


# NONPROFIT INSTITUTE

at the  COLLEGE of SOUTHERN MARYLAND

## Semi-Annual Report to St. Mary's County Government January – June 2020

This report covers the first two quarters of 2020, a period of time like no other. The year began with our traditional offerings of training classes and workshops, networking meetings, consulting services, and our annual conference. In January, **Robin Finnacom** began her employment with the Nonprofit Institute as the Coordinator for St. Mary's County. March arrived and the Nonprofit Institute, like everyone and everything, pivoted its operations to a remote environment to meet increased needs and requests for services from nonprofits in St. Mary's County and the entire Southern Maryland region.

Details about the Institute's activities during the COVID-19 pandemic are described throughout this report. A [CSM press release](#) from May 4 further describes the Institute's work in the first six weeks of the pandemic.

One of the first things the Institute did, in partnership with the United Way of Charles County, was to bring the nonprofit community together through weekly Zoom meetings. Together, and to this day, the nonprofit community collaborates, shares information and concerns, and assists each other during this time of major upheaval. A similar virtual meeting in partnership the United Way of St. Mary's County was added so we could more specifically address local nonprofit needs.

We also saw an immediate need for a central repository of nonprofit-specific information and resources and quickly launched a [COVID-19 Resource web page](#) to meet the need. Through this, we curate and present the most up-to-date resources including grant opportunities, tools, guidance, training workshops, and more.

The Institute's Charles County Coordinator, Cara Fogarty, served on the **Maryland Governor's Nonprofit Working Group**, organized by the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives. The group was tasked with making recommendations to Governor Hogan's *Maryland Strong: Roadmap to Recovery*. Nonprofit organizations throughout the state served on this working group. The Nonprofit Institute represented the voice and interest of Southern Maryland.

The Nonprofit Institute is also represented on the **SMC Business/Nonprofit Resource Team** and on the Charles County COVID-19 Recovery Task Force. Participating directly in the recovery efforts of both counties has proven to be very helpful for the nonprofit community.

### Strategy One: Ensure Value of Training Provided by the Nonprofit Institute

Our winter courses included Leading Organizational Change, Overview of Grant Writing, and Creating a Digital Strategy. All were well attended by nonprofit representatives from Charles, St. Mary's, and Calvert counties. Our two spring courses were cancelled due to the pandemic and closure of CSM's physical campuses. Fall classes, including Managing in Today's World and Vision in Fundraising, are scheduled and will be held online via Zoom.

The annual conference is a day-long training opportunity and is discussed in detail under Strategy Three.

We also facilitated an information session in January with the Catalogue for Philanthropy. Nonprofits from Charles County with annual operating budgets between \$100,000 - \$4 million are eligible to apply for inclusion in the Catalogue – the Washington, D.C. region's only locally focused guide to giving. Being a part of the Catalogue creates visibility for nonprofits and opens opportunities for philanthropic dollars not otherwise available.

Feedback from our courses and the workshop overall was generally positive.

The 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Grants Training Workshop is scheduled for Sept. 25. Course planning is underway for winter and spring 2021. All courses and conference sessions are offered based largely on feedback from previous attendees and from those engaging with Nonprofit Institute activities and consultations. The Nonprofit Institute's meetings, workshops, and classes will remain online for the foreseeable future.

## **Strategy Two: Measure the Effectiveness of the Nonprofit Institute's Marketing Efforts**

Website traffic is typically steady from quarter to quarter with a traditional bump in the weeks leading up to our conference. In 2020, however, website traffic soared. Page views jumped to 11,799 from January – June of 2020 compared to 7,158-page views in the same period of 2019. This is largely due to the increased traffic during the pandemic, but the numbers were also higher in January and February of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. We can attribute this increase to heightened interest in our annual conference and classes.

Prior to the pandemic, our monthly e-newsletter continued its steady expansion, reaching nearly 2,000 subscribers every month. Beginning March 18, we transitioned to a weekly email to provide more frequent and updated nonprofit-specific information and resources such as relief grants, networking calls, free webinars, PPE suppliers, guidance, etc. Continuing through the end of July, the Nonprofit Institute published 20 weekly emails and added dozens of subscribers. In August, we are transitioning back to our monthly newsletter.

Our social media presence experiences ongoing expansion with new likes, shares, retweets, impressions, and engagement, even more so since the beginning of the pandemic.

Content on the Nonprofit Institute's web pages and social media accounts is updated and refreshed on a regular basis. Social media includes Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Social media platforms are used to promote the e-newsletter, classes, and events, to share nonprofits' Facebook postings and Tweets, and to share grant opportunities, free webinars, and articles of interest. These can be found at:

- [www.facebook.com/NonprofitInstituteCSM/](http://www.facebook.com/NonprofitInstituteCSM/)
- [www.facebook.com/VolunteerSouthernMaryland/](http://www.facebook.com/VolunteerSouthernMaryland/)
- Twitter: @NonprofitInsCSM
- [www.linkedin.com/company/nonprofit-institute-at-csm/](http://www.linkedin.com/company/nonprofit-institute-at-csm/)

## **Strategy Three: Measure the Effectiveness of the Annual Conference**

The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Nonprofit Institute Conference was held on Feb. 20, 2020. The conference featured a return of a few popular presenters, some new voices, smart thinkers, representatives of the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers, Maryland Nonprofits, and many more. Breakout sessions focused on leadership, strategic planning, management, fundraising, and communications.

We organized a "Meet the Media" panel discussion as one of the breakout sessions at the conference. This event was originally held in Charles County in 2017 with more than 75 people in attendance. We also hosted the panel discussion in St. Mary's County with approximately 55 people participating. The inclusion of the panel discussion in this year's conference was by request of several nonprofit representatives.

Overall, the conference was well received. Speakers, break out session topics, and even the food ranked highly on evaluations submitted by attendees. Attendance held steady from 2019, with approximately 150 registrants. Several of the breakout sessions will transition into longer training classes allowing for a deeper dive into the topics.

## **Strategy Four: Review and Enhance the Effectiveness of Current Activities**

We regularly hold meetings for nonprofits on a range of interest areas. With the switch to remote operations, we began hosting our meetings via Zoom. Participation in these meetings is at the highest level in the history of the Institute. We anticipate hosting these meetings via Zoom for the foreseeable future and with a Zoom option when we return to in-person gatherings.

### **Volunteer Coordinators**

The volunteer coordinators group has met biweekly on Zoom since April. Social distancing requirements and community-wide fear surrounding COVID-19 make attracting and retaining volunteers every more difficult. Pre pandemic, this group met quarterly but we will continue biweekly meetings for as long as it is helpful to the coordinators.

### **Fundraising Professionals Network Meeting**

This quarterly networking meeting pivoted to a biweekly meeting for a few months and now meets monthly via Zoom. Numerous federal, state, and local COVID relief grants and loans became available with the declared state of emergency. Understanding the regulations governing each funding source, navigating different grant portals, assembling necessary documents, and meeting incredibly short deadlines became an immense challenge for nonprofits as well as businesses.

Michelle Sullivan is NPI's expert on identifying and preparing funding applications. During the biweekly Fundraising Professionals Network meetings, she helped nonprofits tackle complicated loan applications, such as that for the federal Paycheck Protection Program, shared news on COVID related funding opportunities from corporations such as Hanes, kept everyone apprised of deadlines and any changes to grant eligibility requirements as happened more than once and even reviewed applications prior to submission. During this time of crisis, nonprofits have benefited greatly from such personal and hands on support from NPI.

### **PR/Marketing/Communications Network**

This group met monthly until the pandemic hit when we increased frequency – by participant request – and has been meeting weekly via Zoom since April. Marketing during the time of COVID presents unique challenges. Ensuring that the public is kept aware of a nonprofit's changed hours and services, pitching flash fundraising appeals to donors and sponsors, crafting succinct but coherent messages for staff and board leadership to use when speaking about the organization with the public or the press are just some of the COVID-related tasks that marketing professionals have undertaken during the state of emergency. Cara Fogarty, who has a deep background in maximizing social media platforms, keeps this group moving forward as they share best practices and consider new approaches to keeping the needs and services of their nonprofit in the forefront of the broader community's awareness.

### **Executive Director Roundtables**

These meetings are on hold due to the need to hold the larger nonprofit community calls.

### **Volunteer Southern Maryland**

Participation ebbed and flowed on this web-based portal. We dismantled this service due to lack of interest and high fees. Admittedly, the platform was not the most user-friendly and Institute staff does not have the bandwidth to properly maintain this service. With arrival of the pandemic, we revived the accompanying Facebook page and turned over ownership to the United Way of Charles County. We assist the UW with maintaining this asset.

### **Supporting/Assisting Nonprofits**

As noted previously, the Institute began hosting weekly calls with the United Way of Charles County in mid-March. The first few calls had more than 100 people, representing nonprofits throughout Southern Maryland. These calls continue weekly, as do the biweekly calls with the United Way of St. Mary's County, with anywhere from 20-45 people participating.

Feedback has been tremendous with nonprofits saying these calls have helped them stay engaged while operating remotely. The Institute has seen record-high participation levels in all of its calls and meetings since mid-March.

The Nonprofit Institute's team also provided one-on-one support and assistance to dozens of individuals who either represent nonprofit organizations or are individuals seeking assistance with starting a nonprofit. Requests for assistance on a range of interests are also the highest they have ever been in the history of the Institute.

## Strategy Five: New Initiatives

### Southern Maryland Nonprofit Directory

The Nonprofit Institute is developing an online, searchable database of the 2,600+ nonprofits serving those who live, work, and play in Southern Maryland. The Southern Maryland Nonprofit Directory will be searchable by one or more counties as well as by the type of work the nonprofit performs. It will also include basic information about each nonprofit as well as details such as contacts, website links, and more. We anticipate launching the directory in advance of Giving Tuesday on December 1, 2020.

### New Staff

Robin Finnacom joined the staff of the Nonprofit Institute in January as the St. Mary's County coordinator. She brings 40 years of experience in the fields of community and economic development to NPI. Robin is managing the development of the Southern Maryland Nonprofit Directory. Once fully trained, Robin will oversee NPI's training classes. She hosts a COVID-related zoom meeting in conjunction with the United Way of St. Mary's County, staffs the regional Volunteer Coordinators meetings for NPI and assist nonprofits throughout St. Mary's County when called upon to do so.

### Partnerships/Collaborations

The Nonprofit Institute worked with Maryland Nonprofits to bring two training seminars to Southern Maryland earlier this year. We also worked with the Small Business Development Center to co-develop a workshop on Business Plans for Small Businesses and Nonprofits. However, this training was postponed due to the pandemic. We look forward to rescheduling the SBDC-NPI training workshop and attracting more Maryland Nonprofit training opportunities to the region in the future.

The **Governor's Nonprofit Working Group**, organized by the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives, continues informal conversation and resource sharing. Again, the Nonprofit Institute's participation in this group represents the voice and interest of nonprofits in Southern Maryland.

The **Charles County COVID-19 Recovery Task Force** continues meeting weekly and its activities will be included in the next quarterly report.

**St. Mary's County Economic Development, SBDC** and the coordinator for St. Mary's County began weekly COVID-related conference calls that are now hosted biweekly. SMC received a multimillion CARES Act grant for COVID emergency preparedness and response. Two million dollars of that fund was dedicated to COVID relief grants for local businesses and nonprofits. The county's Department of Economic Development administers the fund. Both SBDC and NPI provided input to the development of the grant application and assisted in the marketing of this funding opportunity. To date, 24 SMC nonprofits have each been awarded \$5,000 grants.

We've worked with **Leadership Southern Maryland** for several years to develop and review LSM's proposals for nonprofit-related projects each class may pursue. The outgrowth of a somewhat recent LSM class project brought about the newly established **Feed St. Mary's** nonprofit organization. In preparation for LSM's upcoming class, we were asked to solicit suggestions for short term assignments each class member could tackle for a local nonprofit. Nine assignments were suggested and will be pitched to the class when it convenes in September.

Securing sufficient supplies of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) at reasonable prices became a pressing concern for the region's nonprofits. Nonprofits will need PPE's for the balance of the year and, most likely, beyond. Both the **Charles County** and **St. Mary's County Chambers of Commerce** were approached by Institute staff to explore the possibility of establishing a collective PPE purchasing program for businesses and nonprofits. This initiative gained traction in Charles County and now includes the Health Department, the Chamber, the Department of Economic Development and Economic Development Advisory Committee, and the COVID-19 Recovery Task Force. Together they are exploring how a collective PPE purchasing program could be organized and if one entity could staff the project for nonprofits and businesses throughout the region.