

Standards for Excellence training program earlier this year.

The first Institute course of more than 40 nonprofit organizations completed Institute training in October and began preparing for accreditation submission and review. Human service, arts and cultural, health care and education-focused nonprofits were included. Suzanne Durham, longtime CEO of Birmingham-based YWCA of Central Alabama, is currently working at the board and staff level to seek national accreditation.

"We've recently concluded significant program expansion and a \$15 million capital campaign, both of which could be considered outwardly focused," says Durham. "Over the next couple of years, though, we are going to be more inwardly focused on fine tuning our policies and procedures to ensure we're strategically aligned for long-term sustainability. Having a process like Standards is going to serve as a valuable

template." dards emphasizes best practices and the difference great governance at both the board and staff level can make in achieving the organization's mission."

Administrator Andy Wynne of Mobile's St. Mary's Home understands the impact of standards-related requirements for nonprofits. Wynne co-founded the South Alabama Nonprofit Coalition, a peer group of leading nonprofits in the Mobile area formed after the Nonprofit Congresses of 2006 and 2008. The Coalition works with nonprofits to incorporate standards developed during the Congress and by the Panel on the Nonprofit Sector.

"Putting concrete standards in place assists our community in addressing changing governmental regulations, perceptions of abuse and the ever changing definition of 'charity,'" says Wynne. "The Coalition was formed to provide a clear and concise voice for all nonprofits at the local, state and national levels and works closely with

get limitations of Alabama nonprofits and to encourage Alabama to have the most trained and accredited nonprofits in the nation by 2014.

Achieving this goal will have to come with the support of Alabama's philanthropic community. While the organizational benefits of the adoption of national standards will ensure management and governance sustainability, using the accreditation to attract new dollars is the ultimate goal. The Association is currently working with corporate, community and private foundations to recognize Standards as a benchmark for success.

Alabama Power Multicultural Markets Coordinator and Association Chairman Teresa Zúñiga Odom is playing a lead role in advocating for this recognition, even with the economic downturn and limited funding by corporate benefactors.

"Companies are looking closely at nonprofits who are demonstrating a commitment to using philanthropic dollars to strengthen their long-term sustainability now more than ever before," says Odom. "I think organizations committing themselves to this movement will be benchmarks for innovation and stronger funder consideration in the coming years."

Sue McInnish, a 28-year nonprofit veteran and foundation leader, long advocated adoption of a unified set of nonprofit principles in Alabama. McInnish has served as executive director of the Alabama Civil Justice Foundation for the past 18 years, during which time she has led the foundation to award nearly \$9 million in grants to nonprofits. McInnish says that, while funding resources are becoming increasingly limited, that doesn't mean nonprofits should be any less vigilant about their practices.

"Foundations and donors are requiring increasingly higher standards when it comes to accounting for the charitable dollars they give to nonprofits," says McInnish. "The Standards curriculum shows that nonprofits are willing to go beyond the norm to seek the highest standards of good governance and ethics, just as companies and elected officials are being asked to do."

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Durham's board of directors recently completed its own Standards training initiative, led by Standards Chief Operating Officer Justin Pollock from Baltimore, Md.

YWCA board member and Association Vice Chairman Shannon Lisenby also believes Standards for Excellence is a vehicle for elevating nonprofit sustainability for Alabama's sector.

"Standards provides a terrific opportunity for nonprofits with a desire to affect systemic change," says Lisenby, a partner with Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP and a graduate of Harvard Business School's Governing for Nonprofit Excellence program. "Like the goals of the YWCA, nonprofits can use Standards to increase the efficiency of their work. Stan-

the Association to promote core standards to more than 1,800 nonprofits in Mobile and Baldwin Counties."

"One of the real benefits of the Standards program is how it really bolsters smaller nonprofits to have more community impact," says Amy Coates Madsen, program director for National Standards for Excellence. "It gives them a turnkey model for assessing their management and governance that oftentimes is out of reach due to budgets or staff size. They are craving this type of tool as they work to set themselves apart in the eyes of funders with increasingly competitive dollars."

The cost for organizations in Alabama to complete the 16-hour institute is \$195 per organizational representative. The fee is intentionally affordable due to the bud-