

NPDCSNJ's Needs Assessment Initiative: A Summary of Preliminary Subject-Matter Reports



Introduction

The NonProfit Development Center of Southern New Jersey has undertaken a 23-month Needs Assessment Initiative, comprising more than three dozen separate discussion sessions with and on behalf of the region's nonprofit organizations—on subjects ranging from Transportation and Literacy to Employment and Successful Aging.

The 15 topics targeted in these sessions were among the 17 initially selected by the NPO leaders who attended Summit II in March 2024.

Participants in each subject-matter group have been discussing how to build bridges between and among the region's NPOs as they uncover opportunities to promote and expand a "collaborative infrastructure" that NPDC hopes will position South Jersey to become the most NPO-friendly region in the country by 2030.

To introduce the work of these Task Forces, NPDC volunteers, led by Joanne Rafferty, have prepared summaries of the recommendations in each of the initial reports from the subject-matter discussion groups that comprise this Needs Assessment Initiative.

Many groups are still meeting and additional discussions on all of the topics are planned for the participants in Summit III, as well as thereafter.

In other words, the door on the discussions will never close.

NPDC is grateful to the subject-matter experts who have led these online sessions. The topics and facilitators follow here:

Transportation

Mavis Asiedu-Frimpong, JD, MPH

Director/Senator Walter Rand Institute for Public Affairs/Rutgers University-Camden

Employment

Jeff Swartz

Executive Director/Camden County Workforce Development Board

Faith-Based Initiatives

Rev. Floyd L. White, III

President/Woodland Community Development Corporation

Food Security

Fred C. Wasiak

President & CEO (ret.)/Food Bank of South Jersey

Housing

Alexandra Staropoli

Founder & Principal/Staropoli Strategies

Healthcare and Mental Health and Substance Use

Brianna Donahue

Director, Policy & Government Affairs/Inspira Health

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Literacy

Aurella Green
Director/Adult Basic Skills/Camden County College
and
Heidi Daunoras
Education Consultant/Multiplicity Consulting, LLC

Environment

Renee Pollard
Chair/Environment & Social Justice Committee/Sierra Club New Jersey

Animal Welfare

Laura Houston
Animal Welfare Association of New Jersey

Veterans Affairs

Terri Illes
Chair/Community Veterans Engagement Board, Southern NJ

Arts & Culture

Julie Hain
Executive Director/South Jersey Cultural Alliance
and Mark Morgan, Producing Artistic Director/Moorestown Theater Company

Education

Dr. Mary Jean Strong
Elementary Literacy Coach/Lindenwold School #4 & #5 and
Founder/The Magic Seeds Project

Aging/Seniors

Christine Ferri, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Psychology and Director, Stockton Center on Successful Aging
Stockton University

Youth and Sports

Takeem Ragland
ESL Instructor/Adult Basic Skills/Women's Flag Football Director/Camden County College
and Matthew Emerson, Director of Business Development/Emerson Group

Internet Access

Arthur Leiby
Lerepco IT

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**Transportation Report:
Summary Recommendations**

- Develop a South Jersey wide regional transit plan containing an inventory of existing transit routes, routes, and initiatives that should be created or expanded, and an evaluation of transportation pilots. This would synthesize existing information and fill in information gaps. It would be used as an advocacy plan for funding and direct funding allocation as it becomes available.
- Secure South Jersey specific transportation funding for identified needs and pilot and explore new opportunities and options.
- Purchase additional vehicles and shuttles to support workforce development goals.
- Develop incentives for employers, nonprofits and rideshare drivers to supplement existing transportation infrastructure. Convene a meeting of employers to determine what incentives would be most effective.

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Housing Report: Summary Recommendations

- Enact local and/or statewide rent control policies. This is a longer-term strategy since it requires significant political will locally and on the state level, extensive policy design, accounting for varying markets, enforcement and tenant and landlord protections, as well as legislative support.
- Preserve existing affordable housing by extending affordability restrictions with expiring deed restrictions.
- Support home ownership by expanding statewide programs, like first-time and first-generation homeownership initiatives and explore local versions of these tools.
- Expand equitable access by strengthening enforcement of the Law Against Discrimination (LAD) and the Fair Chance Housing Act (FCHA), particularly for housing providers advertising on digital platforms; and through education and outreach provide housing providers and tenants with knowledge of LAD and FCHA.
- Expand housing supply and development pathways by enacting inclusionary zoning practices, incentivizing the development of underutilized properties, streamlining acquisition and standardizing permitting and approval processes; and ensuring municipalities comply with recently codified Mt Laurel Doctrine.
- Strengthen housing stability and support services by expanding access to legal representation in landlord-tenant court, increasing the availability, intensity and quality of supportive housing programs for residents with high needs, and investing in programs that strengthen tenant rights' knowledge, financial literacy and home maintenance skills.
- Enhance federal, state and local policies and funding support to sustain affordable housing initiatives and address systemic inequities by protecting the statewide Affordable Housing Trust Fund and affordable housing funding in FY2027 budget.
- Update eviction posting requirements, habitability standards and subsidy program structures to better support tenants, and review and revise rules that penalize tenants for income or savings gains.
- Synthesize recommendations across all need areas to identify strategies with greatest potential impact and plan NPDCSNJ Day in Trenton to engage legislators and build momentum around key policy priorities.

**Literacy Report:
Summary Recommendations**

- Expand in-person training programs to improve digital literacy among older adults to reduce barriers to modern educational and healthcare systems and alleviate social isolation. Establish reverse mentorship programs in libraries pairing older adult learners with younger mentors to teach digital skills, fostering deeper bonds and challenging ageist stereotypes.
- Encourage collaboration among libraries, community centers and local businesses to address generational illiteracy by sharing funding and space to create One Stop Literacy Hubs.
- Seek grants that target two or three generational outcomes, emphasizing lifelong learning as a driver for economic resilience.
- Conduct a Literacy Audit to identify book deserts and digital gaps.
- Launch Cultural Awareness Initiatives for families, encourage family reading nights, storytelling festivals.
- Provide targeted training for caregivers and parents, equipping the child's first teacher with necessary tools.
- Make the public aware of the availability of software, apps and on-demand learning resources for adults learning to read.
- Partner with local employers to value Lifelong Learning and ensure literacy skills are linked to economic opportunity.
- Encourage integrated community-based approaches that address transportation access, intergenerational engagement and economic stability alongside literacy instruction to achieve lasting gains in South Jersey.
- Distribute books to adults and children in need, including connecting book distribution with meal distributions and providing books to adults in ABS programs to gift their children.

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Environment Report: Summary Recommendations

- Promote the importance of developing more urban green spaces (community gardens, green roofs, green office spaces using green building materials and systems) and rural green spaces.
- Develop and adopt resolutions and green initiatives that ensure NPOs are developing principles and practices that contribute to environmental sustainability benefiting their organizations and the community.
- Reduce food waste by promoting food donation, composting and creating resources to help businesses and institutions reduce and recycle their food waste. Encourage local governments to apply for DEP grants for help in creating waste management guidance and providing food waste estimation tools.
- Encourage new building projects to seek out Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification which is a globally recognized system for certifying that buildings are sustainable and environmentally sound.
- Advocate for environmental legislation at the state level (New Jersey Green Amendment, Energy Leadership Act) and local level.
- Educate the public about conservation issues and the importance of protecting the environment and encourage volunteerism and financial support for environmental projects and organizations.

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Arts and Culture Report: Summary Recommendations

- Increase private support and diversify revenue beyond same limited donor base, as well as to increase government and foundation funding with fewer restrictions and eligibility barriers.
- Expand corporate and foundation partnerships and strengthen partnerships across libraries, schools, nonprofits and municipalities and maintain strong Board involvement
- Increase staffing and ability to retain employees
- Increase visibility, keep up with pace of digital marketing and content creation, rebuild audiences, expand awareness beyond core supporters
- Increase advocacy and policy clarity to deal with political, economic and social climate uncertainty
- More funding for aging buildings and deferred maintenance
- Balance innovation with sustainability, to increase support for touring artists
- Update strategic planning in rapidly shifting environment
- Address the crisis around freelance contractor classification affecting paid opportunities for teaching artists and leading to fewer residences, workshops, and community events

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Sports Report: Summary Recommendations

- Transition youth sports from isolated leagues to a professionalized collaborative network, by identifying organizations across the nation that are doing this well, reaching out to them and national thought leaders (Project Play) to bring *State of Play* insights to South Jersey.
- Identify which specific age groups (3-5 years old, 6-12 and 13-18) and underserved South Jersey zip codes show the widest “gap in play” to ensure efforts are data driven.
- Develop a *Guide for Youth Sports in South Jersey* as a resource for compliance guidelines, facility access and grant opportunities and offer technical workshops to sports clubs focused on 501c3 compliance and grant-readiness.
- Address barriers for girls in sports and how to ensure inclusive environments for all genders.
- Craft a regional directory for sports NPOs.
- Plan a meeting with a representative of Project Play and someone from a South Jersey target area.

**Aging Report:
Summary Recommendations**

“Older” than the NJ average, South Jersey counties offer many opportunities for older adults to serve in and to benefit from nonprofit organizations. And data shows significant growth in the older population in South Jersey; three of the five oldest counties in NJ are in South Jersey: Cape May, Ocean and Atlantic.

- Nonprofits should examine whether their missions and internal cultures make older adults invisible or inaccurately represented; ageism is a significant barrier to effective overall engagement with older adults.
- Nonprofit organizations should be knowledgeable about what federal and state benefits already do provide, and do not provide, when developing programming.
- Nonprofits should be aware of comprehensive data on the wellbeing of older adults. County area offices on aging have information on the most recent needs assessment in that county.
- Nonprofits would benefit from acknowledging the strengths of older adults and identify strengths in older adults that align with organizational goals.
- Nonprofit organizations should seek intergenerational approaches to community issues. Intergenerational community models have been spotlighted as a promising strategy for addressing social challenges, while fostering mutual benefit across age groups.
- Nonprofits should be aware that NJ is designated an “age friendly” state and so seeks to create inclusive communities, institutions, and healthcare systems that support, value and accommodate people of all ages. State, national and international stakeholders have funding available for age-friendly initiatives.
- Nonprofits should seek opportunities to innovate, collaborate, and build services that are inclusive, empowering and sustainable and should create volunteer opportunities for older adults that can help ensure that all South Jersey residents can benefit from the growing older population.

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Employment Report: Summary Recommendations

- Identify and address current barriers to employment services:
 - Transportation
 - Childcare
 - Proper Identification
 - Re-Entry
 - Literacy
 - Language

- Work with regional partners and other partners in the state to develop new performance metrics that give insight into process flow and the quality-of-service delivery by County Workforce Development Boards.

- Offer literacy training services in partnership with county library systems.

- Identify how County Workforce Boards can assist non-profit organizations:
 - Support Grant Applications—provide letters of support for state and federal grant opportunities
 - Employment Recruiting Events
 - Adult Education and Literacy Training, including GED Testing
 - Training Opportunities, including On-the-Job Training and Incumbent Worker Training

- Expand and develop pathways and services that open up career opportunities for all New Jerseyans. Core targeted industry sectors might include:
 - Healthcare
 - Transportation, Distribution and Logistics (TDL)
 - Advanced Manufacturing
 - Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (FIRE)
 - Retail, Hospitality and Tourism

Emerging industries including cannabis cultivation and sales, wine production and film/media production, have shown measurable growth and are now more integrated into the Camden County pipeline.

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Healthcare Report: Summary of Recommendations

- Address Social Drivers of Health Through Expanded Community Resources
 - Education and Awareness Campaign for Residents on Changing Healthcare Landscape: create a regional plan for bringing together community leaders, non-profit organizations, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), and religious institutions to ensure there is continuity of access for residents, especially in traditionally hard-to-reach communities due to transportation, internet accessibility, and other barriers.
 - Invest in Community Health Worker Programs: increase limited reimbursement mechanisms to offset costs for these necessary programs in South Jersey communities.
 - Transportation Availability and Accessibility: expand transportation options, including workforce shuttles and the expansion of existing bus routes, is critical for patients to have timely access to brick-and-mortar healthcare services and avoid cancellations or delays due to transportation concerns.

- Bolster Healthcare Workforce
 - Permanent Telehealth Accessibility: support legislation to make telehealth a permanent fixture in our healthcare system will make it another tool to rely on to reach our vulnerable and rural populations.
 - Incentivize Workforce in Rural Communities: support legislative efforts can focus on loan redemption and funding opportunities to incentivize providers to work in rural, underserved regions. Additionally, supporting partnerships between local health systems and higher education can build a future workforce by expanding opportunities for residents to serve and work within their own communities.

- Identify Funding Resources for Rural and Underserved Communities
 - Rural Health Transformation Fund: New Jersey applied for this funding, and if approved, will receive up to a \$500 million grant in the first round of funding dispersed from CMS to states. South Jersey has a significant rural population, and this funding could be revolutionary to sustain brick-and-mortar healthcare, invest in expanding telehealth and remote patient monitoring, and address the social drivers impeding health outcomes.
 - Substance Use Disorder Funding: local non-profit organizations and community leaders have an opportunity to collaborate with the varying levels of state government on the dollars that are received and ensure they are going towards projects that expand harm reduction efforts, increase behavioral health treatment accessibility, and expand medication-assisted treatment, among other priorities that can aid communities impacted by the opioid epidemic.