

Nonprofits provide essential services in Central Oregon

By [Jan Eggleston and Shauna Quistorff](#) / *Bulletin guest columnists*

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Nonprofit organizations embody the giving 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. They defend our environment and enrich our lives with art. 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 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 unless charitable organizations have the support of the communities they serve.

This was the focus of Many Missions, One Voice, the first National Nonprofit Congress held in Washington, D.C., in October. We were fortunate to be among more than 400 delegates from 48 states and as far away as New Zealand. Delegates drew inspiration from the impressive speakers (among them Nobel laureate Jody Williams) and interactions with people doing good work all over the country, but the Congress was about much more. The tasks attendees accomplished in small and in regional groups sent us back home with some points we want to share with you.

Delegates took input from surveys and town hall-type meetings in their home states to the congress, then worked together to arrive at a consensus of top priorities for the entire nonprofit sector. The top priority is nonprofit organizational effectiveness. It is of utmost importance to those of us representing the sector that nonprofits are effectively and efficiently managed by strong leaders and are accountable and responsive to community needs.

The other priorities were to advocate for the sector at large in order to increase public awareness and support and to engage our constituents in problem-solving at the grass-roots level. This means increasing the understanding of what nonprofits do and why they are important to everyone. This can only be done effectively with input from all segments of the community. It is only with public understanding and support that nonprofits can do their best work.

Nonprofits were "invented" and sanctioned by the Internal Revenue Service because historically they have been able to accomplish certain work at a relatively low cost. This is primarily because nonprofits are mission-driven rather than profit-driven. Tax benefits donors receive for their gifts are designed to encourage such support.

Central Oregon's nonprofit sector is responsible for 10 percent of the region's payroll, which is average for the state and the country. Nonprofits employ about 141,000 Oregonians, adding \$4.6 billion to Oregon's economy through paid wages. And nonprofits contribute more than wages to the Oregon economy. They purchase services, supplies and equipment, and their employees buy houses, food and goods.

Nonprofits make a significant economic impact in every region of our state. But the value of the nonprofit sector is far greater than simple economics. It provides immediate, participatory democracy, giving people a voice. It allows citizens to fulfill a need they would not be able to fulfill alone, and it answers the yearning for community, purpose and hope.

We are aware, from our own community contacts and work recently done by the Bend Chamber of Commerce's Nonprofit Committee, that there is a lack of knowledge about, misunderstanding of, even mistrust of nonprofits by people who don't have direct contact. Yet we know firsthand the value and importance of nonprofits to the health of a community, and we know how efficiently and effectively many local nonprofits are being run.

The efforts agreed to at the National Nonprofit Congress will become part of the new Oregon Association of Nonprofits' efforts to inform and to promote this sector that is so much a part of our communities. You can learn more about Oregon's charitable, mission-driven organizations, their purposes and their impact by visiting www.oregoninvolved.org. Visit often for continuous updates on the development of the Oregon Association of Nonprofits.

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