



LOOKING AHEAD

WHAT NONPROFIT.IST EXPERTS
SEE COMING IN 2024



In 2023, nonprofit consultants navigated an unpredictable landscape marked by economic volatility, a flat Giving Tuesday, and a significant surge in the accessibility of AI technology.

In light of these changes, consultants from the Nonprofit.ist network shared insights into their business practices and growth they anticipate in 2024, recommendations for the year ahead, and perspectives on the role of AI in their future work.

The survey responses indicate a nonprofit sector in 2024 that is evolving with a focus on technology adoption, employee development, and operational efficiency.

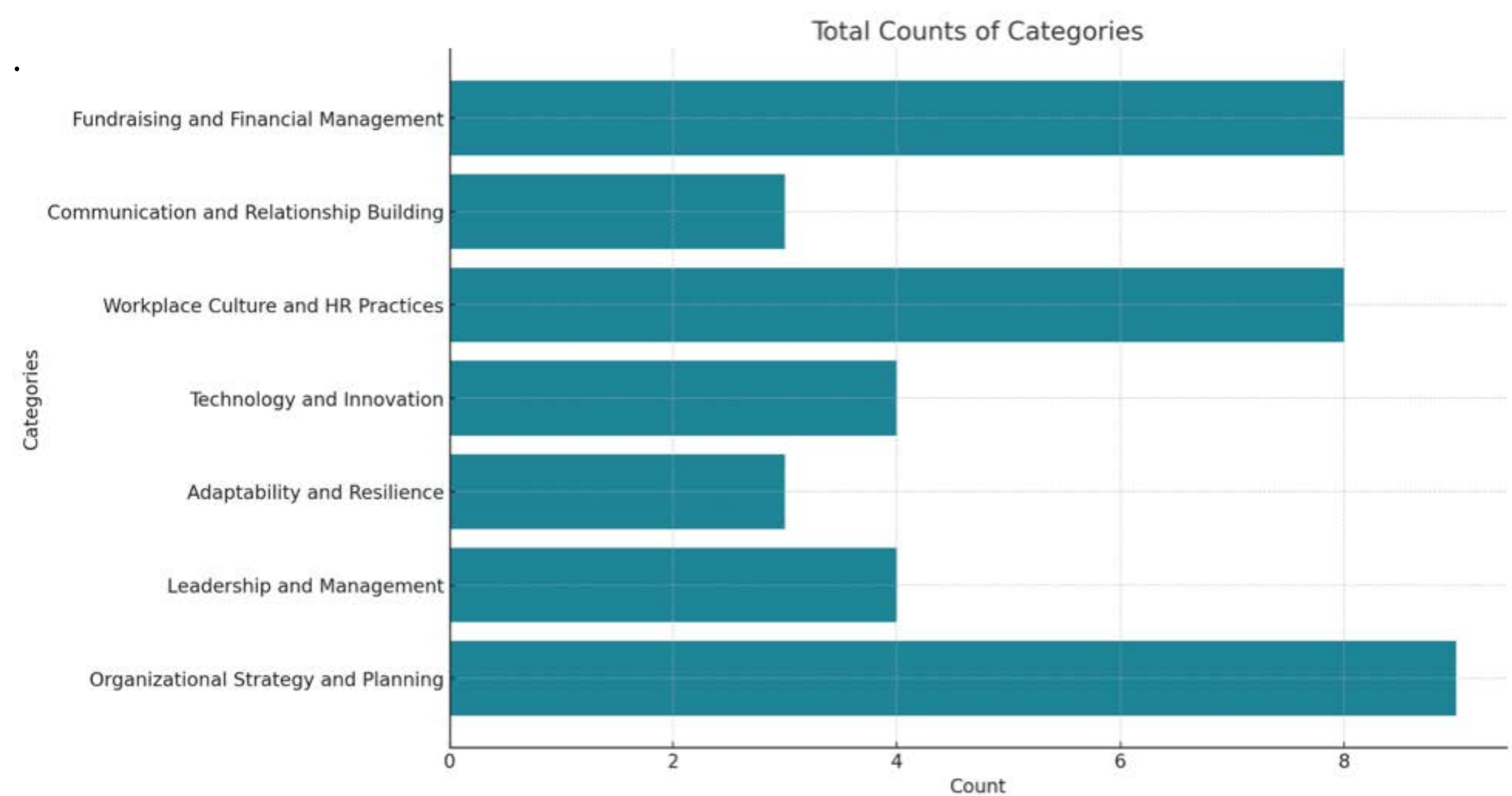
C O N T E N T S

Business Strategy & Outlook	2
The Role of AI	13
About Nonprofit.ist	15



BUSINESS STRATEGY & OUTLOOK

After another unpredictable year, the nonprofit consulting sector is ready to look ahead. We asked consultants in the Nonprofit.ist network to share what they were telling their nonprofit clients for 2024. Their responses reveal several key trends that are shaping the strategic advice for organizations in the coming year.



Strategic Planning & Adaptability

One common thread is the emphasis on strategic planning and adaptability, with many advisors urging clients to integrate technology and back-office functions, plan as best as possible for the unplanned, and be bold in decision-making.

A notable shift is occurring towards LinkedIn for strategic communications, with leaders leveraging the platform to express values and build trust through innovative content. Concurrently, there's an increased emphasis on human



connection and community-building in response to remote work and workforce shifts, favoring more meaningful networking forms. Content creation remains crucial, with a focus on storytelling for recruitment and retention, and a strategic pivot towards owned media channels.



“Planning is back! The reluctance to plan too far into the future or make big changes that we saw during the height of the pandemic is waning. Organizations are once again looking to the future and grappling with the impacts of technology and work culture trends. More collaborative and inclusive approaches to organizational planning and program design and development, along with a focus on supporting staff skill development, will drive nonprofit spending on consultants in 2024.”

Jami Yazdani

Yazdani Consulting & Facilitation



“It's time to revamp their learning curriculum and courses. Why? A lot of pandemic content is still being used on top of refinding what is the best delivery method for your learners.”

Danielle Gines

DG Consultancy, LLC



“I'm telling my clients to pay attention to two things in 2024. First, go back to the basics. Secondly, think outside the box. After the past several years that we've had, our external and internal environments have experienced significant change.

Going back to the basics and focusing on your foundational support structures will help you weather the storm. Make sure you clarify strategic goals, create detailed implementation plans, and review your current systems to make sure they work. For instance, do you have a formal fundraising plan? Do you have a stewardship plan? Strategic behaviors like those can relieve stress and help you achieve your goals.

Thinking outside the box is also necessary right now. Consider how you can use AI to conduct mundane tasks and free up your staff for more relational work. Or consider hiring a high-quality fractional consultant if you are having trouble filling positions. There are a lot of tools and resources you can take advantage of if you are willing to think creatively.”

Mary Gladstone-Highland

Spark Group Consulting



“Build off of your existing strengths and be strategic.”

Kate Shugart Weaver

Next Ascent, LLC

People & Culture

Another significant trend is the focus on people and culture, where responses highlighted the importance of considering all staff as leaders, creating equitable and inclusive workplaces, and supporting staff development and well-being.



“People need to come together. They want to gather in meetings, conferences, trainings, etc. Also, nonprofits need investment. Take time to strengthen your board, finance understanding, and HR practices. When you invest in you, you are better positioned to achieve your goals in collaboration with others.”

Nancy Bacon

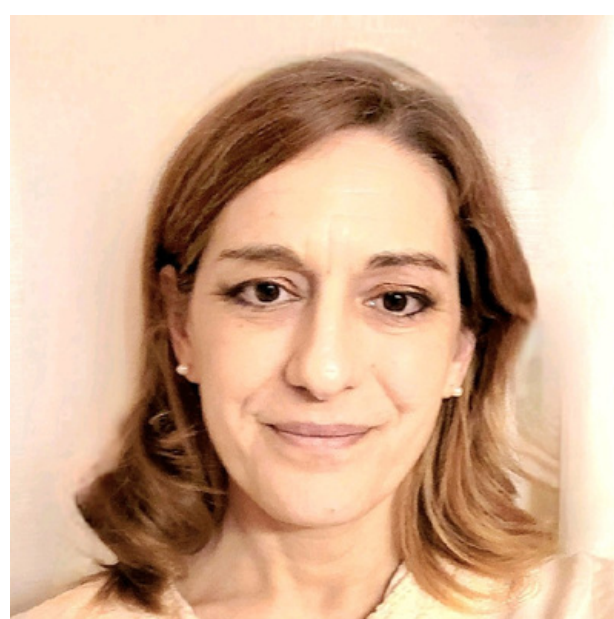
Nonprofit Learning Center



“Balance and self care are not optional.”

Mary Hiland

Hiland Consulting



“The more you can do to unleash and harness the people energy of your teams, the better things will be.”

Alicia Parr

Performer, LLC



“DEI has to start at the top of the organization for real change to be made.”

Dr. Ashley Storman

The Storman Group, LLC



“Stay true to your organizational values and commitments to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), despite the pushback you're encountering.”

Katherine Turner

Global Citizen, LLC Consulting and Coaching



“Grief is everywhere these days. Everyone experiences loss at some point in their lives - whether through death, the ending of relationship, retirement or job loss, or other forms of loss. Collectively we have experienced many losses related to the coronavirus pandemic and climate collapse. Experiencing a major loss impacts people's mental, cognitive, financial, and physical health. Creating a grief-informed workplace where staff are supported by well-trained managers and a clear (and generous!) bereavement leave policy will increase retention and loyalty (and is the right thing to do). If you're a nonprofit serving clients, it's especially important for your staff to understand the impact of grief (their own and their clients) in order to serve your clients effectively.”

Susanna Gilbertson

Susanna Gilbertson Coaching & Consulting



“The people on your team are your most important asset. Are you listening to what they need to thrive and grow?”

Meredith Emmett

Third Space Studio, Inc.

Innovation in Leadership & Operations

The need for innovation in leadership and operations is also evident, as respondents suggest challenging assumptions, embracing AI tools, and being proactive in adapting to changes.

AI's growing impact is met with both enthusiasm and caution, acknowledging its role in content creation but also noting the need for human oversight and the risks of 'lazy AI content.' Concerns about AI's influence on elections and advocacy, need for human oversight and the risks of 'lazy AI content.' Concerns



about AI's influence on elections and advocacy, along with the recognition of external systemic barriers faced by marginalized identities in the workplace, reflect a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding AI integration in business practices. This landscape suggests a nuanced approach to AI, balancing technological innovation with a focus on ethical use and human-centered strategies.

There is a notable shift towards specialized software to meet unique nonprofit requirements, and a strong emphasis on professional development across organizations. A positive, mission-centric reframing is emerging, coupled with a demand for more nuanced performance measures from funders, extending beyond traditional financial metrics. AI is recognized for its dual role in enhancing efficiency while presenting challenges in content accuracy.



“Let’s make 2024 the year of making the implicit explicit.

There’s a certain power in shedding light on the unspoken, in saying the hard thing, in naming and challenging the assumptions we all take for granted. Challenging assumptions, or carefully examining the processes we do automatically, can help us optimize operations and create more equitable and just workplaces.

Dismantling inefficient or inequitable operational systems allows us to customize smart, scalable processes, fostering an environment where everyone's strengths are recognized and valued. It's not just good for operations; it's a catalyst for positive cultural shifts as well.

The work of creating diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible workplaces and communities is never done. It’s a continuous, active, and intentional practice, and it should be where you start - your planning, your programming, and your evaluation - not something you add at the end. So let’s start 2024 by doing the hard things first - let’s make the implicit explicit and allow that clarity to carry us through the new year.”

Shannon Parris

Shannon Parris Consulting



“Integrate as many back office functions as possible.”

Joseph Scarano

Araize, Inc.



“What if you thought about leadership a little differently? Consider all staff as leaders. How could that change your commitment to supporting staff at all levels?”

Meg Raymond

Heart Space Consulting



“A technology plan consisting of a to-do list and a budget is no longer viable. Things are changing too fast for that. You'll need strategies and soft tech skills (including at the executive level) that allow your organization to be nimble and responsive.”

Karen Graham

Nonprofit Technology Consultant & CIO Coach



“Be ready for the Search Generated Experience changing the way that search traffic is going to work. Also, be ready for how your (Google) Universal Analytics will be deleted in June.”

George Weiner

Whole Whale



“The media landscape in 2024 will be nutty and election-focused, so we need to think of new ways to reach decision-makers that isn't going through reporters/news outlets.

Also, we're in weird and wobbly time for social media, so we're telling our clients to focus on communications channels they can control, such as email newsletters, printed collateral/direct mail and video.”

Katie Test Davis

Forthright Advising



“Slow down! It's better to talk with someone, not at them. Great communications ideas mean nothing if they're not strategically implemented.”

Rebekah Grmela

Right + Good Consulting



Fundraising & Revenue Diversification

There's a strong emphasis in responses on fundraising and revenue diversification, including building donor relationships, focusing on stewardship, and being prepared for shifts in search traffic and analytics.

Organizations are preparing for future changes through restructuring and re-skilling, with caution in fundraising efforts potentially widening resource gaps. The sector is expected to show resilience against economic downturns due to its diverse income streams and funding models. The upcoming election year is anticipated to increase funding for specific initiatives, notably in political advocacy. There's a trend towards network-based structures and relational, trust-based fundraising, with collaborations among consultants increasing to tackle larger projects and deliver greater value.



“Focus internally and diversify: mobilize your own networks and those closest to you. Requests need to be personal. I feel the sector is starting to move towards more relational and trust-based approaches to fundraising. Don’t put all your eggs in the same basket — make sure to diversify revenue sources.”

Katherine Lacefield
Just Be Cause Consulting



“Diversified revenue cements purpose.”

James Young
Product Community



“Focus on stewardship and retention of both donors and development talent.”

Jeri Alcock
Rose City Philanthropy



“Don't be afraid to ask for the big gift.”

Susan Kahan

Sapphire Fundraising Specialists



“Government funding is available at unprecedented levels. Be aware of it. If any funding is available for your organization, begin contemplating how you can leverage the application process and the eventual funding (if you are so fortunate) for fundraising from private philanthropy.”

Kevin Mahler

Contributed Line, LLC



“Focus on stewardship. We know from recent reports that giving is flat or slightly down. It is important for our clients to focus on their existing donors, to improve donor experience and ensure that their donors have a true sense of the impact of their giving on the organization's mission. Too many nonprofits respond to decreases in giving by focusing on finding and acquiring new donors. However, with limited resources available for fundraising, the best return on investment is to focus on improving donor retention.”

Maureen Mahoney Hill, CFRE

Advancement Advisors



“Focus on building relationships with donors and board members. 60% of fundraising is building relationships (cultivation).”

Sabrina Walker Hernandez

Supporting World Hope

Organizational Resilience

Responses also point towards organizational resilience, with advice on succession planning, continuous learning, and maintaining a balance between self-care and professional responsibilities. As nonprofits and other organizations face burnout and transitions, it's important to be prepared so you can be proactive instead of reactive when possible.



“Prioritizing People & Culture work - learning & development, DEIBW, satisfaction & engagement, performance management, etc. - is essential to business success.”

Katrina Magdol

Amalou Consulting & Listen to Your Mothers



“I am still seeing leaders (board chairs and executive directors/CEOs) leaving the sector due to burnout and/or retirement. Having a written succession plan can limit disruptions during these transitions. In 2024, boards should prioritize the development of succession plans for both emergency and planned departures.”

April Mastroluca

Synergy Nonprofit Consulting



“I am an HR consultant and I have two. 1) In order to thrive as an organization, it is essential to encourage a workplace environment that values and supports continuous learning and development for all employees, including embracing AI-powered tools. 2) Nonprofits will need to be proactive about potential changes in volunteer engagement and retention.

As generational shifts continue unfolding, some organizations could see disruptions in their volunteer workforce. Long-held assumptions about volunteer availability, longevity and motivations may no longer hold true.”

Stacey Brown

S Brown Consulting, LLC

In summary, the advice for 2024 centers around embracing change, prioritizing people and culture, leveraging technology, and maintaining a flexible yet strategic approach to organizational growth and sustainability.



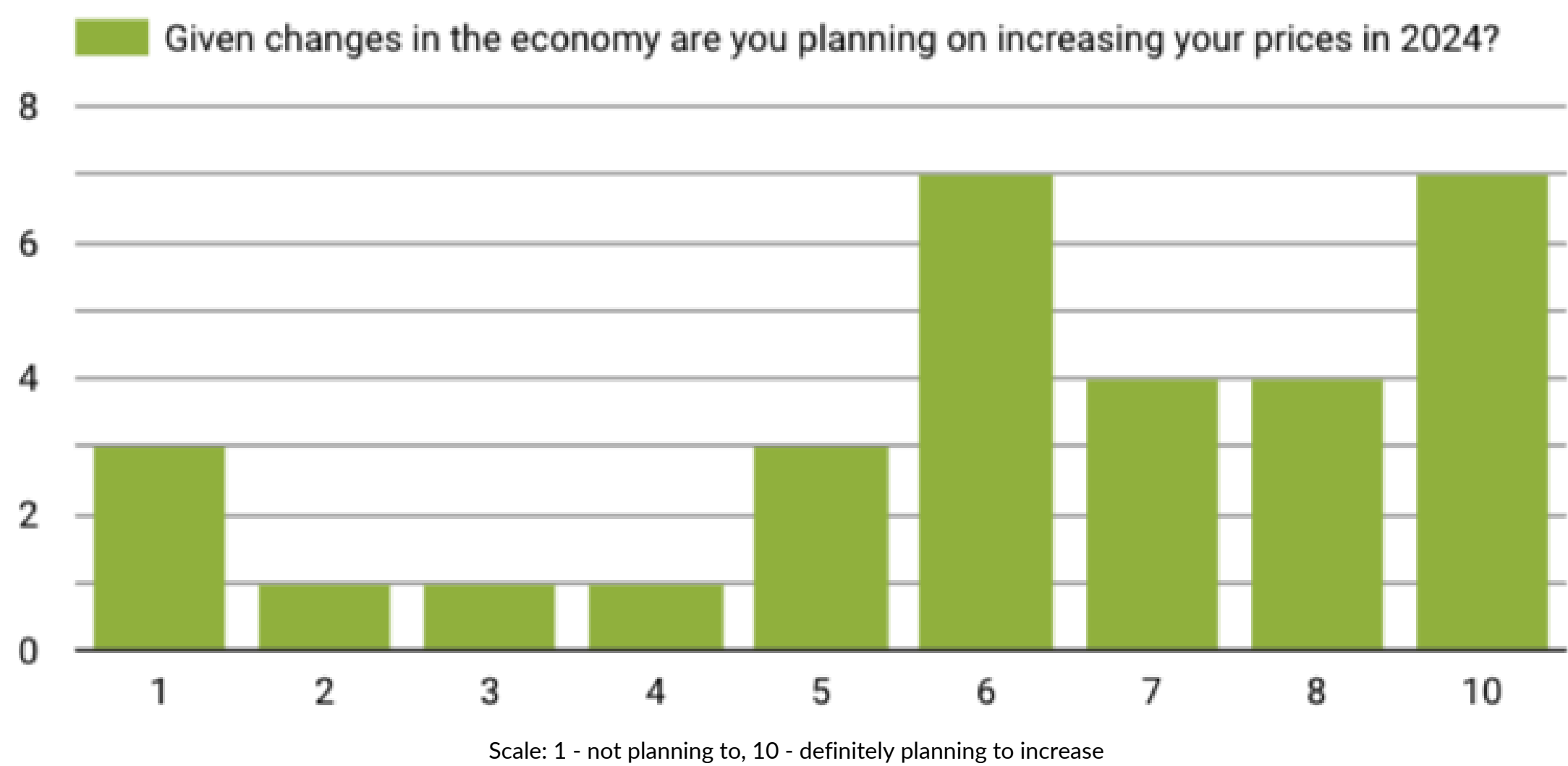
“I am inspired by how many organizations, no matter their size, want to prioritize professional development. It is such an important offering for all employees.”

Meg Raymond

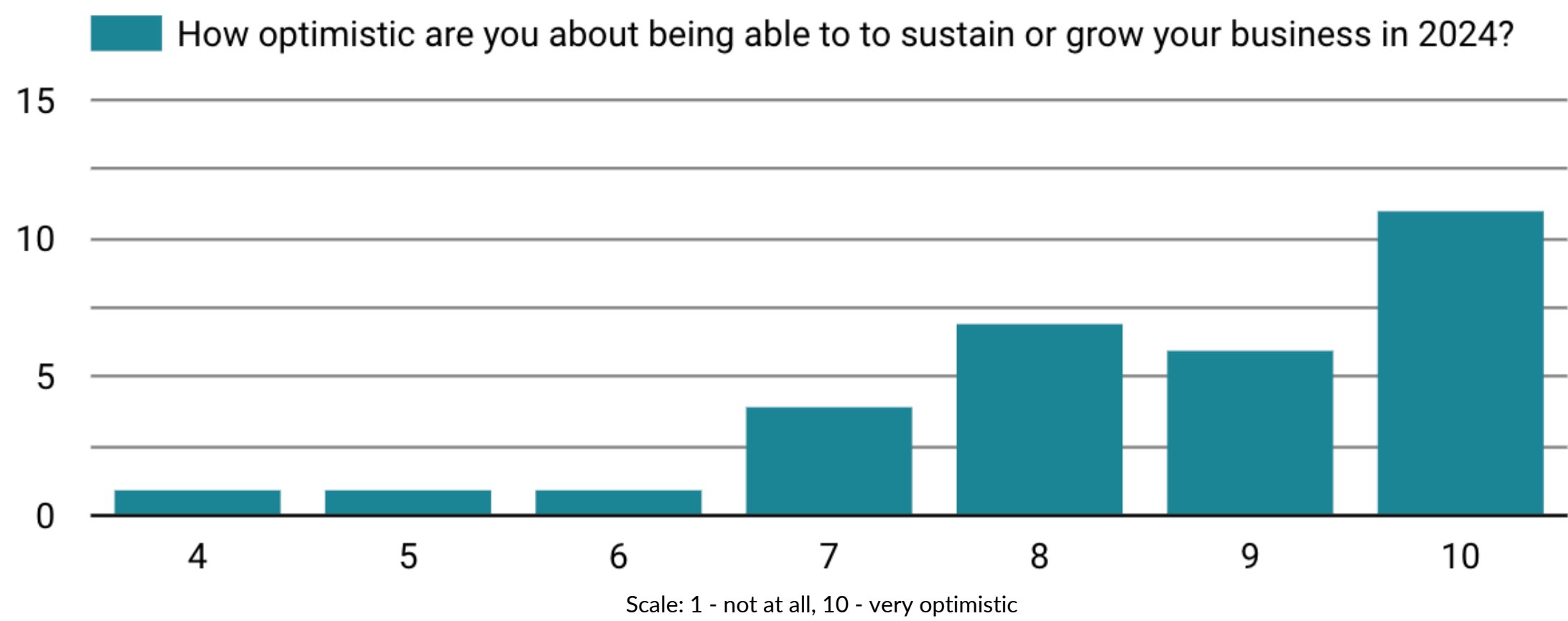
Heart Space Consulting



We also surveyed consultants about what they see ahead when they look at the future of their practices. On a scale of 1 to 10 regarding their likelihood to increase prices, consultants reported an average likelihood of 6.4, indicating they were more likely to increase prices but not definite.



Why were consultants more likely to increase prices? It may have to do with their outlook – respondents conveyed optimism about business growth, with an average optimism rating of 8.4.



We have not increased our fees since 2016, our fee increase is long overdue but we want to make sure our services are still affordable for the nonprofits we serve.

Maureen Mahoney Hill, CFRE
Principal, Advancement Advisors



In order to grow their consulting businesses, though, our Nonprofit.ist experts were re-examining the ways in which they reach potential clients, including courses and standalone training that showcase their expertise.

Our respondents indicated a moderate likelihood of expanding their educational offerings, with an average response of 6.7 on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 indicating they were absolutely expanding what they offer. This response aligns with their overall optimism about business growth.

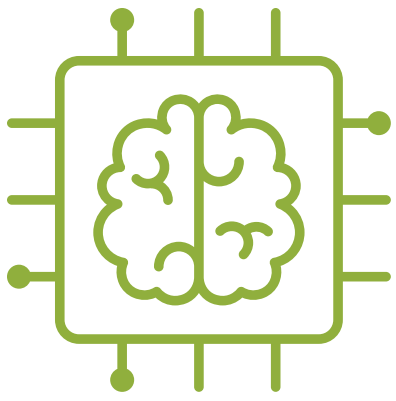
Another avenue of promotion for their expertise and services we also asked about was video content. With video being more engaging across social media platforms, it's becoming more and more a part of a communications strategy. When considering the incorporation of more video, though, the average response was 5.7, suggesting a more cautious approach towards this method.

In all, consultants are looking to promote their practices and establish expertise through content but are wary about some avenues, such as video.



So many social media users are abandoning X, leading more CEOs and nonprofit execs to lean on LinkedIn as a trust-building tool. These leaders are using the platform to deliver messages about values – theirs, and those that are core to the company or organization they lead. They're talking about commitments to advancing equity, how they're supporting working families, and professional development opportunities available to their workforce. I'm seeing more CEOs posting short-form videos as a way to showcase their personality and create conversations that build trust. These aren't just talking head videos; they're cinema verite. Many focus on human connection in big ways.

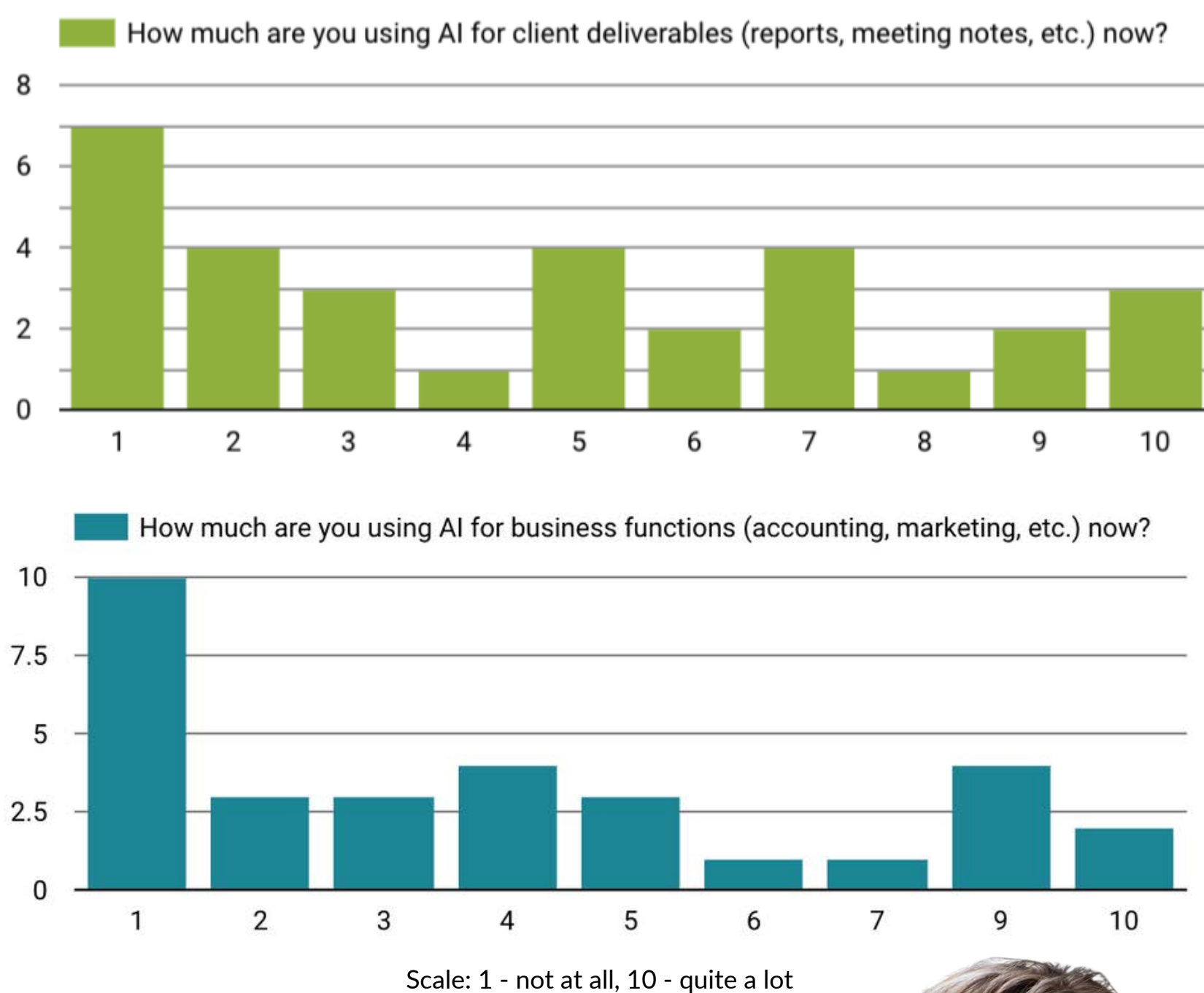
Sarah Schaffer
Bond Studios



THE ROLE OF AI

Artificial intelligence (or AI) is spreading throughout our society in every sector, in both obvious ways and not-so-obvious ways. The survey responses on AI usage in business reveal a trend towards cautious yet innovative adoption.

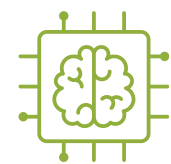
Currently, consultants are using AI primarily enhancing operational efficiency, such as in marketing, content creation, and streamlining backend functions. “I use it as a sidekick that gives me fresh perspective and avoids the blank page syndrome,” said Katherine Lacefield of Just Be Cause Consulting. There's a significant focus on using AI for tasks like producing interview transcripts, meeting summaries, and editing videos into shareable content. Many respondents acknowledge AI as a tool for time management and efficiency rather than a complete replacement for human effort.



“AI won't improve my business; it's simply a tool to make more efficient use of my time.”

Jeri Alcock
Rose City Philanthropy





Concerns about maintaining client confidentiality and intellectual property highlight a cautious approach to AI deployment. “For ethics, as well as quality, we only incorporate AI to support human effort, not replace it,” says Curtiss Hayden of Skytemple. Interestingly, AI's role in reducing bias in job candidate screening is appreciated, indicating its potential in creating equitable systems. One consultant, Shannon Parris of Shannon Parris Consulting, uses AI to screen job candidates using a rubric that’s based on her client’s job posts.



“(AI) is central to nearly everything I do, but will not replace me,”

James Young
Founder
Product Community

Some respondents also expressed concerns that while AI will make some work easier, it may also make it harder. We’re likely to see inaccurate or biased content and increase in noise as we find a new way to work with the technology.

There's a general sentiment of AI as a supportive tool, enhancing human capabilities, particularly in the nonprofit sector. However, some respondents admit to being in a learning phase, seeking more user-friendly AI solutions and expressing a desire to explore AI more deeply in their operations.

Regarding their confidence in AI improving their work in 2024, consultants showed moderate optimism with an average rating of 5.8, and the distribution of responses was notably even.

Only time may tell as to whether or not we’ll see more consultants embracing AI.





ABOUT NONPROFIT.IST

Since 2018, Nonprofit.ist has been a trusted source of nonprofit consultants. But we're not your average consultant list. Search, compare, and connect for free with consultants through our dynamic network. Consultants in our directory are vetted - meaning you'll find quality work for whatever one-time or ongoing needs you have. From fundraising to DEI, strategic planning to communications, Nonprofit.ist has a consultant that can meet your needs.

Consultants who join our network benefit from increased visibility thanks to active marketing and access to RFPs in monthly digests. But it's more than that - it's the opportunity to connect with colleagues. Monthly webinars, regular networking opportunities, and resources give you the chance to build your skills and get advice on the challenges you, and the sector, are facing.



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