



Montana Nonprofit Association

---

# MNA NONPROFIT ROUNDTABLES

BUILDING CONNECTION BETWEEN NONPROFIT LEADERS AND MONTANA LEGISLATORS

MNA convened three roundtables between August and October 2024, bringing together representatives from the nonprofit sector and area state legislators. These events were an opportunity for legislators to learn more about the scope and impact of the nonprofit sector. The roundtables were also an opportunity to build relationships between state legislators and nonprofits, and to discuss the priorities of the nonprofit sector ahead of the 2025 legislative session.

The roundtables took place in Kalispell, Billings, and Great Falls. A total of 22 select nonprofits participated in the roundtables, representing sub-sector areas such as childcare, youth development, arts and humanities, housing and homelessness, conservation, food assistance, economic development, financial literacy, education, senior services, and health research. A total of nine legislators participated in the roundtables, including eight Republicans and one Democrat.

During the events, the participating nonprofits discussed their work in the community, highlighted major challenges impacting their ability to carry out their missions, and to shared messages with legislators. Additionally, the roundtables provided space for open conversation and dialogue. Several common themes emerged:

## Housing

- Housing was a central challenge raised in all three communities. The lack of affordable housing impacts the nonprofit workforce, as well as the missions of many nonprofits. People are leaving communities when they cannot find affordable housing, diminishing not only the workforce but the fabric of a community. Nonprofits working in human services are serving a growing number of households struggling to afford basic necessities due to the rising cost of housing. The lack of affordable housing is also contributing to increasing rates of homelessness, with one nonprofit noting that they are seeing more individuals and families experiencing homelessness in their community than ever before.

## Childcare

- The importance of access to childcare was also a central theme, impacting the nonprofit workforce, families served by nonprofits, and communities as a whole. Nonprofits discussed the significant gaps in access to affordable and quality care within their communities. Nonprofits working in childcare also noted the shifting environment for childcare support in Montana as state contracts have evolved and those providing services are changing.

mna@mtnonprofit.org  
406.449.3717  
mtnonprofit.org

7 W 6th Ave, Suite 610  
PO Box 1744  
Helena, MT 59624

**TOGETHER** we are a force for good.



## Healthcare and the importance of Montana's Medicaid program

- The importance of protecting and strengthening access to healthcare was raised by nonprofits working in food security, housing, youth development, and more, demonstrating the intersection of health and many other issues facing Montana communities. Nonprofits recognized the foundational role of Medicaid expansion in improving access to preventative care, treatment for chronic conditions, and behavioral health services, as well as the irreversible harm that would result from losing this critical program.

## Support for the arts

- Many nonprofits raised concerns over declining public investment in the arts and humanities, particularly in public education. Nonprofits emphasized the essential role the arts play in fostering creativity, empathy, and connection, and raised questions about the harmful long-term effects of declining access to music and arts programs in schools.

## Funding challenges for nonprofits

- Many nonprofits are experiencing a shifting funding landscape, with declines in small and mid-side donors and an increasing reliance on a smaller number of large donors. Additionally, nonprofits noted how the availability of philanthropic support may be unpredictable and varies widely across nonprofit sub-sectors. Numerous nonprofits highlighted the importance of working in partnership with the state government to provide programs and services, along with the uncertainty and disruption that comes with changes to state contract structures or awards.

Legislators gained valuable insights on the issues impacting their communities, asking questions and participating in conversations. Legislators shared insights on how nonprofits can communicate effectively during the legislative session, the importance of building relationships outside of session, and considerations for messaging and approach when bringing issues to the legislature. Legislators also urged continued input from all nonprofits, including those working in housing, childcare, and other issues that will be at the forefront during the upcoming session.

The roundtables provided an important opportunity for nonprofits and legislators to come together, learn, and build relationships. They spurred new connections and important conversations on meeting local needs and building strong communities. MNA looks forward to continuing to convene spaces for connection and partnership between Montana's policymakers and nonprofit sector.

---

*For more information, contact Lorianne Burhop, Policy Director, at [lburhop@mtnonprofit.org](mailto:lburhop@mtnonprofit.org).*

[mna@mtnonprofit.org](mailto:mna@mtnonprofit.org)  
406.449.3717  
[mtnonprofit.org](http://mtnonprofit.org)

7 W 6th Ave, Suite 610  
PO Box 1744  
Helena, MT 59624

**TOGETHER** we are a force for good.