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February 9, 2021

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Big Bend Residents Underestimate Economic Impact of Local Nonprofits, New Survey Finds

Only 1 in 5 correctly identified nonprofits' \$3B contribution to local economy

TALLAHASSEE – Despite its substantial contribution to our local economy, most residents of Florida's Big Bend don't know the considerable size and scope of the region's nonprofit sector. That's a key finding from a local survey released today by nonprofit leaders from the Institute for Nonprofit Innovation and Excellence (INIE), Council On Culture & Arts (COCA), and United Partners For Human Services (UPHS).

Conducted by Sachs Media, the public survey was shared during a virtual town hall by the three nonprofit groups earlier today. It revealed a greater need to educate Big Bend residents and leaders about the true extent and impact of the nonprofit sector and its sizable contributions to livelihood, vitality, and economic growth.

"We need to start thinking of the nonprofit sector as our community's third pillar -- alongside government and education," said Felina Martin, INIE Executive Director. "Just as we would expect these sectors to engage with Tallahassee's civic and business leaders, it's critically important that nonprofits play an active role in developing policies that shape the future of our community and economy."

A new public awareness campaign, **The Capital of Nonprofits: Elevating Our Community & Its Economy**, was announced during the town hall. Led by INIE, COCA, UPHS, and Sachs Media, the campaign will provide original content, including social media posts and bold infographics, to local nonprofits so they can easily share the survey's impactful insights with the larger Big Bend community

Among key survey findings:

- **Most respondents correctly identified faith-based institutions (61%) and human service and social welfare organizations (60%) as nonprofits, but were not aware many other types of organizations are nonprofits** as well. These included arts and culture institutions (47%), private foundations (31%), hospitals (30%), industry associations (29%), credit unions (20%), and chambers of commerce (19%).
- **79% of respondents donated to a nonprofit organization** in the past year, in a form such as money, sponsorships, gifts, in-kind or other goods. However, only **32% said they used or benefited from a nonprofit's services for themselves or their families** (in the past or currently), likely not realizing they benefit from nonprofits regularly – whether visiting a museum, receiving care at a hospital, or using a credit union's services.

- While most respondents (85%) recognized that nonprofits play a vital role in serving people in our community, about **half (53%) didn't know nonprofits are also economic drivers locally**. That may be due to a lack of recognition of the nonprofit sector's overall size and impact, with **one-third (31%) correctly identifying our community as home to 2,371 registered nonprofits**. Additionally, **12% knew that nonprofits contribute \$3 billion each year to our local economy**.

“The results of this survey are two sides of the same coin,” said Amber R. Tynan, UPHS Executive Director. “On one side, we see generous support for the mission of nonprofits through donations and time. Yet on the other side, we see a lack of understanding and knowledge about the business of nonprofits, including their sizable economic contribution to our community.”

Tynan noted that Tallahassee's 2,400-plus nonprofits cover a wide range of essential services, from widely recognized human service organizations and religious institutions to the lesser-known arts and cultural institutions, private foundations, hospitals, associations, and credit unions. Overall, the nonprofit sector accounts for 1 in 10 local jobs and contributes 25% to the region's economic activity. One of Leon County's three largest employers – Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare – is a nonprofit, [employing more than 5,000 people](#).

Nationally, [nonprofits employ more than 12 million people](#) – more than 10% of the U.S. workforce – and account for about [5.3% of the nation's total GDP](#) and 9.2% of all wages and salaries.

“One of the most surprising findings in the survey to me was the disconnect between what constitutes a nonprofit and the number of people who said they have personally benefited from one of these organizations,” said Kathleen Sephar, Executive Director of COCA. “We all know about human services nonprofits, but there are hundreds of arts and cultural nonprofits in our community that fuel our economic economy, employ thousands of people, and make the Big Bend such a wonderful place to live. Add those nonprofits focused on religion, recreation, and business, and you get a much better grasp on the sizable impact of our sector.”

[INIE](#), [COCA](#), and [UPHS](#) are Tallahassee-based nonprofit organizations focused on strengthening and amplifying the sector's voice through advocacy, education, community engagement, and cross-sector collaboration.

The survey, conducted online by Sachs Media, measured Big Bend residents' awareness and perceptions of the nonprofit sector and its impact on the local community and economy. Sachs Media interviewed 960 registered voters, including 600 Leon County residents and 360 residents from surrounding counties (e.g., Wakulla, Gadsden, Jefferson, Franklin, Liberty), December 17-31, 2020. The survey had a margin of error of +/- 3.2% at the 95% confidence level, with results representative of registered voters in terms of age, race, gender, and political party. Sachs Media fielded a separate survey with identical questions to 50 stakeholders from nonprofit organizations.