, and national levels by partnering with media, business, government, and civic leaders.



Feature

Add your name to the thousands signing this declaration online at www.nonprofitcongress.org.

DECLARATION FOR AMERICA'S NONPROFITS

I Support America's Nonprofits.

Nonprofits embody the best spirit and values of our nation. They help millions of individuals and families daily. They protect, feed, heal, shelter, educate, and nurture our bodies and spirits. Nonprofits also give shape to our boldest dreams, highest ideals, and noblest causes. They turn our beliefs into action— as promoters of democracy, champions of the common good, incubators of innovation, laboratories of leadership, protectors of taxpayers, responders in times of trouble, stimulators of the economy, and weavers of community fabric. America needs nonprofits and cannot realize its aspirations or successfully tackle the problems it faces without vibrant and effective nonprofits. Likewise, individual nonprofits cannot overcome the significant challenges they face until charitable organizations recognize their value and unite from a position of strength.

The time has come for nonprofits of all sizes and missions to come together to:

- 1. Forge a Common Identity Based on Shared Values. Together, nonprofits will re-imagine, re-position, and re-create a clear identity for the charitable sector, one commensurate with its importance to society.*

- 2. Develop a Unified Vision and Message. Together, nonprofits will develop a unified vision and message in order to create a more caring, just, and equitable society.*
- 3. Exercise a Collective Voice. Together, nonprofits will embrace their vital role and collective power and promote their shared vision to the general public, media, business and civic leaders, and government officials.*

By signing this declaration, I call for and show my support of the Nonprofit Congress, an unprecedented movement to unite the sector. The first part of the Nonprofit Congress will bring nonprofits together through community forums or "town hall meetings."

Based on the input from these meetings, nonprofit delegates from across the country— who will convene in Washington, DC, on October 16 -17, 2006— will craft a unified vision and message for America's nonprofits. Thereafter, nonprofit leaders and their allies will mobilize to spread this message to society at large and unite nonprofits for greater visibility, influence, and resources.

I proudly sign this Declaration because I support America's nonprofits. I add my individual voice to the advancement of the common good and call for the start of this nonprofit movement. I encourage and promote this effort to unite nonprofits in order to strengthen local communities and create a more caring America.

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