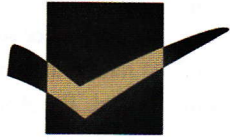


# Service Measured by Highest Standards

Standards  
for  
**excellence**  
Replication Partner



One of only nine statewide associations to partner in the national Standards for Excellence® for nonprofits, the Alabama Association of Nonprofits has set the goal of Alabama having the most trained and accredited nonprofits in the nation by 2014.

By John Stone, President & CEO, Alabama Association of Nonprofits

**ALABAMA'S NONPROFIT SECTOR** has been buffeted in recent years by the nation's economic downturn. Philanthropic contributions are increasingly limited, while client needs—particularly after recent disasters including the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and the devastating tornadoes of April 27—continue to skyrocket. Trying to do more with less has not become a temporary mantra for nonprofits, but a new way of operating for the long term.

Challenging times, though, often lead to innovative solutions. With donors looking for increased return on investment and nonprofits trying to set themselves and their missions apart from the other 22,000 tax-exempt entities statewide, a paradigm shift in Alabama began to occur in early 2010, led by the Alabama Association of Nonprofits.

More than 15 years ago, three national nonprofit leadership organizations recognized that tax-exempt organizations and donors alike were calling for greater accountability and partnership when it came to increasing organizational capacity and donor confidence. Led by the Maryland Association of Nonprofits and with funding from the Carnegie Corp. of New York and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, nonprofit leaders from around the nation crafted the Standards for Excellence®. An

Ethics and Accountability Code for the Nonprofit Sector.

Standards for Excellence encourages nonprofits to adhere to eight guiding principles, including fiscal and legal accountability, governance best practices and ethics in fundraising and public policy engagement. These areas have remained the core tenets of the Code since 1996.

What we saw in the mid-1990s with the creation of Standards is closely akin to America's perception of nonprofits even today. Americans want to give their dollars to organizations that are stable with well-defined missions and an open-book mentality when it comes to transparency.

Nationally recognized governance, leadership and strategy expert Allison Black-Cornelius saw the early needs for the creation and adoption of a recognized set of standards following well-known nonprofit scandals nationwide. Principal of Alabama-based Blackfish Strategies, Cornelius has trained more than 700 nonprofit boards and raised more than \$30 million for charities during her consulting career.

"Events of the past decade have really shaken the public's confidence in the work of nonprofit organizations," says Cornelius. "Assuring the public that we're publicly accountable and fully transparent is paramount, but it often goes against what's most attractive about serving the sector –

our mission. Organizations that voluntarily submit to the Standards recognition process give their board members and management a competitive edge in balancing these roles."

Trying to sift through even just the 22,000 nonprofits in Alabama alone to make wise giving choices is highly difficult though for the public. The Standards for Excellence code gives donors an immediate sense of a nonprofit's commitment to excelling in all areas of acumen typically associated with the corporate community. The need for strong financial practices, performance measurement review and a clear-cut strategic direction is no different in the nonprofit sector.

Helping donors identify responsibly governed nonprofits and giving these organizations the tools to succeed led the Association to appeal to the national accrediting body to bring Standards for Excellence to Alabama in 2010. Now one of only nine replication partners in America, the Association is delivering professional development courses consisting of 16 hours of immersion training to nonprofits statewide. Those completing this training or who have already demonstrated readiness can apply for three-year accreditation by the Standards for Excellence Institute. Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange endorsed Alabama's participation in the