

Latest Nonprofit Workforce Survey Results

09.27.23 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



By the summer of 2021, if you'll recall, the COVID-19 vaccines were widely available and we were more than ready for a return to normal.

But as the hot months turned into a cooler autumn, there was a new and surprising crisis on top of the fallout from almost two years of unprecedented chaos and disruption from the pandemic.

It was expected that, once the lock downs were lifted, workers would “flock back” to their old jobs. That it did *not* happen was a shock all around, so much so that an organizational psychologist from Texas A&M University coined an entirely new phrase for it: “The Great Resignation.”

Other experts offered analyses: “The pandemic, social and political events, and the relentlessness of navigating both personal and professional priorities created a perfect storm. Professionals in every sector feel burned out, disenfranchised, and are seeking a new normal which goes beyond remote work.”

Our coverage of this deeply troubling but intriguing development includes:

- [The “Great Resignation” Problem in the Nonprofit Sector](#) (December 7, 2021)
- [The “Great Resignation”: Exactly How Bad Is It for Nonprofits?](#) (December 9, 2021)
- [The “Great Resignation”: Update](#) (June 6, 2022)
- [Is There \(Still\) A Nonprofit Labor Crunch?](#) (March 30, 2023).

Data Collection and Analysis

The National Council of Nonprofits (NCN) has taken the lead during this difficult period in collecting hard data to determine the scope and breadth of this issue in the nonprofit sector and in helping to lead the conversation about solutions.

First, in October 2021, the networks of the National Council of Nonprofits (NCN) “circulated an online [Survey on Nonprofit Workforce Shortage](#). The purpose: “to gauge the scope of the workforce shortage problems for charitable organizations and determine the impact on their abilities to advance their missions.”

The response was rapid and impressive. “More than [900 nonprofits](#) in 49 states completed and returned the survey. The results confirmed that a major worker shortage was taking a particularly devastating toll on the nonprofit sector, and that urgent attention would be needed – including from government – to address it. At that time, NCN’s Rick Cohen observed that “... for the nonprofit sector and the population it serves, the high vacancy rate is “[a potential tragedy at hand](#)” because “... people in the community needing services can’t get access to them.” See: [The Scope and Impact of Nonprofit Job Vacancies](#) (November 15, 2021) and [The Scope and Impact of Nonprofit Workforce Shortages](#), (December 13, 2021).

Second Survey Launched

Then, again, this past spring, the National Council of Nonprofits “conducted a nationwide survey to secure the [latest, comprehensive information](#) about the nonprofit workforce.” We alerted you to this development in our [March 30, 2023, post](#).

By way of introduction to the spring 2023 survey, [NCN recapped](#): “A 2021 survey of the charitable nonprofit sector documented a severe workforce shortage crisis leading to unfilled vacancies, long waiting lists of people seeking services from understaffed nonprofits, chronic burnout, and other struggles to meet needs in local communitiesThe survey results led to action to implement solutions at the community, state, and federal levels.”

But, “[n]ow 18 months later, the [state of nonprofit employment is unclear](#). One view is that the nonprofit workforce has fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels. Other reports – from all over the country – suggest problems persist as charitable organizations compete for employees with governments and for-profit entities while trying to cope with increased demands for services, natural disasters, inflation, declining revenues, and more. The lack of accurate data makes it hard to manage the situation, much less overcome the growing challenges.”

The challenge: “Help tell the charitable nonprofit story today. The results of the survey will drive solutions for this year and beyond.”

2023 NCN Survey Results

The report from the spring 2023 survey was published recently. On the NCN website, there is a summary of the latest findings, with highlights and a link to the full 43-page PDF Report. See: [2023 Nonprofit Workforce Survey Results: Communities Suffer as Nonprofit Workforce Shortage Crisis Continues](#) (August 2023).

“The following report [analyzes the more than 1,600 responses](#) collected from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. It also references data from reports by state associations of nonprofits and others to present the most current information on the challenges nonprofits face. Finally, the report presents practical solutions, many shared with us by the nonprofit respondents themselves, and

discusses recommended public policy solutions.”

Before summarizing the key findings, the NCN’s August 2023 Report answers why these findings matter: “When nonprofits cannot hire enough employees to provide vital services, the public suffers. Data from this survey and others show that along with increased demands for services, there are longer waiting lists, reduced services, and sometimes elimination of services. When any of those happen, the ripple effects cannot be ignored: communities lose access to food, shelter, mental health care, and other vital services on which people depend.”

Key Findings

The researchers identify several key findings derived from the nationwide response results:

- Nearly 75% of respondents “reported job vacancies”
- More than 50% of respondents reported “they have more vacancies now compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, and nearly three out of ten (28.1%) have longer waiting lists for services.”
- The most vacancies are those “that interact with the public the most”; namely, 74% reported “program and service delivery position” vacancies; and more than 40% reported “vacant entry-level positions.”
- About 72% of respondents listed “salary competition” as the main issue affecting ability to “recruit and retain employees,” followed by “budget constraints/insufficient funds (66.3%).” Additional causes: “stress and burnout (50.2%) and challenges caused by government grants and contracts (20.6%).”
- About 70.5% “anticipate charitable giving to decrease or or remain flat in 2023, while 68.7% of nonprofits anticipate the number of donors to decrease or remain unchanged.

Conclusion

This August 2023 Report also includes separate results for the 23 individual states where there were at least 25 respondents to the survey. For example, the separate California survey results can be found at: [Nonprofit Workforce Shortage Survey \(California\) \(August 2023\)](#).

— Linda J. Rosenthal, J.D., FPLG Information & Research Director