

Course Syllabus
NPT: Nonprofits Today: Understanding the Changing Landscape

Week 1. Introduction to Nonprofits, Nonprofit Management, and the Nonprofit Sector

In Week 1 we will define and discuss the parameters of the nonprofit sector and the way in which it is rapidly changing. We will identify the size and scope of the sector, a wide range of terms and their different meanings, the key differences between nonprofits and for-profit entities, and how managing a nonprofit is different than managing a for-profit business or government agency.

Week 2. How Do Nonprofits Fit Into Our Larger Society

In Week 2 we will look at how nonprofits fit in to our larger society. As new forms of organizations serving the public good evolve and for-profit corporations increasingly communicate their social impact, it is important to articulate what it is that sets nonprofits apart. We will discuss which features of nonprofits complement the role of government and the corporate sector, and why we need a nonprofit sector in the first place. Or do we?

Week 3. The Role of Nonprofits in Politics, the Economy, and Social Change

In Week 3 we will briefly survey the economic and political roles of nonprofits in the U.S. today. Through reading and discussion we will examine the impact of nonprofits as employers, service providers and special interest groups. We will explore the spectrum of political activity that nonprofits can legally undertake in the United States. If you “bring a nonprofit” to this class, you will have the opportunity to assess where your organization stands on this spectrum. Alternately, you can compare and contrast the economic impact of nonprofits in two different states.

Week 4. Current Nonprofit Trends

In Week 4 we will examine major trends driving the nonprofit sector today, including: accountability and transparency, adopting earned income strategies and exploring new forms of social enterprise, advocacy for the sector as a whole, changing approaches to volunteerism, the decline of NPOs as silos and the ascendancy of networks and more. In addition, we will overlay these topics with macro-level issues that are sure to prompt discussion: income inequality, climate change, military conflicts around the world and related topics.

Week 5. Looking Into the Future: The Role of Innovation

In Week 5 we will center on the future of nonprofit organizations and the critical role of innovation in achieving social impact. Using case studies, we will define innovation and explore what authentic innovation looks like. Finally, we will discuss how to develop a culture of innovation to better prepare an organization for the challenges ahead.