

The Nonprofit Academy in San Diego

By Lyn Corbett, Laura Deitrick, and Michele Marano

BUILDING STRONG NONPROFITS TO DRIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Nonprofits have long been important partners to government, providing direct services, serving as liaisons between government agencies and local communities, and informing policy development. It is generally understood that ensuring the vitality of the nonprofit sector is an important factor in achieving community development goals. One way government agencies can support a healthy nonprofit sector is through direct investments aimed at building nonprofits' capacity to deliver goods and services on behalf of government. While much has been written about how private foundations fund capacity building efforts in nonprofit organizations, little is known about the strategies local governments use to strengthen the capacity of their nonprofit partners. To address this knowledge gap, this article presents a case study of a successful government-funded, capacity-building initiative undertaken by the City of San Diego, called The Nonprofit Academy, which won IEDC's Gold Award for Partnerships with Educational Institutions.

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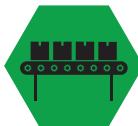
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the nonprofit academy

IN SAN DIEGO

By Lyn Corbett, Laura Deitrick, and Michele Marano

BACKGROUND

Nonprofits have long been recognized for being indispensable in promoting community development, advocating for human rights, and improving citizens' well-being in the United States.¹ In an age of devolving government, leaders in the public sector are gaining an increased appreciation for the role nonprofits can play in helping government meet the needs of constituents. Likewise, government support is an integral part of the nonprofit business model with public sector funding accounting for nearly one-third of nonprofit revenue.² Government money flows to nonprofits in the forms of grants and contracts at the federal, state, and local level. To meet community economic development objectives and to ensure proper stewardship of public funds, government agencies have a vested interest in ensuring the viability of their nonprofit sector partners.

The City of San Diego recognizes that the nonprofit sector is not a dependent partner, but rather that the two sectors have an interdependent relationship that must function as a whole to meet the changing needs of the San Diego community. There is some evidence to suggest that city governments have used capacity building as a tool to develop stronger nonprofit partners and recruit new partners.³ Unfortunately, there is a dearth of guidance for public-sector managers on how city governments can strengthen the capacity of local

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nonprofits. This article presents a case study of one approach.

Challenges and Opportunities

The 2017-2019 City of San Diego Economic Development Strategy guides the City's economic development efforts and places a focus on key partnerships that included nonprofit organizations, trade associations, business incubators and accelerators, chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, and academia.⁴ The plan articulated the vital role these organizations play in furthering the City's economic and workforce development objectives. Given this, the City aspired to partner with a more diverse pool of nonprofits with the understanding that such diversity included perspectives that could bring new, relevant, and innovative perspectives to the program and policy discussion. Despite this expressed desire to broaden the reach of public dollars and services, it was observed that the same organizations were funded year after year, constraining the potential for increased community impact. Furthermore, it was observed that some nonprofits, with promising programs, were neither applying for funding nor eligible for funding based on contracting requirements.

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Nonprofits have long been important partners to government, providing direct services, serving as liaisons between government agencies and local communities, and informing policy development. It is generally understood that ensuring the vitality of the nonprofit sector is an important factor in achieving community development goals. One way government agencies can support a healthy nonprofit sector is through direct investments aimed at building nonprofits' capacity to deliver goods and services on behalf of government. While much has been written about how private foundations fund capacity building efforts in nonprofit organizations, little is known about the strategies local governments use to strengthen the capacity of their nonprofit partners. To address this knowledge gap, this article presents a case study of a successful government-funded, capacity-building initiative undertaken by the City of San Diego, called The Nonprofit Academy, which won IEDC's Gold Award for Partnerships with Educational Institutions.

Acting as a catalyst for creating public value, the City of San Diego sought to understand the reasons that prevented potential partners from applying or qualifying for funding. To develop a collective vision on how to minimize challenges and maximize opportunities, the City of San Diego's Neighborhood Services Division partnered with the University of San Diego's Nonprofit Institute. Nationally renowned for its work, the University of San Diego's Nonprofit Institute (NPI) advances best practices in the nonprofit and philanthropic community through academic excellence, applied learning, and research that examines issues of strategic importance to the sector.

"City-University partnerships are being used to tackle the toughest problems that metros face, and USD is an ideal partner in growing the quality of our nonprofit community. The Nonprofit Academy collaboration uses data and academic expertise to provide real-world skills that improve the competitiveness of our local organizations."

- David Graham, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Neighborhood Services Division, City of San Diego



The Nonprofit Academy is sponsored by the City of San Diego in partnership with the University of San Diego. (USD, Mother Rosalie Hill Hall pictured here)

To understand fully the true potential for partnering and contracting with nonprofits, there first needed to be an understanding of the landscape of nonprofits located within the City of San Diego. IRS data about nonprofits were aggregated and mapped using Geographic Information System software. In addition, 262 nonprofit leaders completed a 36-question survey and provided an additional 326 written comments.

The survey included a cross-section of nonprofits that currently do business with the City, nonprofits that have expressed interest in doing business with the City, and nonprofits that may not have known about opportunities to do business with the City but operated within the City limits. The framework for the survey included questions pertaining to the City's application process, City contracting and reporting processes, and an exploration into the education and training needs of organizations. Survey participants were encouraged to provide their candid thoughts and constructive feedback with the understanding that their anonymity would be protected.

FIGURE 2: FINDINGS OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

SAN DIEGO COUNTY

10,196

501(c)(3) Public Charities

[42% Located within the City of San Diego]

Total Revenue
\$14.9B

Total Assets
\$23.8B

Nonprofit Employment =
9% of Total San Diego County
Employment

Data Sources: IRS Business Master File, May 2015;
Labor Market Information Division, California Economic
Development Department, 2014.

The Landscape of Nonprofits

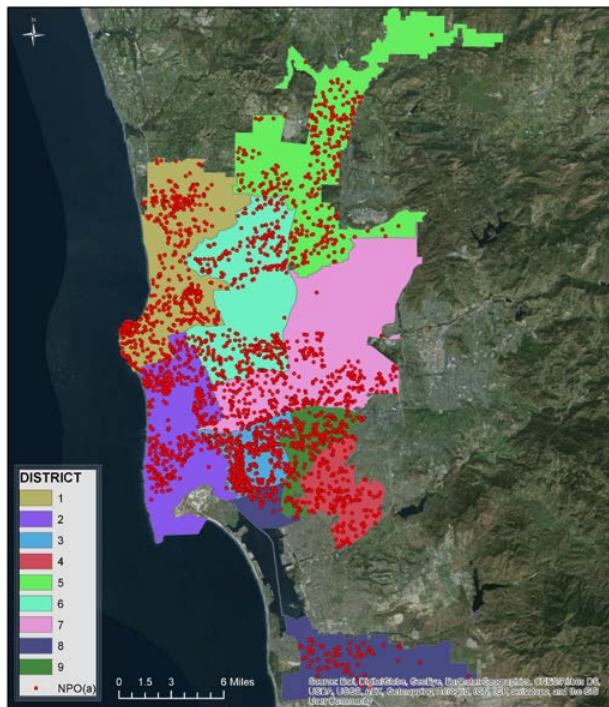
The assessment identified 10,196 registered 501(c)(3) nonprofits in San Diego County. Of those, 4,280 have a mailing address located within the physical boundaries of the City of San Diego. (Figure 2) These data were then aggregated by council district and mapped using Geographic Information System software. The mapping of the data verified a broad pool of potential nonprofits with which the City could partner and contract. Although the physical address of a nonprofit was not an accurate indicator of the full scope of program delivery, the data illustrated

FIGURE 1. NEEDS ASSESSMENT GUIDING QUESTIONS

- A. What is the scope of the nonprofit sector in San Diego? How many nonprofits are there, what are their primary purposes, and what are their services?
- B. What are the characteristics of the nonprofits that currently do business with the City (e.g., type of nonprofit, age, budget size, neighborhood or council district served, etc.)? What are the characteristics of the nonprofits that have expressed interest in doing business with the City but haven't been successful in doing so? Are there any significant trends revealed in comparing those nonprofits that do business with the City and those that do not?
- C. What is the reach of each nonprofit's service area? Are there significant geographic clusters of nonprofits that do business with the City? Are all council districts being reached?
- D. What are the nonprofits' most common shortfalls when doing business with the City?
- E. What are the most important components of organizational development that could be addressed by a Nonprofit Academy/Basic Strengths training program?

FIGURE 3. MAP OF REGISTERED NONPROFITS WITH MAILING ADDRESSES IN THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Distribution of nonprofit organizations (501c3) by San Diego City Council Districts



Source: BMF 2016; SANDAG

(a) Excludes: Hospitals (EH); Agricultural/Farming (K20,25,26,28); Medical Research (H); Diseases, Disorders and Medical Conditions (G); Churches (X); Social Sciences (V); Pension and retirement funds/Cemeteries/Pension and Retirement Funds (Y30,33,34,35); Elementary and Secondary Schools (B20,21,24,25,28,29)

in Figure 3 documented potential disparities in non-profit services and resources across the different council districts.

Organizing the data in this way helped City staff to visualize the potential for proportional funding disbursement across council districts and identify areas of opportunity to reach nonprofits in the City's geographically targeted areas. These geographically targeted areas were identified by the City to help stabilize and improve neighborhoods by directing the investment of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) entitlement grant funds, with the aim of addressing the highest priority community needs and the City's most vulnerable populations.

Interviews and Survey Responses

Interviews with City staff revealed a desire to provide assistance to those nonprofits that have not been able to complete the City's grant application process or had previously been unable to make it past the initial screening process. Interviewees identified some common problems that prevented applicants from successfully completing the process including a lack of basic governance understanding, missing or insufficient financial documents (such as audited financial statements or IRS 990s), and missing insurance certifications.

Survey responses from nonprofit leaders highlighted barriers that prevented them from applying for funding and identified areas where they needed to improve organizational structure and function to become qualified contractors. Nonprofit leaders that had not applied for funding from the City of San Diego in the past five years, reported a lack of understanding of the type of funding opportunities available and were unaware how to access them. Several expressed concerns that City funding is elusive for small or all-volunteer nonprofit organizations.

The most common shortfalls for nonprofits doing business with the City were leveraging resources to meet funding guidelines, meeting funding-match requirements, and keeping their organization in compliance with City contracting requirements. When asked what were the most important components of organizational development that could be addressed by an ongoing training program, the respondents stated that they were interested in:

- diversifying revenue sources (both earned and contributed),
- developing annual funding plans (revenue generation strategies, fundraising activities, etc.),
- leveraging partnerships (collaboration), and
- learning more about marketing and communication (e.g., social media, advertising, public relations, etc.).

In addition, respondents expressed needing assistance with:

- identifying and addressing specific community needs (e.g., data collection, demographics, etc.),
- program design (e.g., setting programmatic goals, objectives, evaluation tools, methods, etc.), and
- awareness and outreach (e.g. community engagement, target audience outreach, etc.).

Pilot Program

The findings from the assessment confirmed the need for additional training and facilitated collaboration to strengthen nonprofits and increase their potential for contracting with the City. To address these needs, the City asked NPI to develop a comprehensive pilot training program called The Nonprofit Academy. Informed by the findings of the needs assessment, the pilot Nonprofit Academy was held over two days in August 2016 on the campus of the University of San Diego and was attended by over 125 nonprofit leaders. The program was free of

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Dr. Laura Deitrick is the director of the University of San Diego Nonprofit Leadership and Management Master's program where she teaches nonprofit research methods, program design and evaluation. She and her staff have developed the curriculum for the Nonprofit Academy.

charge and open to any nonprofit that had completed the needs assessment survey and deemed an eligible candidate for partnering with the City.

During and after the pilot, additional information was gathered through observation and in direct feedback sessions with City officials as well as through a post-assessment survey. There was an overwhelmingly positive response to the quality of faculty, topics, and venue. By and large, the respondents said that they walked away with a better understanding of the funding opportunities available with the City, the application and contracting process, and the strategic objectives of the City. The majority of the respondents stated that they would absolutely attend if there were another training similar to the pilot.

Respondents offered some recommendations for improving The Nonprofit Academy. The most common responses had to do with the technical aspects of the training initiative. Several participants did not have the opportunity to attend all the sessions. They stated they would have attended all the sessions, even if it meant adding an additional day. Others requested a printed bibliography of the books and materials reviewed in each session.

Although nonprofits expressed appreciation for The Nonprofit Academy, respondents were interested in additional assistance with the implementation of strategies to advance their organizations' missions and increase their impact. One respondent stated, "I would love an opportunity to attend again and fill in the gaps... I would get more out of the whole thing as I have a better overview now and would get more benefit from refreshing [my learning]."

ARCHITECTURE OF THE NONPROFIT ACADEMY

There have been two more nonprofit academies held since the pilot program. These were held in the spring of 2016 and fall of 2017. The Nonprofit Academy was designed to achieve the following four objectives:

1. Diversify the nonprofits with which the City contracts for services in order to broaden the reach of public dollars and services to customers.
2. Increase the quantity of nonprofits that apply to do business with the City, so that the pool of candidates is more commensurate with the diversity of the San Diego marketplace and customer demographics.
3. Improve the average score or rank of each pool of nonprofits that apply to do business with the City.
4. Promote the values of integrity, service, people, and excellence articulated in the City's Strategic Plan.

The Framework

The Nonprofit Academy is presented over two days and was shaped around a set of guiding principles presented in Figure 4. Eligible participants attend free of charge and may attend one or both days of the Academy. During the opening of each nonprofit academy, the expectations are made clear. Participants understand that there is no guarantee of funding but, if implemented correctly, the information learned can help position organizations to receive resources from any funder.

Faculty, City staff members, and participants are expected to demonstrate a deep respect for nonprofits and their leaders, no matter their size or current level of competency. Attendees are made aware that The Nonprofit Academy is not a grant-writing or technical assistance workshop. Rather, it is an intensive learning program designed to help nonprofits understand and build capacity in specific organizational competencies required to apply for, receive, and manage government contracting dollars.

FIGURE 4. CORE PRINCIPLES AND OPERATING VALUES FOR NONPROFIT ACADEMY

Core Principles/Operating Values

- Nonprofits don't need to be "fixed"
- Provide a high level experience for as many participants as possible
- Multiple opportunities for added value
- Not a "fundraising/grantwriting" workshop
- Mutual respect
- Learn more about what is needed and which approaches are most effective for the future

Expert Faculty

Key to the success of the program is the expert faculty made available to organizations that otherwise could not afford professional consultation services. The Nonprofit Academy faculty included City of San Diego staff, University of San Diego Nonprofit Leadership and Management faculty, and external consultants. Each faculty member selected for this project had at a minimum ten

years of executive management or consulting experience in the nonprofit sector. Each City of San Diego faculty member had experience working in the nonprofit sector. Participants also had the opportunity to schedule one-on-one consultation sessions with faculty to address specific organizational needs.

A Flexible Hands-On Curriculum

Typically, topics for The Nonprofit Academy have included best practices in governance and leadership, financial competence, program design and development, evaluation and measuring success, and partnering with the city. There are three courses that comprise the Academy's core curriculum: Three Indicators of Fiscal Competence, Program Design and Development, and Measuring Success. Additional electives are also offered and a complete list of all courses is provided in Figure 5. Each session has specific learning outcomes.

Session topics have evolved based on the needs of the nonprofit community. For example, the most recent Nonprofit Academy focused on the San Diego Promise Zone. In June 2016, one of 22 federal Promise Zones in the United States (one of only four in California) was designated in San Diego. The San Diego Promise Zone covers a 6.4-square-mile targeted area that is home to the City's most disadvantaged and underserved communities. In addition to the core sessions, specialized session topics included collective impact, strategic volunteer engagement, and integrating program design and budget.

To address the common shortfalls of capacity-building initiatives, courses included hands on application exercises and opportunities for one-on-one consulting. Each participant received a binder that included session materials and other resources. The information was also made available for download. Participants can also schedule follow-up appointments with instructors through a City-sponsored Office Hours program. Participants who complete all core coursework in The Nonprofit Academy received a signed certificate acknowledging their accomplishment.

NONPROFIT ACADEMY OUTCOMES

Initial evidence suggests that the City's outcome objectives for the Academy are being met. For example, qualified Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) applicants increased 33 percent from 57 applicants in FY2017 to 76 applicants in FY2018, establishing a more competitive selection pool for the City. In FY2018, a total of 27 nonprofits were awarded CDBG funds to implement 33 projects. Of those 27 nonprofits, 14 (or 52 percent) had participated in at least one Nonprofit Academy. In addition, the City's Commission for Arts and Culture received qualified funding applications from 15 nonprofits new to this revenue source.

Intangible results lie in the collective impact these organizations make in strengthening the network of local nonprofits to work together and share information and in the increased transparency and public trust about the funding process. Such education is a necessity for nonprofits to make better operational and hiring decisions

FIGURE 5. NONPROFIT ACADEMY CURRICULUM



The Nonprofit Institute Presents:
The Nonprofit Academy
Accelerating Nonprofit Success and Sustainability

COURSE SCHEDULE

Day One
Tuesday, March 7, 2017

8:30 - 9:00am | Registration and Breakfast
Sala and Loggia

9:00 - 9:20am | Welcome and Orientation
Warren Auditorium

- **Laura Deitrick, PhD, Associate Director, The Nonprofit Institute, University of San Diego**
- **Erik Caldwell, Director, Economic Development Department, City of San Diego**
- **Dana Springs, Executive Director, Commission for Arts and Culture, City of San Diego**

9:30am - 12:30pm | Core Courses

- Program Design and Development - Room 102 (Executive Classroom)
- Measuring Success - Room 127
- Three Indicators of Fiscal Competence - Room 131

9:30 - 10:45am | Elective Courses

- Governance Rules of the Road - Room 135
- Partnering with the City of San Diego - Warren Auditorium

11:00am - 12:30pm | Elective Courses

- Strategy for Social Impact - Room 135
- Financial Basics - Room 145

12:30 - 1:15pm | Lunch
West Terrace

1:15 - 4:15pm | Core Courses

- Program Design and Development - Room 102 (Executive Classroom)
- Measuring Success - Room 127
- Three Indicators of Fiscal Competence - Room 131

1:15 - 2:30pm | Elective Courses

- Governance Rules of the Road - Room 135
- Partnering with the City of San Diego - Warren Auditorium

2:45 - 4:15pm | Elective Courses

- Strategy for Social Impact - Room 135
- Financial Basics - Room 145

Day Two
Wednesday, March 8, 2017

8:30 - 9:00am | Registration and Breakfast
Sala and Loggia

9:00 - 9:20am | Welcome and Opening
Warren Auditorium

- **Laura Deitrick, PhD, Associate Director, The Nonprofit Institute, University of San Diego**
- **David Graham, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Neighborhood Services Branch, City of San Diego**
- **Stephen Maduli-Williams, Community Development Division Program Manager, Economic Development Department, City of San Diego**

9:30am - 12:30pm | Core Courses

- Program Design and Development - Room 102 (Executive Classroom)
- Measuring Success - Room 127
- Three Indicators of Fiscal Competence - Room 131

9:30 - 10:45am | Elective Courses

- Governance Rules of the Road - Room 135
- Building an Effective Board - Room 133

11:00am - 12:30pm | Elective Courses

- Strategy for Social Impact - Room 135
- Financial Basics - Room 145

12:30 - 1:15pm | Lunch
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The City of
SAN DIEGO



The Nonprofit Academy promotes a "hands on" learning experience by encouraging attendees to bring their organization's financial statements and by-laws. This allows for collective, on-the-spot problem solving.

and create more impactful programs to address the City's complex social and environmental challenges while lessening the City's programmatic and financial burden to provide social services.

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"As a result of attending the Nonprofit Academy, stronger measurements have been constructed for measuring ongoing community engagement. Recommended courses of action for building a stronger board have also begun."

– Nonprofit Academy attendee

After the completion of each Nonprofit Academy, a survey is administered to all participants to assess individual outcomes. Responses indicate a high level of satisfaction with the quality of faculty, topics, and location. On the most recent evaluation, 75 percent of respondents indicated they had a better understanding of City funding opportunities and requirements and 70 percent had taken steps to implement new practices. One respondent stated, "We have already implemented additional financial controls based on the finance workshop. We plan to use logic models in the future when creating programming." An additional recognizable benefit of attending The Nonprofit Academy has been the time the participants have to network and explore common interests and potential ideas for future collaboration.

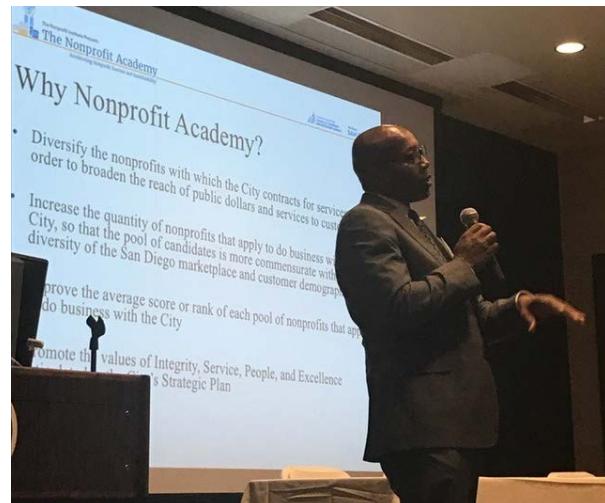
LESSONS LEARNED: THE EMERGING NONPROFITS LAB

The Nonprofit Academy helped the City identify the need for more targeted training for small and emerging nonprofits. Feedback sessions with Nonprofit Academy participants brought to light the difficulty these small and emerging nonprofits faced in overcoming annual funding challenges and providing the City with the audited financial statements required to access federal funding programs administered by the City (like CDBG).

In response to this need, the City's Economic Development Department has created a new Capacity Building Program for FY2019. This program will be available to nonprofit organizations without an audited financial statement for the prior fiscal year and will be limited to those nonprofits with an annual operating budget of \$500,000 or less.

Up to 10 organizations will be awarded \$50,000 each through a competitive application process. The award will come with a commitment from the nonprofit to use the funds to assist with the implementation of a public service project within the City, complete audited financial statements for the current fiscal year, and participate in an intensive six-month capacity building lab developed by and staffed with faculty from the University of San Diego.

The ultimate goal of The Emerging Nonprofits Lab will be to prepare these 10 organizations to compete successfully for local, state, and federal grant opportunities in subsequent fiscal years and provide community economic development services within traditionally underinvested neighborhoods of the City.



Stephen Maduli-Williams is the Community Development Division Program Manager for the City of San Diego. He is responsible for the strategic investment of roughly \$10 million in federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) entitlement funds on an annual basis. Partnerships with nonprofit organizations are critical to the success of the City's CDBG program.

REVENUE SOURCES

The Economic Development Department receives significant revenue from community development resources that are specifically used for the enhancement or expansion of current programs and the creation of new programs. The City's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program income will be the key source of new additional funding for the next 10 to 15 years. Programming options include the creation of Economic Development Department revolving loans, sustainability programs, workforce development initiatives, and incubator and accelerator programs. The vast majority of these programs are used to benefit low- to moderate-income communities.

The City of San Diego's Economic Development Department, which administers the CDBG program and other grants designed to foster business expansion, attraction, and retention, partnered with representatives from NPI to plan the curriculum and instruction for The Nonprofit Academy. The University provided the auditorium, classrooms, and educational materials for the workshop. Both the City of San Diego and NPI leveraged their staffs to provide administrative support for the implementation of The Nonprofit Academy. Each Nonprofit Academy was paid for with \$55,000 of CDBG administrative funds.

CONCLUSION

The Nonprofit Academy has been demonstrated to be replicable, with the second Nonprofit Academy drawing more than 150 participants (68 percent were first-time attendees) from 88 organizations. In August 2017, the third Nonprofit Academy had 152 partici-

pants (81 percent were first-time attendees) representing 118 organizations. Much of the success of The Nonprofit Academy is attributable to the productive partnership between the City of San Diego and the University of San Diego's Nonprofit Institute. However, the Academy's framework can be adapted to meet the needs in any community.

For those public-sector leaders interested in launching their own nonprofit capacity-building efforts, communities/cities should keep the following factors in mind:

- Continually engage the nonprofit community. Include nonprofit partners at all levels of the process.
- Approach nonprofit organizations as equal partners.
- Identify potential lead partner(s). In this case the City partnered with a university. Partnerships could also be with local businesses, foundations, experienced consultant(s), or nonprofit management support organizations so long as partners have deep experience in the nonprofit management field.
- Be willing to adapt. Remain open to the possibility of adjusting policies and procedures.
- Be innovative in your approach.

In conclusion, this endeavor documented an environment rich with opportunities for strengthening existing relationships, as well as forging new partnerships, with San Diego nonprofits. The recommendations provided in this article provide a roadmap to establishing a framework for effective cross-sector collaboration in the future.



The most recent Nonprofit Academy, held in August 2017, had 148 attendees – 81 percent were first-time participants.

ENDNOTES

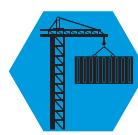
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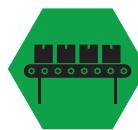
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