How You Can Help
Support The Center for Nonprofit Excellence

The impacts of the economic downturn will be long-lasting, and the challenges facing nonprofits in Fairfield County will only grow. In order to meet the changing landscape of dwindling government funding and the increasing demand for services by those in need, nonprofits will need to be well-managed, flexible and proactive.

DONATE ONLINE
Support The Center for Nonprofit Excellence today. Giving online is fast, secure and easy and you'll be confident in the knowledge that your gift will be used in the most effective way possible.

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Click: "Donate Now"
Select: The Center for Nonprofit Excellence
Choose: Your gift amount
Your tax-deductible gift will join donations from other like-minded philanthropists looking to make a difference in their own backyard.

Support The Center for Nonprofit Excellence

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The strength and health of our communities is directly tied to the strength of our region’s nonprofit sector.

The Center for Nonprofit Excellence provides resources, training and support to our nonprofit, community and philanthropic leaders, ensuring a strong and vibrant community where all have the opportunity to thrive.

Learn more about The Center for Nonprofit Excellence and the work being done to improve and strengthen our region’s nonprofit sector at: www.fccfoundation.org.

The State of Board Governance in Fairfield County

Report produced by
The Fairfield County Community Foundation’s Center for Nonprofit Excellence

A Summary of 2012 Survey Results
Next Steps

Boarding Training Needs

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Learn more about The Fairfield County Community Foundation and its Center for Nonprofit Excellence: www.fccfoundation.org

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Improving Board Governance

Better understanding the needs of Fairfield County nonprofit boards was an important outcome of this survey. The Fairfield County Community Foundation’s Center for Nonprofit Excellence was created in partnership with Foundation support and in response to the growing need to improve the effectiveness of nonprofit boards. As a grantmaker, the Fairfield County Community Foundation will continue to assess the health of organization’s boards and identify areas that need improvement. The CNE will work closely with other resource providers in Fairfield County to expand diversity within board membership.

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This survey confirms what we’ve been hearing anecdotally for years: that nonprofit boards have been consistently underserved by professional development opportunities. This is particularly true for Fairfield County nonprofits, such as financial management assistance grants and board development grants. The CNE offers a one-stop shopping for nonprofit consulting.

When respondents were asked what were the greatest obstacles impacting their board’s effectiveness, the top responses included:

• Board members not understanding how to fundraise
• Small board size, so board members stretched thin and not effective
• Board members not engaged
• Board members not understanding how to fundraise
• Shifting from a passive board to a working strategic board is difficult

As a grantmaker, the Fairfield County Community Foundation will continue to assess the health of organization’s boards and identify areas that need improvement. The CNE will work closely with other resource providers in Fairfield County to expand diversity within board membership.

Findings

In terms of recruiting board members, 68% of respondents reported that it is somewhat difficult to recruit new board members. Boards in Fairfield County do not reflect the diversity of the region. Only 19% of respondents have boards that are overwhelmingly white and older. Over 75% have no Hispanic board members, nearly 50% have no African-American board members and 50% have no African-American board members. Over 75% of respondents prefer to have board members under the age of 50 and over 20% prefer to have board members under the age of 39.

The areas where respondents expressed they would most benefit from trainings were consistent with rating their performance as lacking in certain areas. The top training needs include:

• Board recruitment
• Strategic planning for the organization
• Financial management assistance grants and board development grants

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Improving Board Governance

Better understanding the needs of Fairfield County nonprofits has been an important part of this survey. The Fairfield County Community Foundation has awarded over $135 million in grants to nonprofits in Fairfield County since its establishment in 1999. The Foundation has been a leader in promoting national standards for community foundations. The Foundation offers a variety of tools and resources to help nonprofits develop endowment funds and develop and lead initiatives that further the public good. The survey results will be used to inform the Foundation’s work going forward.

The Fairfield County Community Foundation is the central resource for nonprofit excellence in the Fairfield County region. The Foundation’s mission is to strengthen community excellence, efficiency and impact. Its vision is that Fairfield County be an exemplary community where nonprofits thrive. The Foundation’s goal is to improve the quality of life throughout Fairfield County and beyond. For more information, visit www.fccfoundation.org.

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The “Backbone” of Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit boards are the backbone of charitable organizations.

Boards exercise authority over the organization and have a range of responsibilities. The most important of these responsibilities include providing financial and legal oversight, ensuring that the organization has sufficient resources and setting the strategic direction of the organization.

Given these significant responsibilities, it is widely accepted that a strong, engaged, nonprofit board is an essential ingredient to a nonprofit’s ability to achieve impact.

Today, more than ever, there is increasing pressure on nonprofit boards to operate effectively. Greater scrutiny on nonprofit practices, coupled with increased demand for nonprofit services and funding decreases are challenging boards in new ways.

How are nonprofit boards in Fairfield County, Connecticut stepping up to these challenges? Where are they shining and struggling? What do boards look like in terms of their composition? And how are local nonprofit organizations attracting new board members?

We set out to answer these questions and more in a survey we conducted in January 2012 of Fairfield County executive directors and board members. Our findings are based on the responses of 120 nonprofit leaders in Fairfield County - a 26% response rate. These respondents include 100 executive directors and 20 board members. Respondents represented organizations working in the arts, education, workforce development and everything in between.

One-third of the respondents were organizations with operating budgets between $1-3 million dollars and one-third of respondents were human service organizations.

These findings are just a snapshot of the state of nonprofit governance in Fairfield County. This report is meant to be a tool for board members and how they can be more effective at setting the strategic direction of the organization and recruiting new board members. Please visit our website to download a copy of this report and receive updates on local nonprofit organization performance.

Findings

In terms of board performance, respondents rated their boards high in terms of understanding their mission, financial and legal oversight, and setting the strategic direction of the organization. Respondents rated their boards’ performance poorly in terms of fundraising for the organization, recruiting new board members and monitoring the board’s own performance.

Boards range in size from 5 to 56 members, with 46% of boards having 11 to 20 members. Over 90% of boards have written by-laws, record minutes of board and committee actions, and have an executive committee. 57% of boards provide in-person, structured board orientation for new board members and only 29% use a data dashboard report for board meetings. 72% of respondents felt that their board operated at a strategic versus operational level.

• 52% of respondents say board members do not solicit funds on behalf of the organization.
• 42% of respondents say board members do not identify donors.
• 32% of respondents say board members do not attend fundraising events.
• 28% of respondents say board members do not make a personal donation to the organization.

Executive Summary

In terms of the board’s responsibility for fundraising, only 35% of respondents rated their board performance as Excellent to Very Good.

What We Learned

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Findings

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About The Fairfield County Community Foundation

The Fairfield County Community Foundation works closely with donors, local leaders, and the nonprofit community to improve the quality of life throughout Fairfield County. Individual, family, corporate, and organizational gifts support the Foundation’s efforts to strengthen the region. The Fairfield County Community Foundation is an independent public charity that manages more than $100 million in charitable funds for the benefit of Fairfield County and beyond. To learn more, visit www.fccfoundation.org.

About The FCCF Center for Nonprofit Excellence

The Fairfield County Community Foundation created The Center for Nonprofit Excellence to strengthen nonprofit effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability in Fairfield County, with the goal of improving the quality of life for residents in Fairfield County. The Center provides education, subject advisors, board members, and professional development opportunities for boards, specifically in the area of recruiting quality board members.

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Training Needs of Board Members

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Improving Board Governance

Better understanding the needs of Fairfield County nonprofits is an important outcome of this survey. The Fairfield County Community Foundation created The Center for Nonprofit Excellence workshops are geared towards professional and staff of nonprofit organizations, future board members as well. Future board governance training will be specifically based on the findings of this survey. The CNE will sponsor a high level governance workshop in the fall of 2012 focusing on improving the fundraising capacity of nonprofits.

As a grantmaker, the Fairfield County Community Foundation will continue to assess the needs of the organization, but with the board as well. The Foundation encourages board members to participate in our site visits and workshops so many of our high level workshops, we require board members attendance. This will continue to be a focus of the Foundation.

In terms of recruiting board members, 46% of respondents reported that it is uncertain because difficult to recruit new board members. Boards in Fairfield County do not reflect the diversity of the region. 70% of respondents have boards that are overwhelmingly white and older. Over 70% have no Latinx board members, nearly 50% have no Black or Hispanic board members and 30% have no African American board members. Over 75% of respondents have no board members under the age of 32 and over 20% of respondents have no board members under the age of 39.

When respondents were asked what were the greatest obstacles impacting their board’s effectiveness, the most common responses included:

- Board members not having enough information to dedicate to board activities
- Small board size, in board members stretched too thin and not effective
- Board members not engaged
- Board members not understanding how to fundraise
- Shifting from a grant based to a working strategic business model
- Recruiting quality board members

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About The CNE for Nonprofit Excellence

The Fairfield County Community Foundation created The Center for Nonprofit Excellence to strengthen nonprofit effectiveness, efficiency and impact in Fairfield County. The Center will attract and retain highly talented professionals, workforce development, and professional development work to support the Fairfield County Community Foundation.

The CNE’s areas of focus include:

• Awards special technical assistance grants to Fairfield County nonprofits to enable them to meet organizational needs.
• Offers high quality, affordable professional development workshops for Fairfield County nonprofit boards and organizations. As of this writing, the CNE will continue to develop and offer training workshops to support the Fairfield County Community Foundation.

Findings

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Choose: Your gift amount
Your tax-deductible gift will join donations from other like-minded philanthropists looking to make a difference in their own backyard.

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