

**OVERVIEW:** The First 5 Solano Children and Families Commission, in partnership with Solano County Health and Social Services (collectively, Solano County), developed and implemented a nonprofit diagnostic capacity assessment for the purpose of informing local capacity building efforts; and, effectively directing capacity-building resources to strengthen the nonprofit community.

**CHALLENGE:** Both First 5 Solano and H&SS rely heavily on nonprofit partners to provide critical services in the community. Solano has very few nonprofits in comparison to neighboring counties (Solano has 37.3 nonprofits per 10,000 residents, with the closest neighbor Napa at 61.1 nonprofits per 10,000 residents). Additionally, Solano’s nonprofit partners are largely under-resourced (Solano receives \$3 per person in foundation giving, with our closest neighbor Napa, at \$22 per person). With limited resources, nonprofits have little time to plan and reflect, with the majority of time being spent in “reaction mode.” Several local nonprofits have failed in recent years. Since Solano has so few nonprofits, each agency closure has a significant community impact which can be felt long after the agency has shut its doors.

**INNOVATIVE SOLUTION:** Solano County hired a social sector evaluation and capacity building consultant, Learning for Action, to conduct an assessment of the capacity of Solano nonprofit partners; and to provide a tailored analysis and recommendations for future action. An in-depth diagnostic tool was developed and nonprofit respondents were advised that the data collected would be used to inform a set of actionable recommendations to direct limited resources to appropriate nonprofit capacity building support. Of the 103 human services nonprofits identified to receive the survey, 54 responded for a 52% response rate. The majority of the respondents were the Executive Director/Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the organization.

**ORIGINALITY:** Limited nonprofit capacity is not a new issue. That said, nonprofit capacity is oftentimes defined in different ways, as there are multiple aspects of a nonprofits capacity, such as visioning and impact, resource generation, board governance, strategic relationships, etc. In a community that has very few nonprofits and few resources that are non-governmental, targeting supports to appropriate

needs can be a challenge. While several national nonprofit assessments have been conducted, there is little in the way of a local targeted assessment that informs policy makers of the best approach that effectively serves the most nonprofits.

**COST EFFECTIVENESS:** The cost of developing the tool, implementing the assessment, analyzing the results, and providing recommendations was \$50,000, inclusive of all costs. The expense was shared across departments and gave significant insights into the capacity needs of Solano’s nonprofits. Other counties could utilize this tool to gauge where their nonprofit base needs the most support.

**RESULTS:** The results of the assessment revealed that Solano nonprofits need support in multiple areas, the most foundational of which is vision and impact. As the remaining domains of nonprofit capacity rely heavily upon a strong vision and impact foundation, attempting to strengthen other areas, such as resource generation (identified by nonprofits as their biggest need) without a strong organizational strategy would be a less effective use of resources. Solano County is planning for a cohort-based learning lab to address this need and strengthen the long-term viability of essential nonprofit partners. A copy of the results from the assessment have been published in a report made available for the public entitled “Solano County Nonprofit Capacity Diagnostic Findings.” Recommendations were developed for areas that match Solano nonprofit’s identified needs, have high leverage to influence other areas of organizational need, and are well-suited for change via capacity-building interventions, including capacity building efforts in these areas:

- Vision and Impact Model – Clarity on Organizational Strategy
- Evaluation and Learning – Developing Evaluation Frameworks and Cultivating Reflective Practices
- Board Governance and Leadership – Strengthening Boards and Developing New Board Members

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