



Introduction to the Nonprofit Sector: The Unbeaten Path

**The Bonner Community Engagement Curriculum
(with credits to source material from Idealist.org)**

BWBR Description: *Bonner Curriculum workshop introduces participants to the non-profit sector and basic information they should know about 501(c)3 organizations and governmental organizations that serve as partners.*

Overview: What is the nonprofit sector? What are nonprofit careers? In this introductory workshop, participants are guided through a series of activities based upon practical definitions, statistics, and other information. They are introduced to a framework for understanding the sector, engaging in reflection to develop a sense of what the nonprofit sector is. Through this, participants gain a broader understanding of nonprofit organizations, the depth and diversity of the sector, and the many career paths available within it.

Category: Career and Professional Skills

Level: Intermediate



Recommended

Bonner Sequence: This training is recommended for Bonner students during the junior year, as they are exposed to vocational discernment activities. It may also be helpful for seniors if not done earlier.

Learning Outcomes:

- To introduce participants to the nonprofit sector and its characteristics
- To focus on the range of nonprofit organizations in the United States
- To support participants to consider career paths within the nonprofit sector

Materials:

- Flipchart paper
- Markers
- Copies of attached handouts
- Index Cards

How to Prepare:

Start by becoming familiar with the entire workshop. Reflect on your own career path and how your involvement in the nonprofit sector has evolved over time. Prepare some thoughts to share. Have all materials ready to use.

Brief Outline:

This 1 hour workshop has the following parts:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1) Welcome/Icebreaker | Suggested time 15 |
| 2) What is the Nonprofit Sector? | Suggested time 20 |
| 3) The Size of the Nonprofit Sector | Suggested time 15 |
| 4) Closing | Suggested time 10 |
| minutes | |

Part 1) Welcome and Icebreaker

Suggested time: 15 minutes

Begin by introducing yourself and the purpose of the workshop, referencing the overview at the beginning of this guide. If applicable, briefly explain your career path and how you have been involved in the nonprofit sector as part of your work.

Next, conduct an introduction. If the group is small, you can have each participant share their name, year, major/area of study, reasons for attending the workshop, and what they hope to get out of it. If the group is larger, have each participant introduce himself or herself briefly. Then ask a few people to share why they attended and what they hope to get out of the workshop. Jot reasons on a flipchart paper; you can then respond by summarizing which of those elements will best be covered.

Now introduce the next activity called **Sit and Stand**. Explain to the group that you will read several statements and if they agree with the statement, they should stand. If they disagree, they should sit.

Statements

- I volunteer regularly or have a permanent volunteer placement.
- I have had a paid job or internship with a nonprofit.
- I definitely want to work in the nonprofit sector after graduation.
- I have a good sense of what *nonprofit* means.
- I'm not sure I can find an interesting career in the nonprofit sector.
- I'm not sure I can get paid what I want to earn in the nonprofit sector.
- I am not sure what I want to do after graduation.
- I want my career to make a difference in the world.
- I have volunteered with a nonprofit organization.

Observe trends in how participants respond to the questions. Many students are likely to be concerned and confused about their career options, even if they do have a sense that they want to do "good work" in the world. Many students are also likely to have some volunteer experience with a nonprofit organization. Recognize the value of these experiences as they start applying for jobs. Continue by introducing the key goals for the workshop:

1. **Educate**- Learn about the nonprofit sector and the wide range of career opportunities available
2. **Empower**- Leave feeling inspired and excited about the possibility of working in the nonprofit sector.
3. **Enjoy**- Have fun over the course of the workshop, sharing and learning from each other as well.

Finally set out some perspective:

- The nonprofit sector is not the only place where you can have a meaningful career.
- People can make a difference in government and business.
- Having everyone work for nonprofits is not the answer to the world's problems. The larger goal of this workshop is to encourage you to connect your values and your passion to your career plans. For many young people, this leads them into the nonprofit sector.

Part 2) What is the Nonprofit Sector?

Suggested time: 20 minutes

Step 1: Brief Personal Reflection Exercise (Using the Index Card)

State that before we get into the practical stuff, it is important to consider why people do this work in the first place. So you want them to think a little about what is most important to them.

Distribute the Index Cards, one to each person.

Ask people to **write down on an index card 3 things/issues about which they are passionate:**

- It could be a person, activity, or issue.
- What makes them angry, happy, passionate, etc.

Give them about 5 minutes to write.

Facilitator's Tip: Ask people to raise their hands if they are finished.

When most people are finished, tell them to hold onto their card for later.

Then, ask the group to help you brainstorm or list some nonprofit organizations. Explain that they need to name nonprofit organizations based upon the questions that follow. Record the answers on the flipchart paper.

Name a nonprofit organization that:

1. Works locally (research an example)
2. Works nationally
3. Works internationally
4. Has 5 or fewer paid staff
5. Has more than 1,000 paid staff (university, hospital)

6. Works on environmental issues
7. Works with children
8. Works with the arts
9. Supports the work of other nonprofits (United Way)
10. Has been around for 100 years or more (university)
11. Has been around for 10 years or less (Action Without Borders)
12. Has chapters or affiliates around the country
13. Supports a politically liberal platform
14. Supports a politically conservative platform
15. Does advocacy and policy work
16. Provides direct service

Record answers on flipchart. At the end of the activity, emphasize all the different kinds of nonprofits that people mentioned. Point out that the nonprofit sector is very diverse, thus providing very diverse career opportunities. Nonprofits need people from all the same backgrounds that are needed in the business world (accounting, IT, management, administrative, marketing, PR, etc.).

**Transition into the next part of this section by asking:
*Can anyone define the nonprofit sector?***

Give the group just a moment to think about the question. Call on a few people to respond.

Then explain that this was sort of a trick question. The *nonprofit sector* refers to the US tax code and is not a great term. Being defined by something you are “not” is not ideal.

The nonprofit sector is actually “for” quite a bit when you think about it. But nonprofit is the commonly used term in the United States.

Other terms include the *Non-governmental organization (NGO)* — often used in other countries. The terms *third sector*, *independent sector*, *social sector*, and other terms are also used.

Consider going into this information more comprehensively with more interested audiences.

Types of nonprofit organizations, in addition to 501 (c) 3:

- Majority of nonprofits, must show broad public support-donations are tax-deductible (ex. Action Without Borders).
- FYI, 501 (c) 3 is a specific type of nonprofit as defined by the IRS. Other classifications are 501[c]4 and 501[c]6.
- 501[c]4 can legally do advocacy work, and their donations not tax-deductible (example: National Rifle Association)
- 501[c]6 are professional and trade associations, and their donations not tax-deductible (example: Chamber of Commerce)

Part 3) The Size of the Nonprofit Sector

Suggested time: 15 minutes

Begin this activity by writing four figures on flipchart paper:

- **1.5 million**
- **\$670 billion**
- **6%**
- **1 in 12**

Spend about 3 minutes having participants guess what these figures mean in relation to the nonprofit sector. If figures are guessed correctly, move into explaining the figure further. If there are no correct answers given, explain the significance of all the figures:

1.5 Million is the number of nonprofit organizations in the United States
\$670 billion is the amount of revenue generated annually by nonprofits in the United States— more than the GDP of Brazil, Russia, or Australia.
6% of all corporations (organizations incorporated) in the country are nonprofits
1 in 12 Americans are employed by nonprofits

It's important to state here that these statistics are very American focused. Researching the nonprofit sector is a relatively new field, so the minimal amount of data we have tends to be for the United States. But with these numbers so large just for the United States, imagine how large the nonprofit sector is when you consider the rest of the world!

Part 4) Closing

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Begin by explaining that Robert Payton from the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University talks about the essential defining characteristics of each sector. Essentially, the different sectors could not function without this characteristic. These are:

Business = Wealth
Government = Power
Nonprofit = Values, Morality, and Love

Though some participants may react strongly to the labels, be sure to emphasize that all characteristics operate in all three sectors, but the idea is to isolate the essential defining characteristic of each section.

Ask participants to consider whether or not they agree with Payton's assessment, and encourage them to explain their answers.

Finally, recap the central ideas and fruits of conversation, leaving space for participants to voice any final questions, comments or concerns.