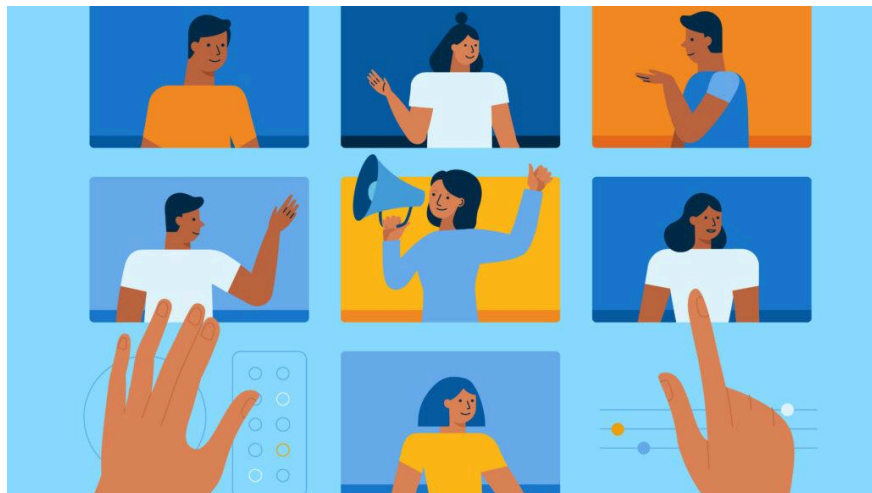


Stronger Together: the Benefits of Joining Nonprofit Networks

From emergency funding to encouragement, nonprofit networks help their members thrive. Here's how to find one that will amplify your work.



By [Laurie Mazur](#)
Contributor



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These days, many nonprofits are facing existential threats — including the loss of funding or tax-exempt status. Many organizations are turning to nonprofit networks for community, shared expertise, and a unified response to these challenges.

Networks bring together people from organizations with diverse skills and perspectives, inspiring creative thinking and sparking opportunities to share resources for maximum impact. They also provide stability, moral support, and financial aid to leaders and organizations at the forefront of social change.

“The Trump administration is using a divide-and-conquer strategy,” says Robin Katcher, founder of [Katcher Consulting](#). Networks offer a way for nonprofits to band together and present a unified front. Nonprofit leaders can find networks by reaching out to peer organizations and donors or by searching databases including [GuideStar](#) or [Charity Navigator](#).

Many networks do not charge membership fees. Others charge on a sliding scale: For example, the [Southeast Climate and Energy Network](#) charges an annual fee of \$50 for organizations with budgets under \$150,000, and \$2,500 for those with budgets over \$5 million.

Here are a few valuable benefits of a nonprofit network.

Tap into members’ expertise and build partnerships.

Often, philanthropic funding allows networks to provide services to members at little or no cost. That’s a boon for leaders like Anthony Diaz, executive director of the [Newark Water Coalition](#).

“I’m so in the trenches,” says Diaz, “that sometimes all I can see is the trench.” But after joining the 190-member [U.S. Climate Action Network](#), Diaz can access technical, legal, and tactical expertise to supercharge his work at the local level.

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“I don’t have to be the expert in everything,” says Diaz, “because there are people in the network who have studied this or worked in these fields, so partnering with them makes our organization stronger.”

Partnerships within networks are a two-way street, which benefits larger, national organizations as much as frontline groups. Diaz’s group is one of few organizations in the U.S. Climate Action Network that serves people directly, providing safe drinking water to those with lead-contaminated service lines. That connection provides invaluable insight into the concerns and needs of people at the community level — a perspective that is often lacking in policy circles.

Many networks provide grant support to their members as well. For example, when the Trump administration cut funding for climate-related work, the U.S. Climate Action Network stepped up with a rapid-response fund that provides small grants to member organizations and leaders. Those grants have been used to pay for rent, disaster assistance, and back-office functions like accounting and legal advice. While grants of \$5,000 may not be enough to support an organization in the long term, they can serve as a critical stopgap until other funding sources can be secured.

Build community around a cause.

Networks cultivate a powerful sense of belonging and shared identity, which combats the isolation and burnout that can plague nonprofit organizations and leaders. For Analyah Schlaeger dos Santos, who serves as environmental-justice youth program director and global climate-justice coordinator for [Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light](#), the U.S. Climate Action Network is a “movement home,” where members can “get grounded and cover each other’s backs and learn from each other.”

“In difficult times, these connections are what sustain and propel the work forward,” says Shamar Bibbins, managing director of the [Kresge Foundation’s Environment Program](#).

CEOs can find peers to serve as sounding boards.

The community offered by networks is especially helpful for executive directors. Leading an organization can be isolating, says Melissa Gavin, CEO of [RE-AMP](#), a network of Midwestern climate groups. “You can’t talk to your staff about everything that’s going on, you can’t always talk to your board about personnel issues, you can’t talk about your angst around fundraising and making your budget.”

People can do almost anything as long as they feel they are not alone.

That’s why RE-AMP launched an executive directors’ peer learning circle a few years back. Participants receive a stipend to hire an [executive coach](#) and participate in monthly group calls. They also are assigned a partner who has confronted similar challenges.

“It keeps people in the movement and keeps people from burning out,” says Gavin. “People can do almost anything as long as they feel they are not alone.”

Access immediate aid during a crisis.

In times of crisis, networks serve as first responders. When Hurricanes Helene and Milton tore through five southern states a year ago, the Southeast Climate and Energy Network leveraged its contacts throughout the region and quickly raised more than \$115,000 for disaster relief.

The network prioritized vulnerable groups that are often overlooked in traditional disaster-recovery efforts, re-granting to partners on the ground to support mutual-aid hubs. In hard-hit areas of western North Carolina, those funds provided hot meals, clean drinking water, and other essential supplies — as well as a mobile micro-grid for emergency power.

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Networks respond to political crises as well. When the first Trump administration sought to withhold green cards from immigrants who might require public benefits, advocates realized this “public charge” rule would discourage immigrant families from using benefits to which they were legally entitled.

In response, the [National Immigration Law Center](#) and the [Center for Law and Social Policy](#) forged [the Protecting Immigrant Families Coalition](#): a network of immigrants' rights and antipoverty organizations. By combining expertise in both realms, the coalition has emerged as a powerful advocate for immigrant families.

Now spanning 44 states, the coalition brings together diverse constituencies: grassroots organizers, policy groups, lawyers, and service providers. Such varied perspectives allow the network to track developments in real time and respond quickly.

“National networks are essential infrastructure and a core part of our grant-making strategy,” says Bibbins of the Kresge Foundation. “They enable our grantees to ideate, collaborate, and push the boundaries of innovation.”

Laurie Mazur is an editor at Island Press, and the author of [Realizing Resilience: Toward a Fairer, Greener Future](#). Her writing has appeared in The New York Times, The Guardian, U.S. News & World Report, The Progressive, and many other publications.