



Starting a Maine Nonprofit: Readiness Checklist

Maine's nonprofits are essential to Maine's economy and quality of life, employing 1 in 6 workers and mobilizing approximately 350,000 volunteers each year. Maine is lucky to have passionate, dedicated people invested in making our communities better places to live, work, and visit.

That said, starting a new nonprofit may not be the best solution to the problem you're seeking to solve. Increased competition for dwindling resources creates a very challenging environment in which to sustain a nonprofit organization, and talking to similar organizations about possible collaboration is often the best move that you can make.

Below are some questions which might help you determine whether or not you are personally and strategically ready to start a nonprofit.

Mission + Vision

- Is there a clearly defined need?
- Have you clearly defined your mission?
- Do you believe whole-heartedly in the intended mission? Do you want it badly enough to work long hours for an indeterminate time period without compensation?
- Have you thought about what needs to happen down the road? How will you sustain the viability of the organization in the future?
- Who else is doing work similar to your proposed mission?
- Have you thoroughly examined the possibility of partnering with an existing organization to start a new program or enhance existing work?

Funding + Support

- Do you know how much money the process will cost? (Incorporation with the state, application for tax-exemption, licensure to raise money.)
- Are you familiar with the different ways a nonprofit can raise money?
- Do you know 4 or 5 "angels" who can become financial donors while you are waiting for certification to officially raise money?
- What is the current funding environment for nonprofits in general and for your mission area in particular?
- What will you need to buy in terms of equipment? What about office space?
- Do you know a coach or mentor or colleague who can support you (non-financially) as you grow the organization and who can help you weather the tough times?

Board of Directors

- Do you have some acquaintances who feel the same way you do about the intended mission and who might be willing to serve as board members as well as committee heads?
- Do your future board members know about the responsibilities of a nonprofit board and the time commitment?
- Who among the founders has experience in strategic planning?
- How will you keep board members motivated and engaged?
- What role do you see yourself playing in the organization?

Practicalities

- Are you familiar with the organizational functions that are needed to “make it go”? (Raising money, accounting for money, programs and projects, volunteers, marketing/communication)
- Since you will not have staff in the beginning (such as an executive director, program director, or administrative staff), who will carry out the various functions?
- What programs or services would you offer? Do you have evidence there is demand?
- Where will you conduct business?

If you have reviewed the above and feel ready to move forward, you will want to work toward developing a nonprofit business plan that includes:

- I. Executive Summary (Max 1.5 Pages)
- II. Context/Rationale (What is the problem you’re trying to solve? What are the gaps you’re trying to fill?)
- III. Vision Statement (What will change as a result of the organization’s work?)
- IV. Mission Statement (What will the organization do?)
- V. Values Statement (What values will guide the work?)
- VI. Programs (How will you achieve the mission?)
- VII. Organizational Structure (Board, Administration, Funding, Finances, Communication and Programs)
- VIII. Impact (What results do you expect and how will this be measured?)
- IX. Anticipated Revenue Streams
- X. Anticipated Growth Strategy
- XI. Appendices:
 - a. Illustrative Budget
 - b. Bylaws
 - c. Board Members