
Election series: Communicating the value of nonprofits



ONTARIO NONPROFIT NETWORK

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One of the ways nonprofits can meaningfully engage in elections is by sharing their impact on communities. Communicating the value of nonprofits during elections is important to support: pitching great ideas and solutions, elevating community voices, building relationships, and participating in public policy. While the public (voting or not) pays the most attention to public policy during election time, political parties and candidates are often eager to learn about great ideas, hear success stories from constituents, and build relationships.

Why it's important to communicate the value of nonprofits

Leading up to elections, conversations about issues impacting communities take place more often: at dinner tables, during candidate debates, at the local park, online, and/or in the news. More people are paying attention to public policies during elections. At the same time, misinformation and disinformation tends to spread faster and broader.



It's important for nonprofits to communicate their value because:

1

There is a general lack of understanding amongst the public and elected officials about the nonprofit sector. A [2023 survey](#) found that the majority of respondents do not recognize their own engagement with nonprofits or understand the nonprofit services they are unknowingly receiving regularly.



2

[Negative narratives](#) about nonprofits and the vulnerable communities we serve are growing, which can impact organizations' funding, operations, and mission. The sector needs to speak up to counter these narratives. As articulated by the [National Council of Nonprofits](#) (NCN), organizations have to "tell the value story of the nonprofit community, before it is defined by others."



It's important for nonprofits to communicate their value because (cont'd):

3

Public support matters during election campaigns and garnering this support helps nonprofits. In order for candidates and politicians to reflect our sector's priorities in their policies and platforms, the public and the candidates need to care about and understand the value of nonprofits. Plus, if people know the work and impact of nonprofits, they can be inspired to take action and become advocates for the sector.

4

Talking about the value of nonprofits leading up to elections can capture the attention of political parties and candidates and get them to realize the potential influence nonprofits have. It's also a great opportunity to share your policy ideas, as candidates are often more eager and open to have meetings with their constituents during this time.



Ways nonprofits can communicate their impact on communities

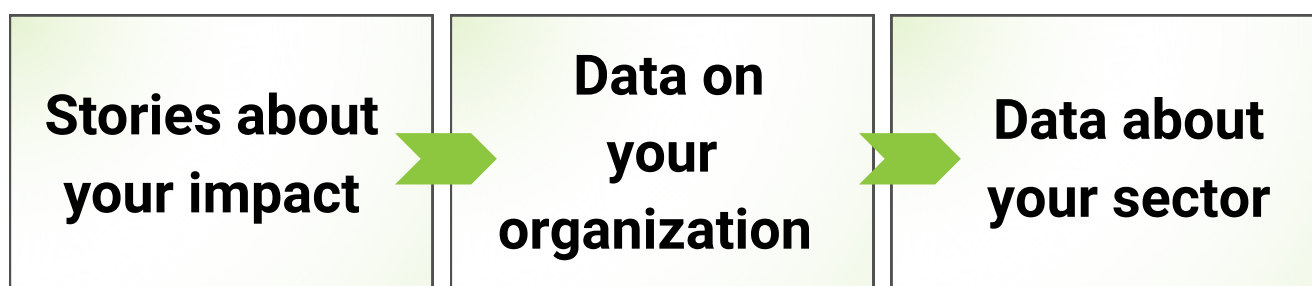
Engage in different types of communications efforts to grow audiences and amplify impact:

- Where possible (social media, website updates, meetings), weave in messaging about the nonprofit difference, which emphasizes how the purpose, governance, and ownership structure of nonprofits makes the sector uniquely positioned to advance the public benefit.
- Talk about the issues your nonprofit, the sector, and communities care about:
 - At candidate meetings, ask questions important to your organization and your communities.
 - On social media, launch a campaign to highlight the issues currently impacting your organization and the communities you serve.
 - Include a blurb about the work you do and its impact in your newsletters.
 - In conversations with your friends, families and colleagues, talk about the work you do and the issues your communities care about.
- Tell your story authentically through testimonials and data about programs and services, and their connection to people. How is your work making a difference? Why is the challenge you face urgent? Show it, don't just say it!

Ways nonprofits can communicate their impact on communities (cont'd)

Storytelling is a powerful tool nonprofits can leverage to showcase their impact:

- Relate to your audience. Tell stories about your impact in ways they understand and care about.
- Activate emotions. A good story reminds the audience of their values.
- Tell a compelling story. Tell a story that energizes the listener to take action.
- Include the voices of those who are supporters of your work. Why do they support your work?
- Incorporate these stories in reports, guides, emails, and other communications, and share stories at community meetings and town halls.



Ways nonprofits can communicate their impact on communities (cont'd)

- Draw on relevant data about [Canada](#) and/or [Ontario's](#) nonprofit sector to demonstrate the economic value of your organization. Use data from ONN's [Ontario state of the sector](#) survey to highlight the issues and challenges your organization might be facing. Check out additional data below to support your arguments:
 - [ONN 2025 State of the Sector policy report](#)
 - [The impact of economic uncertainty on nonprofits](#)
 - [Charity Insights Canada Project](#)
 - [Diversity is our Strength: Improving Working Conditions in Canadian Nonprofits](#)
 - [Statistics Canada's Canadian Business Conditions Survey](#)
- Use ONN's public education tool. The interactive [community map](#) is an illustration of the impact nonprofits have on our communities.
 - Share the map on social media, and connect some of the locations and examples back to your work, to tell your impact story.



Ways nonprofits can communicate their impact on communities (cont'd)

- Share the map with candidates to show how your organization supports the nonprofit ecosystem and your local community.
- Use the map to highlight advocacy around current challenges, including those related to disinvestment and devaluation of nonprofits.
- Showcase the map in client, community, and public settings to educate them on nonprofits.
- Engage different types of media to share your stories, increase public awareness, and expand your reach to a broader audience. Helpful types of media for nonprofits include:
 - Traditional print media like community-based and national newspapers and magazines.
 - Radio and TV news, including morning and evenings news, panel shows, radio call-in shows, and community television.
 - Digital media like The Trillium, IndigiNews, and The Local, alongside other digital outlets and platforms like blogs.
 - Other digital platforms like podcasts, vlogs, live broadcasts, and via social media.

Key messages to communicate the value of the sector

Nonprofits are critical in activating a healthy democracy

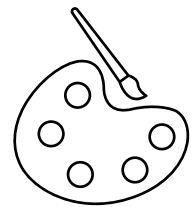
- Nonprofits are an expression of democracy themselves as they are accountable to community members, and are governed by volunteer boards of directors that are democratically elected.
- Nonprofits are trusted local sources. The unique role of nonprofits in community allows organizations and grassroots groups to share information as trusted sources, increase awareness of community issues, identify emerging needs, and enable confidence in communities to speak up. [Research](#) shows that nonprofits hold higher levels of public trust than government institutions, media, or political parties. They are seen as grounded in community interests, mission-driven, and oriented toward service rather than self-interest.
- Nonprofits engage and amplify community voices, help people gather and organize, contribute knowledge through research, provide unique public policy insight stemming from communities, and hold governments and decision-makers accountable.



Key messages to communicate the value of the sector (cont'd)

Nonprofits are always there for communities

- Everyday, nonprofits deliver essential programs efficiently and effectively that sustain the quality of life for millions of hardworking residents and their families, and during times of crises and emergencies, the nonprofit sector is the first to know and respond.
- Whether we are fostering a sense of belonging through arts and sports programs or ensuring families have access to affordable housing, we are there for communities when they need us most.
- Nonprofits create spaces that facilitate community development, enhance social interaction and engagement, and generate economic revitalization. These can include: the sports league in your neighbourhood, the affordable child care operated out of your local church or community centre, the orchestra, or other nonprofits in your neighbourhood that provide essential social services and programs like mental health and addictions programs, child care, and shelters.



Key messages to communicate the value of the sector (cont'd)

Nonprofits are a ready ally to government on the ground, working alongside communities

- The nonprofit sector is a ready ally to the federal/provincial/municipal government in navigating uncertain times and supporting local communities. We bring together the expertise of millions of volunteers and employees, strong social capital, and financial leverage to develop and deliver innovative solutions for the public good, while contributing to the province's prosperity.
- Nonprofits are accountable to local communities, have higher levels of transparency, and reinvest profits back into their missions, ensuring taxpayer money is used effectively.

The domino effect of undersourcing one part of the sector

- When one area of the sector is underfunded, nonprofits shoulder what they can and pass on those clients that fall through the cracks to the next logical provider. And when none of the services are sufficient, clients turn to encampments, sleeping in buses, and living in ravines.
- If the social safety net, as the first line of defense, fails to catch individuals and families falling into poverty, it sets off a domino effect of losses (lost housing, employment, and food). It also sets off increases in health concerns, gender-based violence incidents, and addictions. This ends up costing Canada/the province/the municipality more in the long-run.

Additional resources

- [Democracy Narratives Alliance](#)
- [Democracy Narratives in Action](#) (Metropolitan Group, 2025)
- [How the sector is using narrative change to advance social change](#) (The Philanthropist)
- [Ontarians deserve access to affordable and people-centred services. Nonprofits can make that a reality.](#) (ONN)
- [The domino effect of underfunding social service organizations in Ontario](#) (ONN)

About ONN

[ONN](#) is the independent nonprofit network for the 58,000 nonprofits in Ontario, focused on policy, advocacy, and services to strengthen the sector as a key pillar of our society and economy. We work to create a public policy environment that allows nonprofits to thrive. We engage our network of diverse nonprofit organizations across Ontario to work together on issues affecting the sector and channel the voices of our network to government, funders and other stakeholders.

