

Nonprofit Resource Development Council Howard County, Maryland

This document outlines the Operational Framework for the Nonprofit Resource Development Council's (NRDC) operations, including initiatives it might design and implement. It includes identification of the Council's goals, a specific set of strategies to achieve those goals, the roles of the Council, and recommended initial steps. The Council is the product of a strategic partnership between the Horizon Foundation and the Association of Community Services, and is also strongly supported by Howard County government. It is embodied in the strategic plans of the Foundation and Association and includes in its membership all of the local nonprofit funders.

The Goal

Strengthen Howard County nonprofits' ability to deliver critical services, by building resilience, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, and supporting increased collaboration.

Leadership Roles

NRDC members are a critical resource and their contributions to Council's initiatives will likely evolve over the lifespan of the NRDC. Overall, the Council's role is to encourage, advise and support the work, and make recommendations on general directions and strategies for implementation. Specific responsibilities of Council members follow.

NRDC Members' Role and Responsibilities

1. Represent the initiative to the community and make connections, including for funding and knowledge resources, and to nonprofits in need
2. Provide resources for and/or support specific components of Council initiatives, in accordance with the members' interests and capabilities
3. Participate in Council meetings and other periodic meetings or conference calls needed to support the initiatives
4. Commit to a periodic (at least annual) review of the overall NRDC plan, to assure that support matches the current environment of need
5. Probe opportunities and work collaboratively to agree on recommendations, especially when many interests will be competing for scarce resources
6. Participate personally in meetings, unless absolutely necessary to send a substitute representative. If that is the case, the member will brief his/her representative prior to the meeting so the representative can actively contribute to the discussion.

Leadership Team Role and Responsibilities

The Leadership Team includes Rich Krieg and Anne Towne, assisted by consultants, as needed. Its role encompasses the appropriate responsibilities of Council members, plus these:

1. Make decisions on direction, based on NRDC input and other factors
2. Work collaboratively with all local funders who are NRDC members
3. Facilitate, support and monitor the process, keeping initiatives on track and activity in sync with the overall Council plan
4. Determine, within the Leadership Team membership, who has specific responsibility for what, to support timelines and efficiency, and make those responsibilities known to Council members
5. Oversee the individuals/consultants who will engage local nonprofits

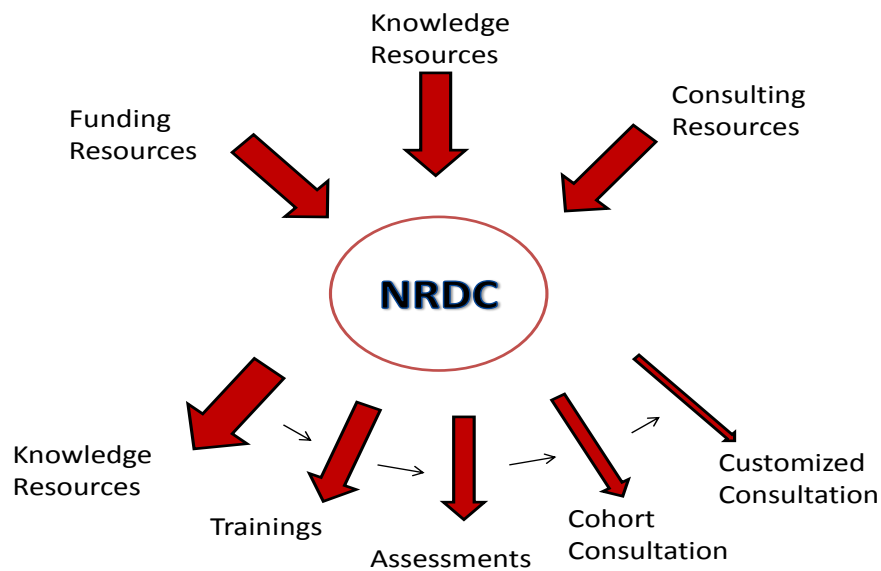
Scope

The Nonprofit Resource Development Council is initially launched for a three-year term, to December 31, 2012. After the first year, the NRDC will review its impact before deciding to continue into the following years. Continuation into the following years may be approved if the program has met measurable criteria (e.g. to-be-defined measures of organizational sustainability and stability that indicate a “home” for initiatives is effective and still needed).

The audience includes all nonprofit organizations located in and/or serving Howard County residents. There may be a specific emphasis on particular nonprofit sectors, neighborhood locations or sizes of nonprofits, based on the NRDC’s determination of specific needs. The audience will include nonprofit board members, management and key staff.

Design

This is a living plan, intended to be used and revised as needed based on community need, NRDC recommendations, and results of implementing each component. Accordingly, the design should be reviewed quarterly during the first year, to determine what improvements are needed.



This visual is a working model and illustrates the design concept. Each component is briefly described below.

Resources

There are at least three types of resources that will be pooled for the benefit of Howard County nonprofits through the NRDC.

1. **Knowledge resources:** Council members will provide or identify others who can provide important resources such as expertise in a needed subject, training capabilities, information on successful practices or models, or other resources.
2. **Consulting resources:** A central piece of Council activities will be to develop the skills of local consultants to lead most of the work going forward. To accomplish that, the Leadership Team will support the development of these elements:
 - a. Develop a consultant data base, soliciting the names of local and other consultants and their area of expertise, and offer that information as a service to area nonprofits; and
 - b. Facilitate and encourage training of interested local consultants by national consultants and others expert in targeted areas (such as the use of revenue matrix and collaboration). The intent is that in the near future, consulting support can be offered locally in a cost-effective, sustainable manner.
3. **Funding resources:** Some funds will be provided by NRDC members or funders. Other funding will be solicited by the Council, on behalf of the initiative.

Deliverables/Services

1. **Knowledge Resources:** These are the most broadly and readily accessible resources, and will be available to all in the community. Sharing this knowledge will also build awareness and interest in the initiative. Possible elements include
 - a. A website, with a description of the NRDC and its initiatives, a community calendar of events, a calendar of upcoming trainings, information on successful models and tools, and other information;
 - b. Public information aimed at the broad community, to build awareness and understanding of the nonprofit community and its needs in Howard County;
 - c. Surveys, reports and plans that offer guidance or an assessment of current needs of Howard County nonprofits, available on the website;
 - d. A library of books and other printed resources; and
 - e. Community information and recent studies of the local nonprofit sector.

2. **Trainings:** The Leadership Team would lead the Council through a selection of 2-3 themes for training sessions for nonprofits. These could be sessions that are open to all nonprofits or to groups that share common characteristics such as:
 - being in current financial crisis,
 - needing to strengthen board and management leadership skills,
 - knowing that a major anticipated cut in governmental funding is coming,
 - needing to restructure to stay alive (through mergers, consolidation, etc),
 - losing their office space and looking for others who are interested in sharing, and
 - needing to have some sort of accurate program evaluation in order to attract funding support.

The trainings can take the form of

- a. Convenings that allow the Council and consultants to meet some of the pressing needs of Howard County nonprofits early in the operation of the Council;
 - b. Customized workshops on topics the Council has identified as those of greatest interest and need;
 - c. Webinars on topics of current interest; and
 - d. Currently offered workshops, which the Council publicizes or otherwise makes available to nonprofits.
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3. **Assessments:** Members of the Leadership Team will develop and offer an assessment for nonprofits that indicates their health and stability as measured against components of organizational capacity. A self-assessment, particularly one paired with a phone consultation with a consultant (the “discovery discussion” concept discussed in two of the sample initiatives the Council heard about in November), provides helpful guidance to nonprofits as to their

greatest strengths and weaknesses, and to the type of consulting/TA assistance they need most. The self-assessment tool needs to be developed; it could be based on proven assessment tools and customized for Howard County. The local consultants would also need to be trained (perhaps through a webinar) in effective methods to conduct these discussions.

The assessments are not meant for the Council or consultants to judge or measure which nonprofits are “good” or “efficient”, as that sort of assessment is neither appropriate nor achievable without a tremendous use of resources. However, a well designed self-assessment tool that allows selected organizations to consider their performance against proven factors of organizational capacity, followed by a debriefing, analysis and planning session with an experienced consultant, can provide solid guidance as to the future direction and strategies the nonprofit should consider.

As part of the implementation planning, goals for the number of assessments and any target audience will be determined. Nonprofits may voluntarily use the assessment tool, made available on the website. Council members could also encourage nonprofits to use the assessment tool; completing it would be part of the requirement to approaching the Council for assistance. The assessment would include actions taken and planned for the specific areas of concern, so that the Council is not in the position of determining a nonprofit’s areas of weakness and recommending specific action steps.

4. ***Cohort Consultation/TA:*** The following topical ideas were offered during the first Council meeting and in the follow-up telephone interviews. The ideas included:
 - a. Shared office facilities
 - b. Joint marketing
 - c. Group purchasing
 - d. Collaboration
 - e. Board development/recruitment

This preliminary list highlights those approaches that appear to have the greatest merit and interest among nonprofits and their stakeholders. The goal is that the Council supports a number of “mini-initiatives” in very real and practical ways. The Leadership Team will explore models and the status of projects and recommend a plan the Council can pursue (e.g. meet with the County Executive’s recommended group purchasing person; explore if the Arts Council’s technical assistance program – the consultants bank - can be expanded or used as a model for expanding; etc.). They will pull their research into a framework for consideration by the Council. The Council will then select initiatives it would like to advance during the three-year operational framework.

5. ***Customized Individual Consultation/TA:*** This support could be offered to individual nonprofits or collaboratives. Since this is the more costly way of providing services, the Council will need clear criteria and a simple cost/benefit mechanism to determine if the situation will benefit from support, how many resources can be offered, and what the expected benefit to the community will be. Nonprofits may be required to complete some steps in #3 Assessment and #4 Cohort

Consultation if appropriate prior to requesting assistance here. Customized consultation can take the form of:

- a. Immediate or emergency needs, such as the STARR Center;
- b. Consultation with two or more organizations exploring merger possibilities; or
- c. Other substantial interventions.

Implementation

Each element will need an implementation plan tailored to each situation.

Criteria for Prioritizing Strategies

1. **NRDC recommendations:** During the interviews, members suggested some possible criteria for consideration by the whole group. The Council will determine how needs should be prioritized; the criteria might also evolve over time. Council recommendations will likely take into account their knowledge of the range of community needs, how critical a need is, the environmental implications of possible strategies, and other factors. They will also consider what is known about an organization's readiness to effectively utilize assistance, and the likelihood that the results of the support offered can be sustained.
2. **Research of existing options:** The Leadership Team will scan available options to deliver on the Council's recommendations, including using skilled local consultants, using consultants to train and support local consultants for future delivery, recommending mentoring or existing training programs, or other options. Strategies and options the organization itself suggests, developed through their consultant-assisted self-assessment, will be a primary consideration here.
3. **Cost-benefit considerations:** The leadership team will conduct a "reality check" of a cost-benefit analysis to determine if the Council's recommendations can be implemented with an appropriate level of available resources, and if the expected benefit to Howard County will justify that use of resources. The organization's readiness, interest in the recommended strategy and perceived ability to sustain their work will again be considered here.

Criteria

Approved initiatives under consideration should meet all of the following criteria (except for those that are not applicable to the initiative under consideration, such as #8 and #9).

1. The initiative is fully consistent with the NRDC goal and will further the Council's ability to achieve the goal.
2. The NRDC offers unique resources toward creating or strengthening this initiative; it is not already available elsewhere in Howard County.
3. The resources needed to successfully achieve this initiative, the risks and challenges involved, and the potential positive impact (including the depth of the change and the number of

nonprofits assisted) have been carefully considered. The benefits clearly outweigh the resources that will be needed.

4. The numbers and scale of initiatives to be implemented at one time are within the capacity of the NRDC to deliver at a high quality level.
5. One or more NRDC members commit to participate in developing this initiative.
6. The initiative will clearly increase the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the sector's ability to deliver critical services and positively impact Howard County residents, in ways that can be clearly articulated. This criteria focuses on the sector's capacity, not the survival of individual organizations.
7. The initiative will leverage other resources (that would otherwise not be leveraged) in support of the goal.
8. The initiative serves as a template for future work, by creating or furthering an innovative practice, or by incubating organizations/practices for continuing development.
9. The initiative has the potential for systems change leading to a long-term positive impact.

The Starting Point – Greatest Challenges and Strategies to Address Them

The Report on Interviews highlighted four key challenges, as well as several other challenges. To keep a tight focus on a manageable number of challenges, this section of our plan addresses high potential initiatives in response to each of these four challenges. The Leadership Team asks that the Council consider these four strategies as the most appropriate starting point, and advise on any implementation issues, delivery options, and timing of delivery.

1. **Fiscal Health:** Nonprofits are facing serious funding problems, while struggling with growing needs.
Strategy: Train and support nonprofits' use of the Revenue Matrix, designed by Tom Triplett. This service begins with training nonprofits and local consultants in the use and application of the tool.
2. **Too many nonprofits:** Council members perceive that Howard County may have more nonprofits than the community can support, and that there is at least overlap, if not duplication, in mission and responsibilities.
Strategy: Train nonprofits in identifying and building collaborative opportunities, presented by Sandy Jacobsen. This service begins with training nonprofits and local consultants in collaboration principles, preparing the way for expanding successful models such as the Arts Council's experience in shared space and equipment. Given that "too many nonprofits" is likely not the perception in the nonprofit community itself, the initiative would need to be designed to include a hard look at who is doing what, whether everyone can be sustained, and what business models exist to enhance performance through collaboration/consolidation.

3. **Competition for board members:** There is a reported shortage of qualified board members; as a result, the small pool of board members is stretched thin and smaller nonprofits lose out in the competition. Nonprofits need assistance in ways to effectively recruit board members.
Strategy: Invest in the expansion and marketing of the Board Development Institute, Board Bank, and Gavel Group (partners include ACS, the Columbia Foundation, The Volunteer Center Serving Howard County, and Leadership Howard County).

4. **Governance and leadership:** There are continuous opportunities to develop both board and executive management capabilities to meet today’s challenges (i.e., a lack of succession planning, challenges related to ‘founder’s syndrome’, and over-extended services).
Strategy: Identify governance options and strategies designed to maximize nonprofit effectiveness. Consider nontraditional options such as quasi-nonprofit structures.

Benchmarks and Evaluation

Measurable objectives and benchmarks will be developed for each element of the plan that the Council determines should be implemented.

An evaluation plan for the first year will be developed no later than third quarter 2010.

Proposed Next Steps

Task	Responsible	When
Revise/edit operating framework as needed	NRDC response to LT; LT revise	April 2010 and ongoing
Determine if the four recommended strategies (“The Starting Point”) or other initiatives are to be implemented; advise on any implementation issues and a timetable	NRDC and LT	June 2010
Develop a three-year workplan, with timelines, responsibility and budget. Establish an evaluation model for each year. Provide greater detail for first year, and outline plans for 2 nd and 3 rd years.	Leadership Team; review by NRDC	June 2010
Develop an implementation plan for selected initiatives for early delivery. Determine NRDC members with additional involvement. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Target initial delivery of (strategy 1) for (date?) b. Target delivery of (strategy 2) for (date?) 	LT; review by NRDC.	June 2010
Begin delivering these selected strategies	TBD	July 2010