



# SOCIAL IMPACT STAFF RETENTION 2025

## Findings from the second survey on nonprofit staff satisfaction

First launched in 2024, the Social Impact Staff Retention project collects data on nonprofit worker engagement.

Respondents in the United States are asked whether they are seeking new jobs (or will be over the next year), whether they are not, and the reasons why.

This second annual survey delves into key areas such as job search intentions, tenure, and the scope of work, while also exploring whether professionals plan to remain within the nonprofit field or seek opportunities elsewhere.

To deepen the research, survey findings were shared with nonprofit CEOs and other decision-makers for their reflections. Their insights shed light on sector challenges and potential solutions for staff retention. This report features feedback from these leaders, offering valuable perspectives on key trends and strategies to strengthen retention efforts.

April 2025



## Authors' Note

*We release SISR 2025 amidst a deeply challenging socio-political and economic moment in the social sector. During our careers we have seen **unprecedented** (aren't you tired of that phrase?) times before. However, to both of us, this is a pace—and frequency—which feels at once uncharted and paralyzing.*

*Yet, despite these obstacles, we believe in the power of data.*

*Even in the most difficult of times, nonprofits need access to robust, actionable information to make informed decisions. The challenges uncovered in this report preceded the current moment, and, left unmitigated, may follow them as well.*

*Nonprofit staff are the lifeblood of our sector. In the United States, that's nearly 13 million of you. We hope this report plays a small part in driving meaningful change—for each and every one of you and those you serve.*

— Michelle Flores Vryn & Evan Wildstein

# SOCIAL IMPACT STAFF RETENTION 2025

Nonprofit employees in the U.S. were asked about job satisfaction. **Here's what we uncovered...**

**7 in 10**

**will look for, or consider, a new job this year**



### **Why are they looking to leave?**

Too much responsibility, not enough support (59%)

No obvious or clear growth opportunities (54%)

Unsupportive management and leadership (52%)



### **Not everyone's looking... here's why**

Hybrid or remote work flexibility (78%)

Strong alignment with the mission (74%)

Good or encouraging work environment (71%)

### **Fields with highest potential exits**



Arts and culture (92%)

Social and Human services (71%)

Health care (66%)

# KEY FINDINGS

## Nonprofiteers are on the hunt for new jobs, still.

The vast majority of nonprofit employees (67%) plan to seek their next job in 2025. While a slightly lower figure than in 2024 (74%), both years' data suggest high potential departures in all corners of nonprofit life. In both years, social sector staff were looking at a higher rate than all-industry averages—for 2025, estimates of 48% and 56% of all workers are looking, down from 65% in 2024. While the overall job market may appear to be cooling, it's concerning to see how nonprofits fare across the whole of the workforce.

### What we heard from respondents

“One of the biggest challenges surrounds the old adage 'we've always done it that way.' This is most common in older nonprofits where the C-suite team has 20-30 year tenures.

*These seasoned execs are stuck in old ways rather than embracing newer strategies and technologies. This will continue to drive away younger (45 and under) nonprofiteers.”*

### Where to focus

- Across all industries, including nonprofits, employees say **hope** is their most primary need. “[H]ope is the belief that the future will be better than the present and that people feel empowered to make it so. If a leader does not create a sense of hope and help people see the way forward, chances are, no one else will either.” ([Gallup](#))
- Determine your level of organizational slack. Engage in discussions with team members to pinpoint opportunities for task redistribution and introduce flexible time for innovation.

# KEY FINDINGS

## Who is most at risk?

A staggering 92% of nonprofiteers in arts and culture report they are seeking new jobs, outpacing all other nonprofit sectors and mirroring last year's findings (93%). Other industries with high projected employee departures include social/human services (71%), health care (66%), and advocacy (60%). As in 2024, four key job categories show the highest likelihood of turnover over the next year: marketing (81%), programs (71%), fundraising (67%), and administration/operations (64%).

The data also suggest systemic challenges for the entire sector. Nearly one-quarter (24%) of all respondents say they are rarely, if ever, fulfilled by their work. Of those looking to leave their current roles, only 32% plan to definitively stay in the nonprofit field—a drop from 35% in 2024. The remaining 68% expressed uncertainty or a desire to exit the sector altogether.

### What we heard from respondents

“*Our arts sector needs a shift in mentality. We were finally getting to a place of talking about quality of work-life, then, this changing socio-political landscape sent us quickly moving backwards.*

*I wonder, in this new reality, if our cultural organizations are feeling a 'fear of being loud' right now.”*

### Where to focus

- Bosses, talk with direct reports and teams about incorporating meaningful, fulfilling work into their routine. Focusing 20 percent of time this way—one day per week—will stave off burnout *and* grow results. Companies like 3M and Google have done this, leading to widely used innovations like Gmail, Google Translate, and more.

Encourage colleagues to join new projects outside their expertise or lead fresh initiatives the nonprofit has not attempted.

# KEY FINDINGS

## A delicate balance: flexibility, support, and growth.

For the second year in a row, remote/hybrid flexibility is the top reason employees stay in their jobs—78% in 2025, 82% in 2024. As return-to-office mandates gain traction, including a recent [presidential order](#), nonprofits have an opportunity: if higher pay isn't feasible, flexibility is a powerful retention tool.

Other top reasons employees are staying: mission alignment\* (74%), a supportive work environment (71%), and adequate pay/benefits (63%).

The leading reason nonprofits seek new jobs remains “too much responsibility, not enough support” (59% in 2025, 58% in 2024) underscoring ongoing workload equity issues. Other factors: lack of growth opportunities (54%), poor management (52%), and inadequate pay/benefits (50%).

\* This response was a new addition for 2025

### What we heard from respondents

“I love my organization and the work, but I'm stretched too thin with too few resources to be successful. I'm incredibly burnt out and lacking in creativity.”

“In my last organization, the CEO was insecure and took any conversation about 'growth' as a threat to their leadership. As such, none of us could grow... so most of us left.”

### Where to focus

- Unsure how to begin talking about remote/hybrid work? [Start at the beginning](#).
- AI (like meeting transcript [summarizers](#)) and volunteer platforms like [Catchafire](#) can help nonprofits streamline tasks, reduce staff workload, and more.
- Have staff complete [an exercise](#) to understand their motivations. Also, ask them what job(s) they're interested in; then work together to build the necessary skills to be ready for that job.

# KEY FINDINGS

## Compensation improvements... underway?

In 2025, half of respondents (50%) said their compensation and benefits motivated them to seek new jobs, compared to 57% in 2024. This drop might suggest organizations are making efforts—or being perceived as doing so—to improve their competitiveness. These changes could help address workforce sustainability and support long-term viability.

### What we heard from respondents

“We considered increasing our salaries to match the proposed federal minimum increase in 2023. However, when those increases did not happen, we decided to match our salaries to local cost-of-living minimums instead. Staff were appreciative we at least tried something.”

“Love my job, love my small nonprofit, love the people and flexibility. I also have three children who are not school-aged, and the cost of staying at my job and childcare means I need to seek higher compensation.”

### Where to focus

- Optimize costs by shifting print materials to digital, cutting unused services, seeking nonprofit discounts, and reconsidering free swag as an expense-saver.
- If your organization is small enough where HR or administrative staff functions are not feasible—or would be a big strain on the budget—consider partnering with a professional employer organization like ADP or Insperity.
- If you have a physical space you cannot leave, try to lease (or sub-lease) some of it to other organizations for a reasonable fee. If you have staff with knowledge others will pay for, offer their expertise to other organizations in a fee-for-service model.

# FEEDBACK FROM KEY DECISION-MAKERS

Sharing the 2025 results with nonprofit CEOs and other decision-makers sparked discussions on staff retention, offering valuable leadership perspectives on sector-wide challenges and solutions. These conversations provide insight into how leaders are addressing retention and working toward more sustainable workplaces for their staff.

## What we heard from CEOs and leaders

“If the people on your payroll qualify for the services you provide, that means something needs to be restructured because we're not paying people appropriately—or even a living wage.”

“The perception that nonprofit work is somehow 'less valuable' than other work has got to change. It doesn't serve the sector, the community, or the world.”

“Nonprofits need to start thinking about succession planning. If you underpay staff, you set yourself up for failure. You might save a few dollars now, but eventually, you'll have to raise salaries—or replace people at a higher cost.”

“We need to ask ourselves—are we acting in a scarcity mindset? If we are, we're never going to solve retention issues.”

# ABOUT SISR 2025

In the fall of 2024, working through social networks and directly with nonprofit organizations and their employees, the Social Impact Staff Retention (SISR) survey was administered online. Responses were collected from a random sample of nonprofiteers across the United States (n=304). SISR participants were CEO/founders, IT professionals, fundraisers, marketers, and beyond—no one group held a majority. Responses came from a range of experiences as well, from fewer than 5 years working in nonprofits to more than 30. The survey collection was kept anonymous to optimize results.

The inaugural SISR survey findings (2024) are [available here](#).

## ABOUT THE PROJECT LEADS

### MICHELLE FLORES VRYN, CFRE

Michelle brings 16+ years of nonprofit experience to the table. Throughout her career, Michelle has raised funds for causes close to her heart including climate change, higher education, and civic engagement. Her expertise ranges from major gifts and institutional giving to social media engagement and brand storytelling. Michelle considers herself a lifelong learner and community-builder across sectors. She is passionate about the future of fundraising and how we can seamlessly integrate marketing and development. Additionally, Michelle actively promotes community-centric fundraising (CCF).

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### EVAN WILDSTEIN

Concerned with the health of the social sector, Evan has spent over two decades building sustainable nonprofit organizations through fundraising, programs, and operations—from the inside. His book, *The Nonprofiteer's Fundraising Field Guide*, and SISR are small ways he works to improve the well-being of nonprofiteers everywhere.

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