Nonprofit organizations play a vital role in contributing to the social, physical, economic and environmental health of our communities. Yet, nonprofits are being asked to do more with less in an era of growing needs and shrinking resources. The barriers faced by nonprofits are too big and too complex for a single organization to tackle alone. Removing barriers to nonprofits’ success requires leveraging the resources, strengths, and knowledge of a broad network of organizations.

The Western New York Nonprofit Support Group (WNYNSG) seeks to strengthen communities in the 8 counties of Western New York and Monroe County by increasing the capacity of the organizations that serve those areas. We envision a healthy nonprofit ecosystem in which organizations collaborate, learn, and innovate together, becoming even more effective in delivering on their missions.

We are committed to building on the many ongoing efforts and filling gaps that are not currently addressed. WNYNSG members include:

- Jim Boyle, The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation
- Glenda Cadwallader, Cadwallader & Associates Consulting Services
- Maura Dewan, The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation
- Beth Gosch, Western New York Foundation
- Nora OBrien-Suric, The Health Foundation for Western & Central New York
- Ginny Oehler, independent consultant
- Tracy Sawicki, The Peter and Elizabeth Tower Foundation
- Karen Lee Spaulding, The John R. Oishei Foundation
- Katie Pieri, Director, WNY Nonprofit Support Group

**NONPROFIT CAPACITY BUILDING IN WNY: ASSETS, NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES**

The WNYNSG commissioned the Center for Governmental Research (CGR) in partnership with Community Network for Engagement, Connection and Transformation (CoNECT) to conduct a study on assets and needs or gaps in capacity building resources for nonprofit organizations in its nine-county area. Through best practice research, surveys, interviews and focus groups, the researchers collected information from nonprofit organizations in the region. The full report and asset map can be found at www.wnynsg.org.

The WNYNSG is now working to identify priorities and how it will address the needs identified, with a focus on sustainability. The WNYNSG is committed to an approach that brings the nonprofit voice into planning and strategy development through a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens. To assist with better understanding capacity building, the researchers developed a capacity building framework comprised of six domains found on the icons on the next page.
COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

The WNYNSG held 13 Community Conversations with more than 150 nonprofit leaders across our 9-county region (4 in Erie, 2 in Chautauqua, 1 each in Allegany, Cattaraugus, Genesee, Monroe, Niagara, Orleans, and Wyoming).

The goals of the community conversations were to introduce the WNYNSG to the community, test what the group learned in the report and test the group’s initial thinking on potential strategies. Participants were asked for feedback on the following three initial potential strategies informed by the report:

POTENTIAL STRATEGY #1: Collaborative Learning/Peer Learning Network
WHY: There is expertise within the sector, however much of it is siloed and not often shared. There is a need for greater connection and collaboration.
GOAL: Bring together nonprofit leaders who traditionally do not collaborate to learn from one another and build each other’s capacity.

POTENTIAL STRATEGY #2: Collaborative Learning/Fund and Revenue Development
WHY: Fund and revenue development were identified as a top need and immediate priority.
GOAL: Increase development of nonprofit’s capacity to raise revenue.

POTENTIAL STRATEGY #3: Access to individualized organizational support/ Increased access to resources
WHY: In addition to building on existing resources, we also aim to be connectors, network builders and partners.
GOAL: Increase access to effective consultants and existing community resources.

Additionally, the report identified various opportunities in each of the six domains to the left for action by the WNYNSG. At the community conversations, nonprofit leaders were asked to prioritize those opportunities.

CAPACITY BUILDING FRAMEWORK

Resources: includes finances, human capacity and resources, networks of support, information technology, communications and physical space.

Alignment and collaboration: engaging and mobilizing communities and clients, partnering with other organizations, working across sectors and engaging in advocacy efforts requires alignment of work across communities and working with groups and networks.

Vision and mission: ability to inform and affect other components including programming and services offered, leadership, fundraising, networking, strategic planning and aligned measurement.

Research, evaluation and strategic learning: to understand and forecast evolving community needs, inform program development and refinement, measure outcomes, account for resources and promote organizational learning.

Diversity, equity and inclusion: commitment to, and extent to which, these principles are embedded in board governance, leadership, policies and practices, research and learning and program development.

Leadership: skills and abilities including board governance and succession planning, as well as relational skills, attention to self-care/mindfulness and willingness to work collectively with diverse groups for systems change.