

# The COVID-19 Effect on Wisconsin's Nonprofit Sector

La Crosse County

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This report, which focuses on La Crosse County, is part of a statewide effort to study the response of nonprofit organizations to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aims to provide real-time data to government officials, foundations, and other decision-makers about the current socio-economic conditions facing nonprofits, and the need for immediate and long-term support to ensure the ongoing provision of critical services throughout Wisconsin. The hope is that, by understanding the pandemic's effect on the nonprofit sector, we can also better understand the recovery process required afterward.

## Background

Nonprofit organizations are often on the front lines of crisis – frequently referred to as "second responders," serving as a resource for individuals after emergency aid has been provided. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Wisconsin nonprofits are experiencing increased demands for food, shelter, and other necessities, yet have been hindered or completely cut off from responding due to school closures, stay at home orders, and social distancing. In Wisconsin, one in twelve employees work at a nonprofit, representing a total of \$14.6 billion in annual wages – making the programs and services provided by statewide nonprofits an essential component of the economic engine that ensures Wisconsin is a thriving, vibrant state.

Our highest priority is to learn directly from Wisconsin nonprofit leaders by connecting with a broad range of organizations and missions. Based on an established online survey by the University of San Diego, data collection efforts focused on the following nonprofit capacities potentially affected by the ongoing pandemic:

- Human Resources, including staffing and payroll
- Finance & Revenue, including access to federal stimulus funding
- Effect on Programs & Service Delivery

The survey also collected information on needed resources, to better understand ways academic and community partners can assist Wisconsin's nonprofit sector through these developing challenges and beyond. The initial online survey was made available for participation from April 14-29, 2020. Additionally, a series of brief quarterly follow-up surveys will be released throughout 2020 to track change, stimulus funding effectiveness, and overall sector recovery. The intention is to continue the project until it is determined to be no longer necessary. Statewide, 526 nonprofit organizations responded to the survey.

La Crosse County data was collected from 25 responding organizations, with a blend of service areas and missions including environmental, educational, community programming, religious services, arts and humanities, and human services. A majority of responding organizations had missions focused on the arts and humanities or human services. A majority of organizations had annual budgets of less than \$500,000.

**Table 1: Sector of Nonprofit Respondents from La Crosse County**

Sector	No. of Respondents
Human services	10
Arts culture humanities	6
Health (non-hospital)	4
Education	2
Higher education	2
Mutual societal benefit	2
Environment	1
Religious	1
Other	1
Total	25

**Table 2: Budget Range of Nonprofit Respondents from La Crosse County**

Budget Range	No. of Respondents
Over \$3,000,000	4
\$1,000,001 to \$3,000,000	9
\$500,001 to \$1,000,000	3
\$100,001 to \$500,000	1
Under \$100,000	8
Total	25

## Research Team

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## Findings from La Crosse County

These following sections summarize key findings from La Crosse County surveys in the areas of finances and human resources, programs and services, leadership, and resources needs. Additional data are available upon request.

### Finances and Human Resources

Organizations in La Crosse County reported immediate decreases in resources and staffing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the safer at home order. Forty-four percent reported they had already made reductions in staff; 84% reported they had already made reductions in volunteer contributions. 80% reported the cancelation of a fundraising event. Organizations in La Crosse County were also poised to take advantage of relief funds; a majority of organizations had already applied for or intended to apply for the Paycheck Protection Program. A majority of organizations had already conducted budget scenario exercises to address uncertainties in and threats to funding due to COVID-19.

A majority of organizations reported an uptick in their efforts to conduct virtual outreach and engagement at this time, with donors and other stakeholders -- including donor outreach, social media and communication campaigns, and collaborations with other nonprofit organizations or government entities.

Key concerns for the future reported by organizations included overall budget reductions, reduction in volunteer engagement and support, strain on staff in meeting new needs with less support, disengagement of stakeholders and donors, and the potential loss of donor and funder resources due to overall economic downturn.

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### Programs and Services

A majority of responding organizations reported reductions in programming due to COVID-19, with 4 fully shuttered at the time of the survey. Six responding organizations reported that they had already conducted notable adjustments in programming, and 3 reported that they had increased programming due to COVID-19 circumstances. Twelve respondents reported that it would be unlikely for them to “adequately” deliver services as before in the near term, and 11 reported that it was likely that they could.

New community needs being met by reporting organizations through programmatic adjustments at the time of reporting included:

- Helping families navigate financial challenges and providing information about resources available
- Increased mental health needs
- Delivery and transportation to connect vulnerable community members with essential goods and services
- Providing supports to families that were previously provided by schools

Programmatic challenges reported at this time included:

- Cancellation of in-person events, leading to decrease in community enrichment and well-being as well as loss of revenue
- Increase in needs of communities served
- Loss of quality of connection with youth despite ability to connect virtually
- Loss of ability to engage volunteers as before

## Leadership

While a majority of reporting organizations (65%) expressed that their Board of Directors was prepared to handle the challenges presented by COVID-19, organizations also expressed concerns that some boards were not sufficiently engaged or tech-savvy to provide optimal guidance.

## Resources Needs

Organizations reported that they would most like support from our coalition in the following areas:

- Technology expertise
- Messaging and outreach
- Fundraising strategies
- Communicating the needs and experiences of the nonprofit sector with elected officials, government entities, and funders.

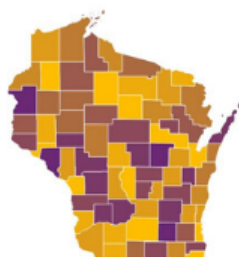
Figure 3: What could academic and community partners assist you with the most?  
(check all that apply)



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<https://uwm.edu/hbi/research/survey/>