
How We're Working:

2021 Survey of Nonprofit CEOs



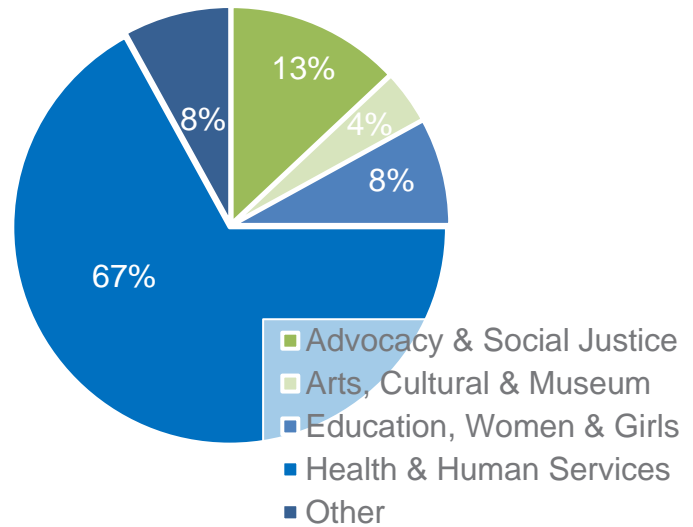
Our Nonprofit Leaders report:

- Organizations feeling 'focused' & 'determined'
- Heightened focus on diversity, fundraising, leadership development, and team efficiency
- A move toward more authentic workplace engagement: greater empathy, and candor in communication
- Greater internal collaboration; shifting the way staff members are engaged
- Stronger donor, Board & staff engagement

At the start of 2021, we decided to take the pulse of our nonprofit partners and learn how the last year has impacted the way organizations operate. Our findings represent a promising picture one year into a pandemic that has challenged our community in ways we never could have imagined.

The pandemic has forced leaders to focus. Leaders acknowledge the uncertainty of the moment, but most remain optimistic, describing their organizations as **stable**. When asked to expand on the state of their organization today, descriptors were overwhelmingly positive, with

many using words like ‘focused’ and ‘determined’. This is particularly compelling as many lead organizations dedicated to serving vulnerable populations: **60% of respondents represent nonprofits in either the health or human service spaces.**



With **stronger engagement** among donors (61%) and staff (57%) compared to before to the pandemic, leaders have a lot to be optimistic about. Board members have also been more active among more than a third (35%) of responding organizations.

Through self-reflection, executives acknowledged the need to practice how they **lead** themselves and others differently at this time. They spoke to shifting the way staff members are engaged, both as a result of virtual settings, and the complex needs of their teams. One shared, “I spend more time nurturing staff health and well-being by providing additional time off, more flexible schedules and lots of team building and staff appreciation.” Another shared how they have personally adjusted to create better boundaries, reflecting on a need to create space and better protect their own needs.

Leaders across more than half of the organizations who spoke with us note that the current environment is **fostering** cross-departmental collaboration. A shift towards greater empathy and candor in communication were also highly reported (48%), providing an example of a move toward more authentic workplace engagement.

“Servant leadership, and the humbleness that is at the heart of it, has become the center of (my) leadership style and approach”

When speaking to their **priorities** moving forward, leaders most frequently emphasized a focus on team efficiency (48%), diversity, equity and inclusion (48%), fundraising (48%) and leadership development (43%). Encouragingly, leaders did not highlight cost cutting measures, a focus heard by many in the early days of the pandemic. Despite the shift to virtual work seen throughout much of the nonprofit sector, leaders did not prioritize advanced technology. The need for succession planning was also not top of mind.

Overall, our leaders represented organizations with annual budgets of \$25m or under. In addition to those leading in the health and human services spaces, our executives represented organizations in the advocacy and social justice (13%), arts, cultural and museum (4%), and women & girls (4%) spaces.

“Leadership demands the ability to pivot even in the best of times; the pandemic has elevated adaptability to an essential leadership skill.”

We will be eager to hear from our nonprofit partners as the year progresses. How will our leaders be challenged as the world adjust to a new normal? Will priorities take a dramatic turn? How will work patterns evolve? **Get in touch with a member of our team to talk more.**

About the Author:

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About DHR Nonprofit Practice:

DHR's Nonprofit Practice provides senior level retained executive search and leadership consulting services to a distinguished group of nonprofit organizations. We believe that great leaders make great organizations that in turn help change the world. Our Partners are industry specialists, many of whom have spent their entire careers working in nonprofits and/or assisting nonprofits with executive search. In addition to search, our consultants have expertise in leadership consulting, and have worked with nonprofits around the world on succession planning, team effectiveness, executive coaching and more.

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The survey was conducted in partnership with [Joy Stephan](#) and DHR's Nonprofit Practice.