

## Develop Your Nonprofit Idea

*It makes sense to start a new organization if:*

- The community, including program participants, volunteers, and the general public, demonstrates strong support for the organization in its preliminary stages
- You (as a group) are effective programmatically and administratively
- You have or will be able to develop the resources necessary to operate and flourish now and into the future
- You have distinctive and extraordinary professional expertise or you own and are willing to share intellectual property for the financial benefit of the organization
- You do not seek ownership of the organization's resources or complete control of the organization's management and operations

*If you are confident that your nonprofit will fly, make sure you...*

1. **Don't replicate existing programs.** Find a way to make your organization distinctive and unique in its' programs and services, population served, and/or methodology.
2. **Educate yourself.** Learn all you can about nonprofit organizations, management, laws and regulations, fundraising, and your program area. You can do this by reading books, attending workshops and seminars, and networking.
3. **Enlist the help of others.** Start talking to people about your idea. Form a Planning Committee composed of community members, people working in your field of interest, and business, law, financial, and human services professionals. Meet regularly to share ideas and map out a start-up plan. Some of these people may continue to serve on your Board of Directors if you decide to incorporate.
4. **Ensure that your commitment is genuine and lasting before going to the next level.** Starting a new organization is an incredibly challenging and time consuming process. You will plant many seeds now that may take months or even years to bloom.

*Before embarking on your new venture, share your vision with others and gather information to ensure that your project is feasible and sustainable. Here are some ideas:*

1. **Research similar programs.** Find out if any other organizations are doing similar work in your area. To do this, you can call your local United Way, do a search on Guidestar.org, or look in local phone or guidebooks. Set up a meeting to learn more about their mission and programs. This will help you understand more about your community, its residents, and the programs and services that are already in place. In addition, there may be a way that you can collaborate together to better serve your common constituents.
2. **Ask the people what they want.** Interview the people who would participate in your activities to see what their needs and desires are. Talk to local small business owners and residents in your neighborhood to introduce your idea and gauge their level of interest.
3. **Seek the advice of professionals.** Talk to a program officer at a local foundation. They are very familiar with the organizations in your community and can provide invaluable insight into unmet needs. Your local legislators or their office managers are also great sources of information. Talk to professionals in your industry and involve them in your planning process.