

Nonprofit Infrastructure Investment Advocacy Group (NIIAG) Policy Agenda - April 2021

The Nonprofit Infrastructure Investment Advocacy Group (NIIAG), chaired by Independent Sector and KABOOM!, supports policies that recognize the essential role of civic and community infrastructure in meeting our public health and economic crisis. NIIAG is comprised of a diverse community of leaders from across the nonprofit sector. It prioritizes investments in and through nonprofit organizations that strengthen civic bonds across the country, put people back to work rebuilding our communities, and provide – at a national scale -- the critical resources and services nonprofits need to accomplish their missions.

NIIAG also prioritizes investments that lift working class, Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, rather than negatively impacting their environment and economy as many infrastructure projects have done in the past. We call upon policymakers to consider and collaborate with these communities in the planning and implementation of infrastructure projects; nonprofits stand ready to support such government processes.

We have organized our priority policy requests into three categories: (1) civic infrastructure; (2) community infrastructure; and (3) critical national infrastructure.

Civic Infrastructure Priority Items

We consider civic infrastructure to be the structure and systems, practices, and norms that knit and hold together the fabric of our communities and our nation, and create the conditions for societal change. Investment into our civic infrastructure is vital to our civil society – the very foundation upon which the nation is built.

1. **Build the capacity and representation of nonprofit institutions** – We call for the creation of a [White House Office on the Nonprofit Sector](#), made permanent through authorizing legislation, that ensures the interests and the expertise of the American nonprofit sector domestically and abroad are fully represented in the policy making process; existing services and programs are streamlined by placing them within one agency; and smaller, community-based organizations have easier access to government support. We also call for expanded government collection and timely dissemination of [disaggregated data](#) about the nonprofit sector, prioritizing data on nonprofit employment.
2. **Strengthen the capacity of the volunteer force in the United States to respond to national crises** – Volunteers are the lifeblood of nonprofits. They provide proactive leadership, deliver essential services, and expand the impact of nonprofit missions. We call for \$250 million in federal funding to: (1) support the creation and launch of a nationally scaled digital platform to connect, mobilize, and support volunteer networks across the nation, particularly those in long-underserved communities, and; (2) to build the internal capacity of nonprofit organizations to effectively develop and engage volunteers. Volunteer drivers provide essential services, particularly during the pandemic, but many struggle to cover out-of-pocket expenses We ask Congress to increase the deduction for volunteer mileage, which has not been updated in over two decades. Currently at \$0.14 per mile, the new rate should be increased to match and indexed against the business rate of \$0.58 per mile. We also ask Congress to allow Medicaid to reimburse volunteer non-medical transportation for no-load travel. Finally, we call on the Bureau of Labor Statistics and AmeriCorps (formerly the Corporation for National and Community Service) to [improve data collection](#) and analysis of volunteerism.
3. **Ensure robust and reliable federal funding for an expanded vision of national service in the U.S.** – National service not only expands the scope and impact of nonprofit work. It often serves as a pipeline to train individuals for careers in the nonprofit sector. We call for consistent, robust funding for AmeriCorps to grow the number of funded positions. We support many of the recommendations made in the Inspired to Serve report

of March 2020, including recommendations to: open service opportunities to people of differing mental and physical abilities; increase compensation, education benefits, and wraparound benefits to make service more accessible to all applicants; support participation by members of low income and underrepresented communities; and collect and track economic and demographic data to monitor and ensure the diversity of the service corps. We support expanding the scope of federally supported national service programs, beginning with a new service year fellowship similar to the one recommended in Inspired 2 Serve and then extending to all AmeriCorps programs. This expansion will enable nonprofit organizations of all types – such as those focused on the arts, the environment, or social justice – to be supported by national service corps members (*also see digital service corps*).

4. **Improve access to, and oversight of, national fundraising by nonprofits** – It is critical, especially in times of crisis, that nonprofits can quickly raise funds from outside their own communities, while still complying with all state regulations. To facilitate this aim, we request a \$3 million investment to create a single online portal that enables nonprofits of all sizes to easily ask for donations in response to a national disaster. Not only will such a tool provide a critical revenue raising opportunity for nonprofits, it will increase compliance with state solicitation laws, provide greater ability for charity regulators to investigate potential cases of wrongdoing or fraud and, in the end, build deeper public trust in the sector.
5. **Improve voter accessibility while maintaining secure elections** – One critical marker of a healthy civic infrastructure is the rate at which its citizens vote. We support policies that help every American safely and easily participate in our democracy, while also bolstering public confidence in the security and legitimacy of our election process. Some of these policies enabled citizens to vote safely during the pandemic, and we ask that they continue in future elections, including early voting, mail-in voting, and same-day voter registration.

Community Infrastructure Priority Items

We consider community infrastructure to be public assets like libraries, recreation centers, schools, museums, parks, and playgrounds that anchor strong, vibrant, resilient communities.

1. **Increase access to affordable childcare for working parents** – During COVID-19, many parents have been forced to leave the workforce due to a lack of affordable childcare. Women – who comprise 66% of the nonprofit workforce – have been disproportionately impacted, in part due to the outsized caregiving burden they carry for their households and communities. For nonprofits to continue to support our communities and build back a strong economy, we need significant investment in childcare infrastructure, including home-based childcare. For example, we call upon Congress to invest \$25 billion through a Child Care Growth and Innovation Fund for states to build a supply of infancy and toddler care in high-need areas, in addition to universal Pre-K, increased tax credits for households that incur childcare or caregiving costs, and ensuring incentives for employers to support childcare also apply to nonprofits. We also ask for increased investment in childcare providers and their workforce, including providing educational opportunities and higher wages.
2. **Rebuild a competitive and equitable workforce** – Employees of nonprofit organizations comprise more than 10% of the nation's workforce, and nonprofit jobs led the way to recovery after the most recent recession. We call for \$100 billion in workforce funding, including funds for registered apprenticeships, worker protection, and community colleges, with a special focus on job training for women, people of color, and those with barriers to employment. These trainings and wraparound services can help dislocated workers gain new skills and find employment in highly sought job sectors, including those that are core to the nonprofit sector, such as caregiving and clean energy. We support further investment in an equitable workforce through funding to HBCUs, Tribal colleges and universities, and other institutions meeting the needs of underserved communities, as well as a robust continuation of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

3. **Invest in culture, arts, and humanities workers and programs** – Culture, arts, and humanities organizations are vital components of the nonprofit sector, are essential contributors to economic development, workforce preparation, tourism, education, global competitiveness, and the wellbeing of the communities they serve, and must be supported by all forms of relief. Congress and the Administration recognized this essential role in the American Rescue Plan and can further leverage these contributions through both dedicated funding and clear eligibility within broader federal initiatives. We support a \$20 billion federal investment in nonprofit cultural organizations and governmental agencies at the federal, state, tribal and local levels, with details available in [“Put Creative Workers To Work,”](#) a 16-action national recovery and equity strategy. We call for substantially increasing the federal investment in the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to support nonprofit, state, tribal, and local governmental and cultural organizations across the country by indexing each of their budgets to at least \$1 per person. We request substantially increased funding for the Administration for Native Americans’ native languages and traditions programs, because the loss of older community members in the past year places native languages in peril without significant action.
4. **Rehabilitate and improve access to community buildings and housing** – Access to affordable, structurally sound housing and community facilities is a key component in effective nonprofit services. In addition, 45% of the nonprofit workforce earns less than \$75,000 per year, and at least a quarter of these employees are housing cost burdened. We call for Congress to invest in improving aging buildings and homes through a \$25 billion investment in the HOME Investment Partnerships Program to support new construction and rehabilitate existing housing stock. We ask Congress to allocate \$213 billion to build and retrofit over two million homes and commercial buildings frequently used for nonprofit services, such as schools, childcare facilities, and veterans’ hospitals. The investment includes building or retrofitting one million affordable housing units and over 500,000 homes for low- and middle income households as well as housing targeting older adults, through the Neighborhood Homes Investment Act. Utilization of tax credits, formula-based funding, grants, and rental assistance projects is needed to further expand access to affordable rental housing for under-resourced communities, including tribal and rural communities. Finally, we call for the elimination of exclusionary zoning and harmful land use policies, like minimum lot sizes and mandatory parking requirements, through innovative new policies like competitive grant programs that incentivize change in local jurisdictions.
5. **Increase investment in community development and resilience** – Nonprofits are at the center of community recovery, development, and resilience, but it is a job that is too big to shoulder alone. Investment of \$24 billion in the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) will provide critical flexible funding for cities, states, and tribal communities to address gaps in housing, infrastructure, and public services in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. We call on Congress to invest \$5 billion in a new Rural Partnership Program to support community and economic development in rural and tribal communities. We support investing \$50 billion to increase resilience in the most essential services, including the electric grid; food systems; urban infrastructure; community health and hospitals; and our roads, rail, and other transportation assets. These dollars should target investments in those communities most vulnerable physically and financially to climate-driven disasters, and to build back to exceed existing codes and standards. Invest \$5 billion in the remediation and redevelopment of Brownfield and Superfund sites in distressed and disadvantaged communities turning idle real property into new hubs of economic growth and job creation. To further support this effort, we support investment in the Economic Development Agency’s Public Works program (while lifting the cap of \$3 million on projects) and in “Main Street” revitalization efforts through HUD and USDA.
6. **Expand access to 211 Health and Human Service Hub** – We call for a \$300 million investment to expand the 211 Health and Human Service helpline to provide one place for nonprofit employees and individual members of our communities to find a range of services

to support their needs during the pandemic crisis and beyond. Similar to 911, callers can dial 211 to reach a trained community resource specialist at one of 200 Community Resource Centers nationwide. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, local 211s are experiencing a 200-400% increase in call volume.

7. **Ensure robust funding for more equitable access to parks and recreation** – We recommend a one-time, historic investment of \$500 million for local parks in any future economic relief or infrastructure package. This investment via the Parks, Jobs, and Equity Act (H.R. 1678) would include 50 percent dedicated funding for low-income communities and 2 percent for Tribal communities, and create 8,000 new jobs. We support H.R. 7264, the 21st Century Conservation Corps for Our Health and Our Jobs Act, which makes emergency changes to the Outdoor Recreation and Learning Program (ORLP). The ORLP provides grants to state or local government agencies (cities, counties, park districts) or federally recognized Indian tribes.

Critical National Infrastructure Priority Items

We consider critical national infrastructure to be core services and assets that nonprofits and others need to fulfill their missions of serving their communities.

1. **Ensure digital access for all** – Distance learning, telemedicine, and spiritual services require accessible and reliable internet services. While many nonprofits are able to convert to virtual operations, the persistent digital divide prevents them from fully serving their communities. We support \$100 billion in federal investment to guarantee all citizens access to affordable high-speed broadband, as proposed by H.R. 1783, the Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act. We support the buildout of broadband infrastructure that prioritizes the “last mile” hardest-to-serve communities as well as funding for the Emergency Connectivity Fund, closing the homework gap, and enhancing digital literacy. Additionally, reinstatement of net neutrality rules could help ensure all individuals and institutions, including nonprofits, have the same level of access to the internet.
2. **Build nonprofits’ technical and skill-based technology capacity** – Systemic investment in building nonprofits’ ability to effectively use technology is needed to ensure all of civil society is accessible in times of increased need. We support the establishment of a Negotiated Indirect Cost Reimbursement Agreement (NICRA)–style rate for government grants to help nonprofits build their digital infrastructure. We also support the creation of a digital service corps that could provide job training in a growing field, while also delivering to nonprofits and government baseline practices for technology security and data management.
3. **Prioritize public and civil society interests in digital infrastructure** – Most digital policy and virtual spaces are currently created by the business sector, but it is critical that products and platforms are also designed to advance the common good. We call for the creation of a quasi-governmental Corporation for Public Software and Digital Infrastructure, or other digital commons to ensure that data collected using government funds can be shared with fellow researchers to advance public understanding. Because nonprofit organizations rely on public trust to best serve their communities, we also support public policies that protect public trust and freedom of association, such as those that help identify and control bot-based content, discourage the use of facial recognition software at protests, and allow for the removal of private information from internet searches.
4. **Upgrade energy efficiency of homes and nonprofit buildings** – As widespread working and learning from home continues for nonprofit employees, donors, and constituents, it becomes increasingly important to ensure households can pay increased energy costs. We support increased federal investment up to \$1 billion in the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program and the Weatherization Assistance Program. Furthermore, a wide range of nonprofits own and maintain property, but they often lack the resources necessary to ensure their facilities are energy efficient or environmentally sustainable. We

call on policymakers to provide financial grants to nonprofits to help make the buildings they own more energy efficient, as proposed by S. 196, the Nonprofit Energy Efficiency Act. Additional energy efficiency incentives or credit programs for businesses or employers also need to be designed to include nonprofit institutions.

5. **Support clean, healthy, and equitable transit** – The pandemic disproportionately impacted communities served by nonprofits, in part, because of a historic lack of attention to the environmental and public health conditions in which they live. Rebuilding after COVID-19 to improve public health and help communities build their physical and economic resilience requires significant investment in cleaner transportation, including public transportation targeting low-income and communities of color. We support significant investment in upgrading public transit for underserved communities and vehicle electrification through a broad range of infrastructure projects and tax incentives, like those included in H.R. 2, the Moving Forward Act. Finally, some past transportation investments divided communities or left out the people most in need of affordable transportation options. We support investing \$20 billion in a new program that will reconnect neighborhoods cut off by historic investments and ensure new projects increase opportunity, advance racial equity and environmental justice, and promote affordable access.
6. **Guarantee safe drinking water** – Nonprofits are not able to improve lives and communities if those we serve are not able to meet their most basic needs, such as clean water. We support an investment of \$45 billion in the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund and Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WINN) grants in order to remove all lead pipes and service lines nationwide. We call for \$56 billion in funding to modernize drinking water and wastewater systems, as well as \$10 billion to help remove dangerous contaminants like PFAS from local water systems.
7. **Invest in Conservation and Environmental Resilience Jobs** – Nonprofits long have been at the forefront of promoting both environmental conservation and civil service. We request policymakers invest \$10 billion in a diverse new Civilian Conservation Corps dedicated to building the environmental infrastructure necessary to support healthy, resilient communities and preserve our nation’s public lands and waters. We also support a \$60 billion investment from the Outdoor Restoration Force Act, which increases funding to state, local, and tribal governments to implement programs and create jobs dedicated to restoring communities and helping them become more resilient in the future.
8. **Ensure environmentally sustainable infrastructure** – We call on policymakers to reinstate National Environmental Policy Act rules requiring federal agencies to assess the cumulative impact of infrastructure projects on climate change. We request explicit language funding environmental and sustainable infrastructure projects for tribal communities, and we support efforts to educate nonprofits about sustainable infrastructure resources.

More information on NIIAG can be found at independentsector.org/civil-society-infrastructure.