



A relentless,
collective
force for good.



Safeguarding New York City's Nonprofit Sector

Forum Summary Report

This summary was compiled by Nonprofit New York and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of any particular program sponsor or participant. Please contact the Nonprofit New York team at advocacy@nonprofitnewyork.org if you have any questions and/or comments about this report or any suggestions for other convenings.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Purpose	1
Process	1
Plenary Session: The Shifting Political and Social Landscape: Implications for New York City's Nonprofit Sector	2
Enhancing Compliance with Federal Law	4
Securing Your Organization's Data	6
Building a Resilient Organizational Culture	8
Conclusion	10
Sponsoring Organization: Lawyers Alliance for New York	11
Sponsoring Organization: New York Lawyers for the Public Interest	11
Sponsoring Organization: Nonprofit New York	12
Sponsoring Organization: Philanthropy New York	12



Introduction

On January 30, 2025, [Lawyers Alliance for New York](#), [New York Lawyers for the Public Interest](#), [Nonprofit New York](#), and [Philanthropy New York](#) convened over 200 participants, including senior level individuals at foundations, arts organizations, housing advocates, representatives of the LGBTQIA+ community, executive level staff and board members, HR and operations staff for the *Safeguarding New York City's Nonprofit Sector* forum, a swift response to a dramatically changed and immediately more challenging political landscape.

Purpose

The *Safeguarding New York City's Nonprofit Sector* forum aimed to heighten awareness of the challenges and threats facing the nonprofit sector at the programmatic and policy levels, and to:

- Strategize and surface emergent themes in a collaborative space;
- Co-create solutions and future collective and institutional actions;
- Equip organizations with resources and tools to secure and protect themselves internally;
- Prepare the NYC nonprofit organizations to better advocate for the critical and essential work of the nonprofit sector in New York City, in partnership with business entities, community and research organizations, and city and state government.

Process

The forum featured an opening plenary session followed by three concurrent workshops addressing urgent sector-wide concerns. To foster open dialogue, forum co-sponsors opted for live capture notes rather than recording or streaming the event. All collected information was carefully anonymized. A high-level report out of key takeaways and emergent themes was shared with the attendees at the closing.

The opening plenary and concurrent workshop sessions identified emerging themes, key takeaways, pressing concerns, and actionable solutions. These insights provide a launchpad for sustained dialogue, equipping the sector to strategize and mobilize in response to a rapidly evolving and challenging environment. A summary for each session including a synopsis of the topic; panelists and moderators; key takeaways and emerging themes; and actions steps appears on the following pages.

Plenary Session: The Shifting Political and Social Landscape: Implications for New York City's Nonprofit Sector

Experts in law, philanthropy, and government assessed the emerging policy threats and discussed their impact on New York City's nonprofit sector. In the plenary session, panelists explored frameworks with which nonprofit organizations can effectively navigate the shifting political and social landscape and ensure consistent and safe service delivery.

Panelists

Moderator: Jacqueline M. Ebanks, *Interim President and CEO*, Nonprofit New York

McGregor Smyth, *Executive Director*, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

Marlon Williams, *Vice President of Public Policy and Collaboration*, Philanthropy New York

Francesco Brindisi, *Executive Deputy Comptroller for Budget and Finance*, New York City Office of the Comptroller

Jennifer Ching, *Executive Director*, North Star Fund

Key Takeaways and Emergent Themes

This attack on the non-profit sector is a recognition of the important role the sector plays in community building.

Remain grounded and do not let our energies be scattered: Stand in our power. Stand united. Stand in fellowship.

As part of risk and security management, develop internal policies and protocols and role-playing scenarios for every level of staff.

Find alternative sources of funding and get your money now!

Do not fall into anticipatory obedience.

Audience Questions

Question	Responses	Action Steps
Are we as a sector aligned on the threats we face? What are the risks?	The flurry of executive orders and proclamations is a direct attempt to chill and destabilize the nonprofit sector and civil service. Overlapping personal and sectoral threats have precipitated a silence by institutions that should be in the vanguard.	New York City should be leading a vocal, strategic and powerful charge. This is a time to have difficult conversations in leadership spaces.
The Comptroller's Office has done several analyses about the impact of federal budget cuts on NYC, what do these reports tell us?	All disbursements have already ceased, particularly large capital and construction projects. Medicaid and the Department of Education are particularly vulnerable. NYC and the nonprofit sector do not have endowments. We are particularly vulnerable because of disinvestment in NYC spaces over years.	More transparency is needed in institutional as well as City budgets. The challenge is to have an organizational lens as opposed to the mission-driven lens that has prevailed in the past.
Where is the First Amendment balance between individuals and leadership speaking out and protecting and safeguarding the organization?	The First Amendment gives you a right to speak but does not necessarily protect you from all consequences, such as government choices about future discretionary funding.	Every organization should be talking to counsel and doing a comprehensive organizational risk assessment and putting updated protocols in place. The risk is both institutional and personal. Of critical importance is a review of senior leadership compliance and a review of insurance, security and liability protocols.

Enhancing Compliance with Federal Law

The incoming administration has discussed plans for intensive oversight and investigation of organizations perceived as opposing its policies or supporting certain communities. This workshop discussed strategies for enhancing compliance with federal tax-exempt status and other federal laws, and preparing for federal funding restrictions and cuts. Participants left with practical ideas for managing risk in this time of change.

Panelists

Meg Barnette, *Senior Consultant, CFAR*

Laura Abel, *Interim Legal Director, Lawyers Alliance for New York*

Eileen Torres, *President and CEO, BronxWorks*

Key Takeaways and Emergent Themes

Funders need to provide legal defense funds so that organizations can do a proper risk assessment.

Review contracts - city, state, and federal. If there is no attorney on staff, utilize your board or the Lawyers Alliance for New York or New York Lawyers for the Public Interest.

Ensure that all publicly available statements - such as 990s, and lobbying certifications are in alignment with each other and that someone can speak to them. Inconsistencies can prove problematic. Talk to your external auditors.

Find coalitions, membership organizations, and your community for information sharing and leaning on each other. Separate rumor from reality.

If you are more privileged and can speak out without repercussions - do so in allyship for the organizations, individuals, and communities at higher risk.

Insurance coverage - Directors and Officers Liability Insurance should cover your entire organization - talk to your broker.

Audience Questions

Question	Responses	Action Steps
Is there discussion of NYC or NYS offering protection or support nonprofits subjected to legal action by federal officials?	Learn to navigate the loopholes and work with nonprofit that have always been targets of city, state and federal administrations, e.g. immigration, drug policy.	Prepare for the worst-case scenario without living in a place of fear. Utilize Lawyers Alliance for New York, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest and other pro bono counsel. Be aware of the level of exposure of leadership, staff, and members of the community. Closely monitor and be deliberate about who is visible on your website, and what is happening on your social media channels.
Groups that are independent and not part of local or federal government might go after organizations for non-compliance and do a deep dive into publicly available organizational records. What is the best way to handle such a scenario?	Scrutinize fee for service work contracts; DEI practices; conflict of interest policies.	Do a comprehensive review of all your sources of public information, including 990s. Pay close attention to recent tax filings and annual disclosures of conflicts.

Securing Your Organization's Data

In today's digital age, many nonprofits collect and store valuable and sensitive information about their client base and stakeholders. While such information serves to advance the sector's work, nonprofits are responsible for protecting this data in the face of persistent threats. It is more important now than ever before for nonprofits to uphold data privacy and manage sensitive organizational and client data. This workshop discussed ways to prioritize data privacy, including reviewing organizational agreements and information-sharing obligations to navigate potential government inquiries.

Panelists

Moderator: Amarah Sedreddine, *Board Member and Chair, Government Relations Council, Nonprofit New York; Partner, Sedreddine & Whoriskey, LLP*

Melissa Faragasso, *Associate, Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP*

Matt Mitchell, *CEO, Safety Sync Group*

Monica Tulchinsky, *Senior Director of Programs, New York Immigration Coalition*

Rosanna Eugenio, *Legal Director, New York Immigration Coalition*

Key Takeaways and Emergent Themes

Minimize the data you collect.

Review the data contracts and privacy notices for your organizations and any third party services you use.

Create a document and data retention policy and train your staff.

Encrypt your data.

Be an informed consumer. Look into the tools and services your organization uses.

Audience Questions

Question	Responses	Action Steps
Who currently has a right to our data and what facet of it do they have a right to?	Whoever has keys to your data, has a right to your data. Not everyone should have the same access. Sensitive personal data includes biometric, financial, medical and health information. Case management warrants high protection and, under the law, needs consent before collecting.	Categorize and minimize data. Think about what is being collected and why it's necessary. The less data you have, the less risk exposure. Anonymize data wherever possible. Do a contract review to ascertain what data provisions are imposed. Look at City, State, Federal and Private contracts, and contracts from third parties that you get data from or share data with.
What are suggested platforms/technologies that can help secure data?		Relay all phone calls through an encrypted server to protect your IP and location. Turn on encryption for iPhone and iCloud. Disable Gemini as it enables human reviewers to have complete access to your system.

Building a Resilient Organizational Culture

Being a leader at a nonprofit organization requires tackling the mission at hand while supporting staff, volunteers, and community members who will experience heightened challenges under new policies and conditions. This workshop discussed how new stressors may manifest at the personal and organizational levels. Participants also explored ways in which organizations can navigate changes and how leaders can create and maintain healthy working conditions.

Panelists

Jacqueline M. Ebanks, Moderator, *Interim President and CEO*, Nonprofit New York

Farra Trompeter, *Co-Director*, Worker-Owner, Big Duck

Jorge Arteaga, *Vice President of Movement Building*, Right to Be

Jacqueline Mondros, *Executive Director*, Worker-Owner, Social Workers for Justice

Luisa Lopez, *President and CEO*, Latino Social Work Coalition and Scholarship Fund

Key Takeaways and Emergent Themes

Resilience comes from adaptability and collective action.

Sustaining staff well-being is essential for long-term success. Autonomy and flexibility are key for ensuring staff safety and nimbleness.

Strong communication and leadership build organizational strength.

Organizations should create restorative and joyful spaces for staff, constituents, etc. to learn skills and celebrate the small wins.

Resilience is not just endurance. It requires proactive planning, flexibility, and inclusive decision-making.

“Moving at the speed of trust”—organizations should communicate transparently but also slow down when necessary to build engagement.

Audience Questions

Question	Responses	Action Steps
How can organizations navigate changes as it relates to their communications and engagement with their various audiences – staff, board, program participants, partners, volunteers, donors, and finders, etc.?	Flexibility and over communicating is key.	Have as many channels as possible for communication and do not silo conversations.
In response to “anticipatory obedience.” there is “anticipatory burnout.” How do we combat that?	We ask people not only to do their jobs, but to care about doing their jobs.	<p>HERO (from Community Resource Exchange)</p> <p>Hope Efficacy: people need the tools to see and understand how they have impact. Resolve: resilience is important for adaptability but resolve asks us to lean into innovation, to create something different and new. Optimism: we can have hope but it doesn't necessarily lead us into a positive space. Optimism can help us move into the light.</p>

Conclusion

The *Safeguarding New York City's Nonprofit Sector* forum provided a critical space to engage with the urgent and complex realities facing the nonprofit sector today. This was not a space for finger-pointing or partisan critique, instead, it was a call to action — urging nonprofit leaders to build and sustain momentum, refine advocacy strategies, and push toward innovative, actionable solutions.

Even as the sector faces new and unprecedented obstacles, it must remain committed to its core mission: addressing deeply interconnected social issues with broad, inclusive, intersectional, and forward-thinking approaches. Now more than ever, the mandate is to move forward—strategizing, advocating, and expanding the space for solutions that will ensure the sector's resilience and impact.



Lawyers Alliance for New York is the leading provider of business and transactional legal services for nonprofit organizations and social enterprises that are improving the quality of life in New York City neighborhoods. Our network of pro bono lawyers from law firms and corporations and staff of experienced attorneys collaborate to deliver expert corporate, tax, real estate, employment, intellectual property, and other legal services to community organizations. By connecting lawyers, nonprofits, and communities, Lawyers Alliance for New York helps organizations to provide housing, stimulate economic opportunity, improve urban health and education, promote community arts, and operate and advocate for vital programs that benefit low-income New Yorkers of all ages.

For more information visit
lawyersalliance.org



Founded nearly 50 years ago, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) pursues equality and justice for all New Yorkers. Our work activates the power of New York communities as they lead the fight to make equal justice a reality. We strive to create equal access to healthcare, achieve equality of opportunity and self-determination for people with disabilities, ensure immigrant opportunity, strengthen local non-profits, and secure environmental justice for low-income communities of color. Guided by community priorities, NYLPI files lawsuits, organizes, seeks policy reform, informs and educates the public, creates pro bono partnerships, and builds the capacity of local nonprofits to serve our communities. Through workshops, trainings for nonprofit leaders, legal counseling, and our Nonprofit Toolkit publications, NYLPI's Pro Bono Clearinghouse is at the forefront of helping nonprofits maximize their performance and their impact.

For more information visit
nylpi.org

NONPROFIT NEW YORK

A relentless,
collective
force for good.

For 40 years, Nonprofit New York has been building a powerful nonprofit community, engaging, on average, more than 3,000 unique organizations. We can do more good when we do it together. Nonprofit New York champions and strengthens nonprofits through capacity building and advocacy to cultivate a unified, just, and powerful sector. We envision a world where nonprofits have the tools and support they need to be effective, just, and sustainable, and act in solidarity with one another across differences in size, budget, and mission to be a relentless collective force for good. Nonprofit New York members gain access to essential resources, training, and advocacy efforts to empower your organization.

For more information visit
nonprofitnewyork.org



philanthropy
new york

A Regional Association of Grantmakers with Global Impact

Philanthropy New York is a trusted community of grantmaking organizations that develops forward-thinking guidance and programming to address the unique challenges of philanthropy and convenes funders to strengthen ties across the sector. Philanthropy plays a vital role in the endeavor to build an equitable, sustainable and democratic society. To serve the public good thoughtfully and strategically, philanthropic leaders need a trusted community in which they can challenge and advance their knowledge and practices. We are a convener and a connector: we bring together funders from within and across sectors to form networks, develop and share knowledge and nurture crucial skills to make the work of each grantmaker - and the sector as a whole - more meaningful and more effective.

For more information visit
philanthropynewyork.org