

Nonprofits, The Election, and Burnout on Steroids

11.11.24 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



“What we know is this: much of our work just became simultaneously more difficult and more important than ever.”

Those were the first public comments by Geoff Green, the CEO of the California Association of Nonprofits (CalNonprofits) on the uncertainties and challenges in the aftermath of Election Day 2024. See *A Time to Gather and Strengthen Our Community* (November 7, 2024, 11:34 am).

“Still absorbing the results as they continue to come in,” Mr. Green noted that “[e]very shift in the emerging electoral map, every ballot proposition, and every bond measure reinforces how indispensable nonprofits are to realizing policy decisions that improve people’s lives.”

Two Upcoming Events

There are two opportunities in the days ahead to hear experts discuss the seismic changes looming ahead as it relates to the nonprofit sector. Both events were previously scheduled but will, of course, be revamped. The NCN webinar tomorrow is free of charge. The CalNonprofits policy conference next week will include some reduced-fee options.

- **November 12, 2024:** The National Council of Nonprofits is inviting nonprofits from across the United States to “discuss the impact of the federal elections on nonprofits, their missions, and our communities.” The free national webinar at 4 pm EST is titled “Impact of the Elections on Charitable Nonprofits.” It will focus on what Congress may do both in the lame-duck session as well as in the upcoming 119th Congress. Registration link is [here](#).
- **November 20, 2024:** The California Association of Nonprofits is holding its “CalNonprofits Policy Conference 2024: Strong Nonprofits, Stronger California” in Los Angeles. It will be “a time to connect, strengthen community, think strategically, and look ahead.” For

members, the registration link is [here](#). For “under-resourced nonprofit leaders with limited budgets,” there is a Pay-What-You-Can ticketing option.

Otherwise, there has been scant public reaction or commentary so far on how the election results will affect the nonprofit sector. That’s not altogether surprising considering how Election Day unfolded and the strong opinions and emotions it has stirred up.

Burnout Will Spiral Off the Charts

Although our three-part series on nonprofit burnout was fairly recent – the latest post was on November 3rd – it’s important to revisit a few points, considering the circumstances on the ground and the opportunity for burnout have so dramatically increased.

The three posts are:

- [*Burnout is Still the Story for Nonprofits in 2024*](#) (September 16, 2024)
- [*Another Long Hot Summer of Burnout*](#) (September 27, 2024)
- [*Nonprofit Burnout Crisis: Innovative Remedies Needed*](#) (November 3, 2024)

The premise of the series is that burnout in the nonprofit sector has been a serious problem for many years. For a variety of reasons – including lower pay – it’s generally been worse than in the for-profit sector or government.

The pandemic struck in March 2020 with a massive worldwide fury. But the charitable sector bore a heavier burden than others as it does whenever people and communities are in distress. The demand for emergency services and relief skyrocketed; the overburdened charities, as always, stepped up to meet the need. But it came at a cost much greater than the dollar price tag.

By the spring of 2023, the acute phases of the COVID-19 catastrophe were waning, replaced by a sense of some normalcy. But nonprofit leaders and mental health experts noticed something different: the lingering effects of stress and burnout, long-term and chronic.

At that time, Tim Delaney, (then) CEO of the National Council of Nonprofits said: “The nonprofit sector has been roasted on the outside ...” like a [“hard pretzel rod on the verge of snapping in half.”](#)

Similarly, Dr. Jamie King, psychology research fellow at the University of Queensland, compared the problem of nonprofit workers (including top executives) under prolonged stress with the situation of a deep-sea diver who has been brought to the surface without the benefit of the rigid protocols for decompression. Her particular worry was how *many* of the leaders had reported being under continuous stress for months on end. (As we all know, it’s *much* longer than that in most cases.) So her prescription for the burnout epidemic is to devise innovative remedies to help the entire sector decompress ... and heal.

Then came November 5th.

It has produced – for many in American society – an earthquake level of shock and concern. For the nonprofit sector, if the [candidate’s platform](#) is carried out, there will be upheaval equaling or exceeding the pandemic level of disruption. For many charitable organizations, there could be elimination of funding or at least dramatic drops in it. There will also likely be onerous new laws and

government policies that make achieving the charitable missions and goals difficult or impossible.

There is no respite or grace period for adjustment to this new reality; no decompression safety valve. Those affected can't wait until January 20, 2025, to make plans.

It's safe to say that the burnout level will jump to catastrophic levels.

Conclusion

In the promotional material for the November 20th special conference hosted by the California Association of Nonprofits, they describe the necessary focus and “central strategy” for the days, weeks, and months ahead: It is “advocacy and policy work.”

That's because nonprofit organizations “are leaders in protecting and providing for our most vulnerable neighbors, caring for our environment, mobilizing communities, and envisioning a better future for all.”

Advocacy work will no doubt be critical, but it will be time-consuming and nerve-wracking. The expected additional stress and strain in the nonprofit sector – already setting in – will require extraordinary and special measures.

– *Linda J. Rosenthal, J.D., FPLG Information & Research Director*