



News Release

For immediate release

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New association finds common ground for common good

October 23, 2007 – Madison, Wisconsin – Nonprofit organizations are an integral part of a healthy, artistic, vital and productive state. They provide needed services, foster support for those in need and provide jobs for about 250,000 Wisconsin residents.

After extensive research and planning, the time has come to launch an association that represents their interests. The Wisconsin Nonprofits Association is a nonprofit statewide association organized for, of and by nonprofit organizations across the state of Wisconsin. Through the state association, local nonprofit organizations can collaborate to manage and lead more effectively, increase their impact in their communities for their constituencies, and strengthen their collective voice on issues that affect both society and the nonprofit sector.

“A thriving nonprofit sector means a better quality of life in Wisconsin,” said Deborah Blanks, president of the Board of Directors for the new association and CEO for the Social Development Commission in Milwaukee. “As the only organization dedicated to connecting nonprofits from all across the state, we can help individual nonprofits reach their fullest capacity and better serve their constituencies.”

The idea of a statewide association of nonprofits is not new to Wisconsin. In the early 1990s, the Wisconsin Association of Nonprofit Organizations (WANO) formed as an attempt to introduce this model. Organizers were never able, however, to expand membership or gain critical support from the philanthropic community. Neither were they able, within the start-up funding timetable, to develop services for the nonprofits themselves.

“The early attempt offered many lessons,” said Heidi Fischer, executive director for Literacy Volunteers Chippewa Valley, who conducted an intensive research study in 2005 along with JoAnn Stormer, executive director for the Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program.

Stormer, who has been retained as an interim executive director for the association, added: “After talking with over 1,000 nonprofit leaders and conducting both formal and informal research, we are confident the idea can gain traction with the proper planning and defined services.”

A founding Board of Directors was created in 2006 with representation from various sectors and regions throughout Wisconsin. It went to work developing a strong business plan and creating member services that aligned with the interests of nonprofit leaders throughout the state.

“While the services provided by the diverse nonprofits throughout Wisconsin are far ranging, the common needs and common interests are not,” said David G. Cochrane, executive director for Family Forum in Superior. “As funding challenges continue and demand for services rise, the time is right for an association dedicating to finding common ground for common good.”

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Education and advocacy are among the association's core services, which also include discount programs, management training, technical assistance, sector information and referrals.

"A statewide association can do a lot to educate our communities, businesses, government and citizens about the vital role that nonprofits play in Wisconsin and how they might even do more," said Peter Kelly, executive director of United Way Fox Cities and a supporter of the association.

Carol Maria, president of Wisconsin Business Development Service Corporation in Waukesha explains the value she finds in a statewide nonprofit association: "In changing political, social and economic times, this type of support network has great potential to reduce the cost of doing business for nonprofit members and increase the effectiveness of policy and advocacy agendas simultaneously."

Like others around the country, the Wisconsin Nonprofits Association works to raise the ethical standards for all nonprofit organizations in Wisconsin while increasing their overall effectiveness.

Full, active membership is open to any IRS-designated nonprofit organization. Associate memberships are available to businesses involved with the nonprofit sector. Individual memberships are available for anyone not employed with a nonprofit organization who seeks to support the work of the association.

People interested in learning more about the Wisconsin Nonprofits Association are encouraged to visit its Web site at www.wisconsinnonprofits.org.

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Note to Editors: Following is a summary of key benefits available to association members.

Discount Programs

- ReadyTalk – phone and web conferencing services
- Mutual America – retirement benefits
- Office Max – office supplies and equipment
- Unemployment Trust – unemployment insurance
- Society of Nonprofit Organizations – magazine & funding alerts

Professional Development

- Catalogue of activities occurring throughout Wisconsin
- 50% discount on membership to Society of Nonprofit Organizations

Advocacy and Public Policy

- Electronic Public Policy Updates – state perspective on national issues, alerts on state issues
- Advocacy How-To's
- Position Papers on Important State Issues

Research and Information

- Nonprofit Sector Report
- Nonprofit Sector Compensation Report
- Electronic Newsletter on Nonprofit Trends and Activities
- 20% discount on Field Stone Alliance publications
- 50% discount on Nonprofit Quarterly magazine

Leadership and Convening

- Listing in online Member Directory
- Access to e-mail list serv on Nonprofit Management Issues