



National Assessment on the State of Fundraising for Domestic Violence Organizations

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WHY THIS REPORT?

Since March, a perfect storm has erupted for Domestic Violence (DV) in the US. The [devastating consequences](#) of the global pandemic, on top of [staggering job loss](#) and a [deep recession](#), coupled with unprecedented [natural disasters](#), have collectively led to an [alarming rise](#) in violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence.

As a longtime DV advocate and nonprofit fundraising expert, I understand how hard things are right now for America's domestic violence advocates and centers. Although there are many things beyond our control right now, I believe one thing well within our power as advocates is to step up our efforts to listen to and learn from one another.

That's why in an effort to help as many advocates and domestic violence centers as possible in this challenging time, my team and I at Sharity decided to partner with NCADV, the YWCA, DomesticShelters.org, and other national and state organizations to conduct the first-of-its-kind "National Assessment on the State of Fundraising for Domestic Violence Programs."

For this study, Sharity approached the analysis by comparing how DV organizations rate on the areas philanthropists look for that determine success. In other words, the key components necessary to attract and retain today's philanthropic donors to not only give but also engage in the successful execution of the nonprofit's mission.

Collectively, the findings in this first-of-its-kind assessment will be used to:

- Identify top fundraising and operational struggles.
- Share easy-to-implement strategies to address common challenges.
- Develop new fundraising tools to position DV programs for more success with donors so they can help more survivors.

This first-ever National Assessment is dedicated to all those impacted by the terror of domestic violence during this pandemic and resulting economic crisis. I'm forever inspired by the grit and extraordinary devotion of DV advocates and staff on the frontlines – having to do more with less. It's my hope this report can serve as your fundraising roadmap and bring necessary guidance and clarity in these uncertain times and beyond.

With my deepest appreciation and thanks to all those who pulled together to make this study possible.



Carol Wick, President

Sharity, Inc.

October 2020

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INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a public health crisis and a public safety issue. DV is the [leading cause](#) of injury to women and the [single largest category](#) of 911 calls and homicides in most cities. We also know [America's deadliest mass shootings](#) are often preceded by violence at home. In addition to the devastating human toll that abusers' violence takes on their partners and families, domestic violence also has profound economic consequences for our country. Arresting and releasing abusers cost taxpayers [billions](#) annually, on top of the toll that DV takes on [businesses](#) and the [medical](#) community. A [Case Study](#) released by Sharity earlier this year found that in one mid-sized county in Florida, intimate partner violence's economic impact was nearly \$250 million per year.

Shelter services for victims of abuse did not exist before the [1970s](#). Before the modern movement and system of services that we know today, some advocates resorted to bringing women into their own homes to provide a safe place. It wasn't until 1974 that the country's first documented shelters for battered women opened. At the end of the 1970s, there were about [250 shelters](#) in a loose network. Today, an estimated [1,887](#) domestic violence organizations exist in the US, with many offering shelters for women, children, men, and pets.



Finding the support to operate these organizations has been problematic from the beginning. In part, this is due to much of the funding and support services for survivors coming from pro-bono advocates and in-kind donations of time and resources. Shelters were predominately operated out of donated homes – many of which remain that way to this day. Typically, only friends and families donated, executive directors ran centers with little to no pay, and most advocates worked for minimum wage. Too often, this is still the case, especially in rural communities.

Fundraising is Harder for Domestic Violence Organizations

Fundraising, in general, is harder for domestic violence organizations than other nonprofits. There are a host of reasons for this. One is the physical act of engaging donors. Traditional fundraising with tours and client interviews has made implementing the commonly practiced fundraising methods, especially problematic because of the danger of exposing survivors and shelter locations. Hiring fundraising staff who can be successful in this environment – even those who may have been successful in other mission areas – can be difficult. Traditional fundraising training and classes rarely

touch on these issues and instead reinforce models such as Benevon, that rely on tours and client contact to engage donors in the cause. Onsite volunteerism, client stories, and even photos must be carefully crafted with survivor safety as the foremost priority. The use of social media can also be problematic for those working with high-risk survivors of domestic violence.



Giving to Girls and Women is Less

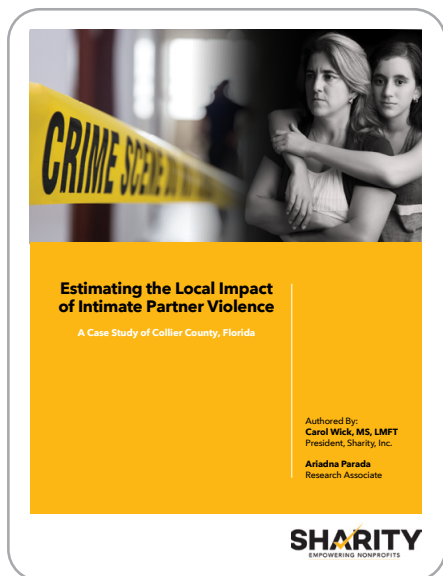
According to a 2019 report from the [Women's Philanthropy Institute \(WPI\)](#), nationally, only [1.6% of overall charitable](#) giving went to nonprofits that focus on women and girls. The domestic violence movement received even less of that – [about \\$1 Billion](#), which might seem like a lot. However, when you consider that individuals, bequests, foundations, and corporations gave an estimated [\\$450 Billion](#) to U.S. charities in 2019, that's roughly 0.22% of annual giving.

Our study seeks to examine, for the first time, how organizations that serve domestic violence survivors rate among major donors and why giving continues to be so low for a cause affecting an estimated [1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men](#). We first looked at COVID-19's impact on operations and fundraising to get a snapshot of how they are faring during the pandemic. For a more in-depth analysis, we also examined how domestic violence organizations fare when analyzed based on the qualifications that institutions like the [Rockefeller Philanthropic Advisors](#) recommend being present before making a major gift.

The Data Doesn't Tell the Story of Impact

The general lack of giving to issues around women and girls is profoundly concerning but also not surprising. For years, every October, the call for funding at domestic violence awareness fundraisers has essentially been, *"We have more survivors asking for help than we have resources available to help."* This message traditionally gets reinforced by [studies](#) emphasizing the lack of resources – and unmet requests – rather than the impact of *what is done* with those resources.

Other [studies](#) focus on domestic violence's financial impact on businesses, taxpayers, and law enforcement resources. None of these are studies about impact; however, they speak to the consequences of not acting. Information about how expensive it is to ignore the problem of intimate partner violence is critical. However, it doesn't explain how money invested in the movement or an individual agency will change the situation, ensure fewer assaults occur, or explain how survivors who seek those services will be better off.



Reporting domestic violence's devastating impact without addressing solutions – coupled with the general lack of giving to women and girls – has put modern DV organizations behind other sectors competing for philanthropic dollars. As homeless organizations have had to [track national outcomes](#) to qualify for HUD funding, their communication has shifted [over the past decade](#) to show how donor dollars result in an immediate return on investment. In the absence of outcomes, domestic violence providers have fallen further behind and still predominantly focus on the impact of the problem and outputs of programs.

Recognizing the dire need for a remedy, this Spring, Sharity produced a [Case Study: "Estimating the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Local Communities."](#) DV organizations can use the study as a template to show the effect intimate partner violence has on the local economy and the value of their services beyond individuals served.

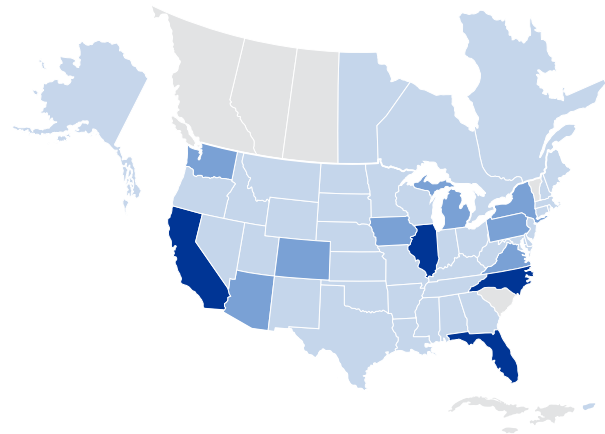
METHODOLOGY

Participants

For this study, Sharity partnered with three national organizations and 47 state coalitions to disseminate the survey via email and social media. Sharity also utilized paid advertising. In all, 240 DV organizations responded to the survey questionnaire over six weeks between August 24th and October 5th, 2020. Sharity did not reach out to tribal representatives as information provided during cohort collection indicated that they are wholly government-funded and do not have the added pressures of fundraising.

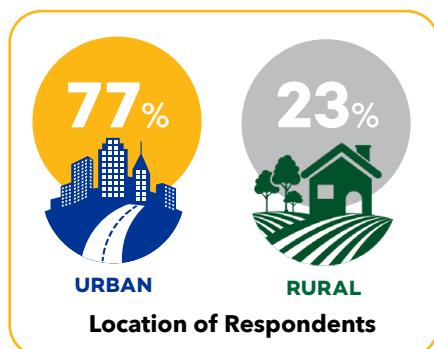
- 47 States
- 2 Territories
- Canada

- 1-5 Respondents per State
- 5-10 Respondents per State
- 10-15 Respondents per State



The survey was completed predominantly by executive directors (60%) of the DV organizations, followed by fundraising staff (20%), advocates (16%), and board members (4%). More than three-fourths of respondents (77%) were from urban communities, whereas 23% were rural (as determined by the 2010 Census data). A further breakdown of the impact by population density will be provided throughout the report.

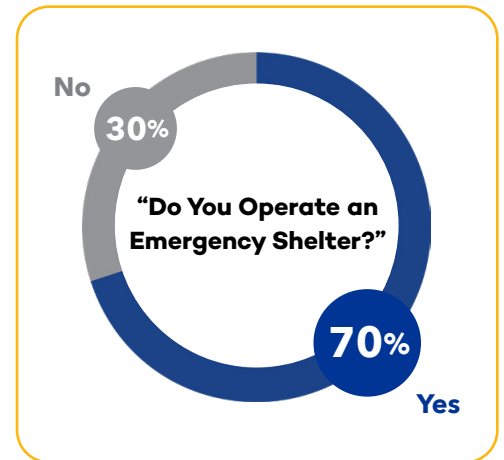
Most of the organizations in our study operate shelters (70%), but a significant number (30%) do not. This number may show a growing trend in the movement where the services are being developed that provide support outside of the traditional model of a shelter, hotline, and outreach services. These organizations tend to be culturally specific or issue-specific. The development of these leaner, more issue-focused organizations provides a new option for those seeking to fund domestic violence while allowing for a focus on a population (LGBTQ, Immigrant, etc.) or area (economic empowerment, housing) that better fits their philanthropic priority.



While critical to the safety net for survivors in any community, Shelters are costly to operate and may not have the capacity to address all the needs of survivors entering their programs. In urban areas such as Los Angeles, more and more culturally specific, non-shelter organizations are opening to meet survivors' complex and diverse needs. A study by [CalCASA](#) found, "Culturally specific approaches address issues across the spectrum, from child sexual abuse to adult sexual and domestic violence to trafficking."

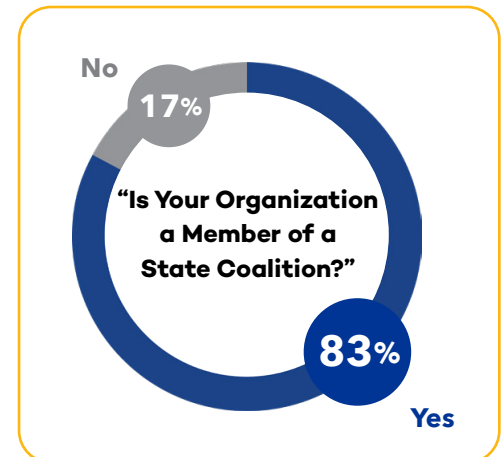
State Domestic Violence Coalitions are present in every state in the U.S. except Florida in 2020. They are required to work with a majority of providers in their state and have representatives from a diverse group of survivors informing their work.

In our study, 83% of respondents reported being members of their state coalitions, while 17% said they were not. Although there may be some standard guidelines for coalitions, their size, capacity, and functions vary significantly by state. In the future, it's worth studying further the relationship between coalitions and state providers to determine how they can best work together to increase the capacity and diversity of programming.

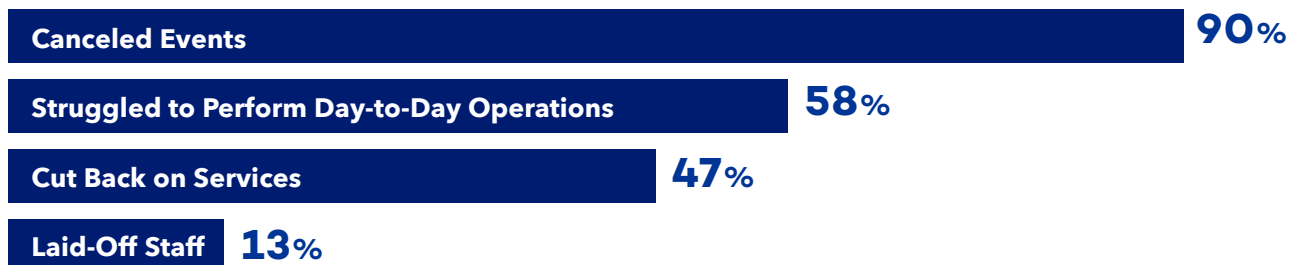


HOW COVID HAS AFFECTED DV ORGANIZATIONS

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, emerging [data](#) and reports from those on the front lines have shown that all types of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, has intensified. For domestic violence services providers, the increase in violence due to stay-at-home orders has further compounded the problem of having to cancel major in-person fundraisers. While fundraising was [up overall](#) nationally during the second quarter of 2020, [according to a study by the Association of Fundraising Professionals \(AFP\)](#), "72 percent [of nonprofits] believe they will raise less money next year than they do in a typical year."



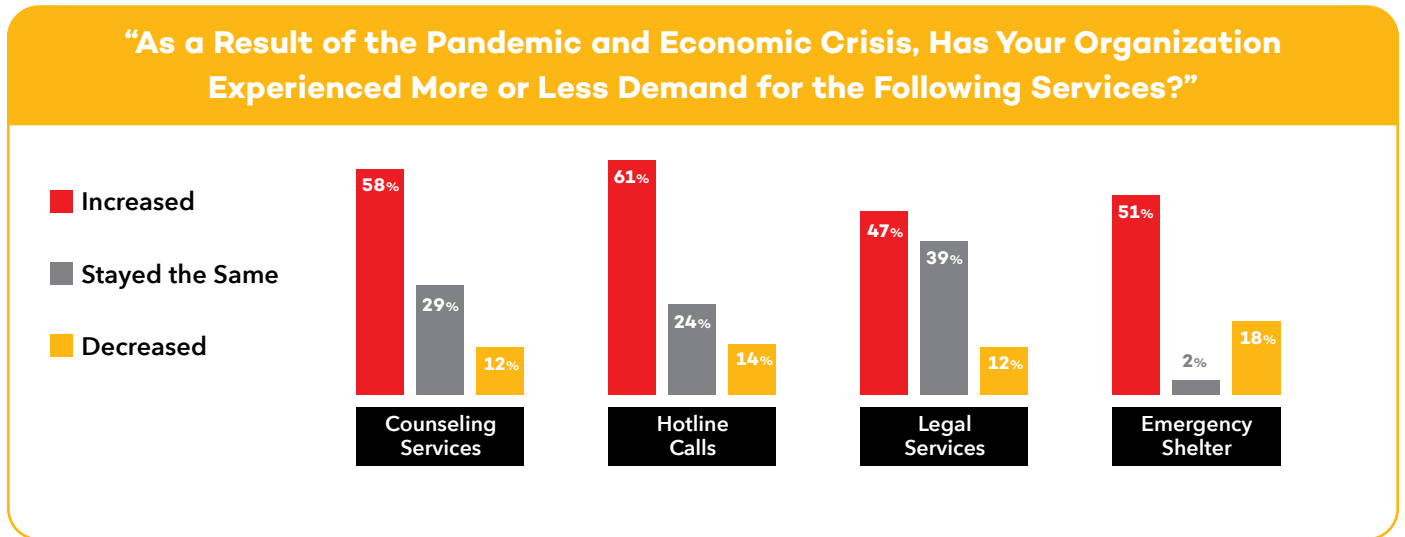
How COVID Impacted DV Organizations



Impact on Survivors

While it's clear that domestic violence providers have been impacted financially by the pandemic, it's also critical to understand how this impact affects those they serve. There have been numerous academic [reports](#) and [media articles](#)

on the effects of COVID on domestic violence survivors and the services needed in light of stay-at-home orders. At a time when public health officials strongly urge “social distancing” to contain the coronavirus, for most, the home is considered the safest place. But, for victims of domestic violence, the reality is very different, as tragically [“home is where the danger lies.”](#)



Hotline Calls

In our study, 61% of respondents reported an increase in hotline calls; 14% reported a decrease, while 24% said the volume stayed the same. Interestingly, the National DV Hotline [on June 5th](#) reported a [9% increase](#) in demand over 2019 numbers (a 6% decrease in March and a 15% increase in April).

Counseling Services

The second-largest increase in demand came from requests for counseling services (58%). It’s also worth noting that many centers have had to shift to telehealth models due to restrictions on face-to-face services and less accessibility for survivors. This requires training, technology, equipment, and protocols that many centers lack in funding and infrastructure. Given that this trend towards online counseling is likely to continue going forward, this will be a significant area for organizations to address in their overall plans.

Emergency Shelter

The challenge of operating a shelter during a pandemic has stretched even the most resourced organizations. Reducing shelter capacity, managing potential COVID-19 outbreaks, and dealing with changing guidelines has added to the already stressful situations that arise from operating a high lethality shelter. It is unclear how COVID has impacted organizations across the globe as data is either unavailable or [varies](#) from region to region, country to country. For our study, a majority (51%) of the organization respondents reported they experienced an increase in demand for shelter over pre-pandemic rates. Forty-nine percent (49%) saw no change or a decrease in demand-for-shelter.

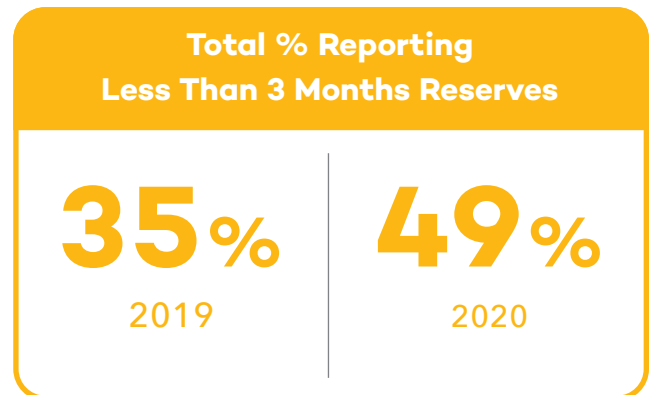
Legal Services

One of the most frequently requested services by survivors beyond housing is for legal support. In our study, only 47% saw an increased demand for legal services amid the pandemic, while 39% saw no increase, and 12% saw a decrease. It's possible that the ability and need to access legal services through the courts for things such as injunctions for protection were reduced due to office closures and eviction moratoriums. If that's the case, organizations should see a dramatic increase as stay-at-home orders are lifted, and the courts return to in-person operations. It will be important to continue to follow this issue.

Our strong recommendation is for an annual report to be commissioned that closely examines what DV survivors need and the availability of said services in the future. A systematic collection of data from local organizations on the front lines would facilitate this process and lead to more rapid response, communication, and ultimately funding in the areas that need it most.

Effect of COVID-19 on Reserves

Just as a family should have a savings account to draw from for unexpected expenses, so to nonprofits should have a savings, or reserve funds. Budget reserves are funds that nonprofits have available to cover expenses when situations arise, and funds fall short, or funders, like most governments, reimburse for work already performed. The [best practices](#) recommended level for a reserve balance is three-to-six months, but at a minimum enough to cover one payroll. For nonprofits, having adequate cash reserves on hand during the pandemic, especially early-on proved essential as they had to cancel major in-person fundraising events and earned revenue dried up.



In our study, when asked about cash reserves (a year ago before the pandemic), 39% of DV program-respondents fell within the best practices level of three-to-six months of cash reserves. 35% reported less than three months.

By comparison, when asked about their DV program's cash reserves during the pandemic, 33% of the DV program-respondents fell within the best practices level of three-to-six months of cash reserves. 49% reported less than three months.

When urban DV program respondents were asked about 2019 (before COVID), 35% reported having less than three months of reserves. However, when urban DV program respondents were asked about their reserves during the pandemic, that number jumped to 48%.

It's also worth pointing out that even before 2020, most domestic violence organizations reported they were not successfully increasing their reserves. While only 10% experienced shortfalls in the preceding years, only 9% reported being able to fundraise and have a positive balance at year-end.

The Situation is Dire

Given the unprecedented rise in domestic violence nationwide, the lack of cash reserves facing America’s DV organizations needs to become a national priority and requires an immediate national action plan.

Our study also found rural organizations struggled even more than their urban counterparts. Asked about 2019, 36% of rural DV program-respondents reported having less than three months of cash reserves. However, a staggering 54% of rural organizations respondents taking the survey in September 2020 reported having less than three months of cash reserves.

Thus, a majority of the nation’s rural DV providers could be at serious risk of not paying bills or making payroll depending on the percentage of reimbursement based grants they rely on for operating. The situation has become so dire that any further drain on reserves could result in a significant number of domestic violence providers closing their doors within the year.

It’s worth pointing out that according to a [report from Charities Aid Foundation of America](#), “one in three organizations is at risk of closing down within the next 12 months due to revenue losses linked to the coronavirus pandemic.”

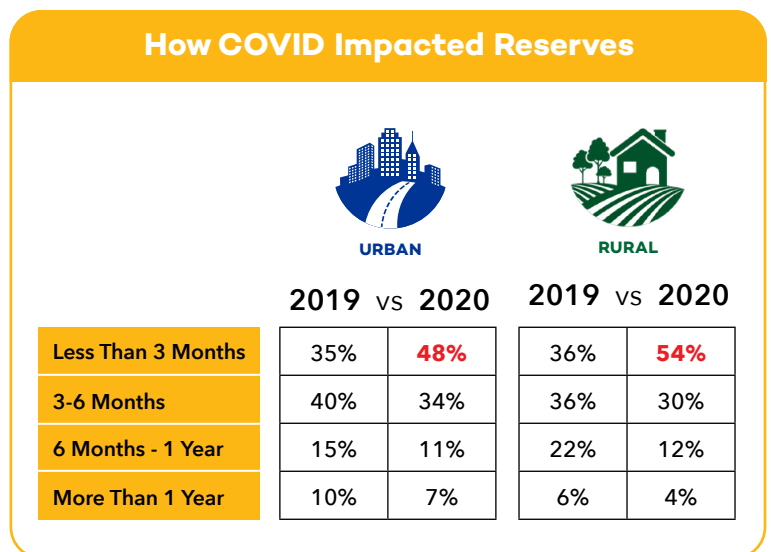
In our study, domestic violence providers reported sharp increases in demand for services compared to 2019, while fundraising has lagged for many.

FUNDRAISING ASSESSMENT

On the whole, nonprofits do critical work in our communities and across the globe that often go unnoticed. The individuals who launch and run these organizations often do so at little to no pay because they care deeply about the mission. While most of these leaders will tell you *they need more funds to grow the nonprofit*, the path to follow is not always the obvious one.






In the world of fundraising, it can often seem that only a few nonprofits in a given community can capture the attention of major funders locally and that breaking into their ranks is nearly impossible. One of the most frequent questions board members and nonprofit professionals ask is, “*Why do we always get passed over?*” In the quest to find the answer to this question, nonprofits spend hundreds of millions collectively each year on consultants only to discover that they are left with the same issues that they had before.

Major donors today evaluate nonprofits they choose to give to similarly as they make investments in other businesses. They tend to assess the organization, not in the way most nonprofits speak to donors.



Yes, emotion and storytelling are essential, but beyond whether the nonprofit's mission is a good cause or even one close to their heart, major donors expect to know what will be accomplished with their money. As various resources online continue making giving easier, it's also opened up fierce competition among different causes. That's why it's more critical than ever for domestic violence organizations to show how their programs and services create lasting change.

What We Assessed

<p>Business Plan</p>  <p>The organization has a clear plan that shows how they will impact the requested donations.</p>	<p>Budget</p>  <p>The estimated budget is adequate to carry out the proposed plan.</p>	<p>Impact</p>  <p>The proposed outcomes are measurable and in alignment with the change that the donors want to see.</p>	<p>Team</p>  <p>The nonprofit has a staff and board capable of carrying out the plan.</p>	<p>Donors</p>  <p>There are enough donors of significant means to fund the plan beyond a single investment.</p>
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THE PLAN

Typically, when nonprofits are asked if they have a plan, most will immediately think of a traditional strategic plan that addresses what they need to improve upon over the next three to five years. These plans tend to be inwardly focused and often have goals such as increase board participation or improve fundraising. Rarely are these plans developed with donors and impact in mind, nor do the plans have measurable benchmarks and metrics that are incorporated into daily operations. Nonprofit plans should provide practical solutions in response to an identifiable need. In today's business savvy market, nonprofits should think of this more as a business plan with a [pitch deck](#) than the traditional nonprofit plan that gets reviewed once or twice a year.

Every nonprofit must have a plan that guides potential donors through the story of *why they must act now*; it's intended impact and results. Major donors are looking for a clearly articulated plan similar to what they would review if they were planning to invest in a for-profit company. They must see the mission as more than just a "good cause" but an excellent investment.

Additionally, concerning is that 45% of respondents reported not having a plan at all. More troubling is that 56% of rural organizations lack a plan that explains to donors what they plan to accomplish. As noted earlier in this report, rural organizations already face [unique challenges](#) in building organizational capacity. If it's not clear to donors where the organization is headed and what it's trying to accomplish, donors may feel further investment will not make a difference. The simple process of developing a business plan and asking the community and key stakeholders for input is critical to helping prospective donors understand how your organization intends to fulfill its mission and why support is needed.

Although things are currently uncertain in terms of recovery from the pandemic, it's still important to show current and prospective donors that there's a strong plan to address the current challenges faced by the community due to intimate partner violence. The plan should have benchmarks and metrics that are achievable rather than generic goals and outputs.

TELLING THE STORY OF IMPACT

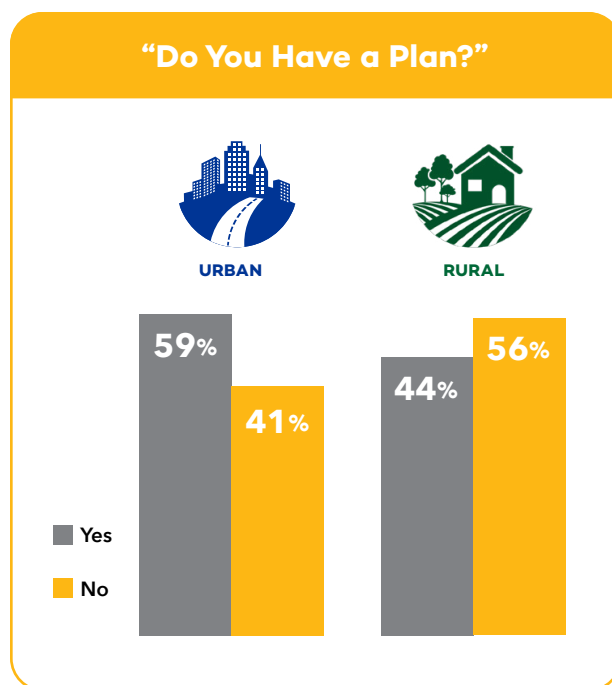
One of the most significant findings of this study comes from asking how domestic violence organizations define success. Major donors, foundations, and nonprofit rating agencies – such as Charity Navigator and GuideStar – expect nonprofits to measure and [report clear, observable results](#).

Why don't we see many outcomes or statements of ROI from domestic violence organizations?

Measuring outcomes requires a more significant commitment of time and resources to tracking what happens long-term to survivors. There's long been a belief that following up with survivors will endanger them. While this danger is very real for many survivors, the practice has significantly impacted our ability to tell the complete story of long-term impact.

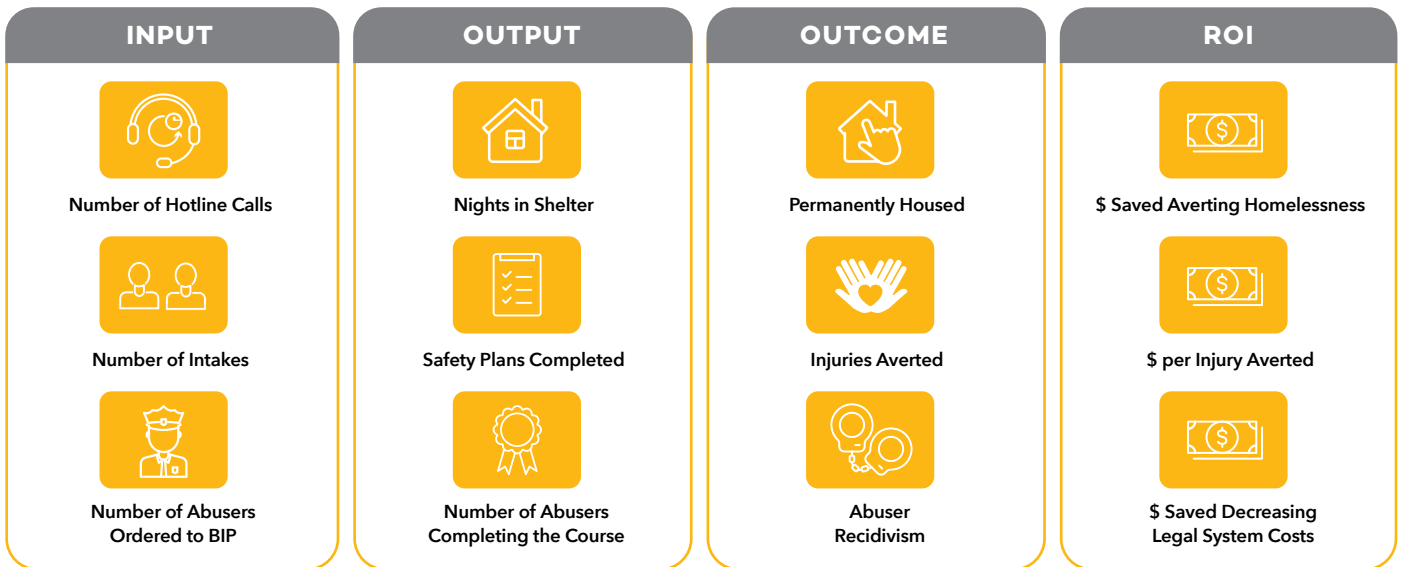
Domestic violence professionals are hindered even further by some of the worst data collection of any form of crime in the US. Despite changes in laws making crime data reporting [mandatory](#), the ability to find local data, download, and analyze it is extremely difficult. Compound that with the reality that the legal definition of "domestic violence," "sexual assault," and "rape" vary state-to-state, and it makes interpreting data accurately nearly impossible.

The U.S. lags behind other countries in studies on femicide and outcomes around the impact of shelter and other domestic violence organizations' services. In stark contrast to countries such as the UK and Australia – which frequently [publish cutting-edge research](#), in the U.S., the data is often so insufficient that it's impossible even to determine how many women die each year. In fact, it took nurse [Dawn Wilcox](#) – a domestic violence survivor, activist, and educator – scouring through news articles and obituaries to complete the first comprehensive list of murdered and missing women in the U.S. She created her spreadsheet, [Women Count USA](#), in response to the lack of a "centralized system to gather data on incidents of violence against women and girls, those crimes are underreported."



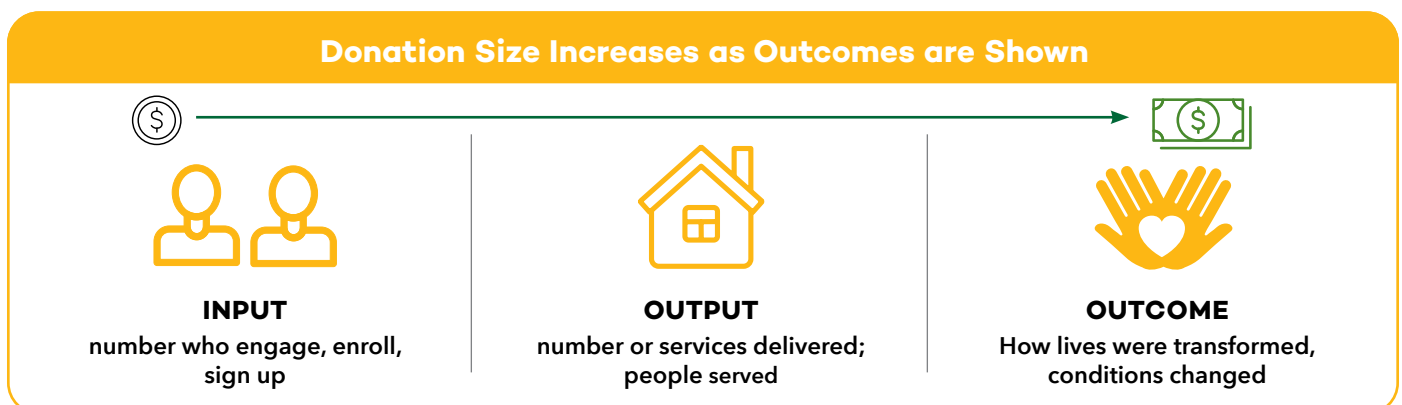
Although it's likely inevitable that data will be difficult to find – nonprofit professionals can at least stay ahead of the curve by knowing the basic concepts around impact measurement. Fundraising professionals should be able to talk and write about results showing the impact of philanthropic investment. That will be difficult if there is widespread confusion about the basic terminology. A great place to start is understanding basic terms in relation to their programs, such as "inputs," "outputs," "outcomes," and ROI or "return-on-investment."

How to Tell the Story of Impact



Inputs are often viewed as resources added to a program. However, when speaking to donors about impact, inputs are the number of people who participate or things that happen because your agency exists. Outputs tell the story of what your organization produced or your organization's activities. Outcomes are the change that occurs because of those programs or activities.

Even further, domestic violence organizations rarely calculate return on investment or ROI, which encompasses the economic return for an investment made, such as a grant or donation. Unfortunately, [donors have noticed and have answered with their checkbooks.](#)



For this study, we reviewed 50 “impact” studies done by nonprofits providing domestic violence survivors services. We found that only three mentioned true economic return on investment (ROI) in their reports. The chart below shows the most frequently included information reported by domestic violence organizations. These reports often list the national or statewide economic costs of domestic violence. Occasionally they calculate and include “local costs” but more frequently the number of “arrests” or “911” calls. Rather than ROI, the most common dollar figure reported was the number of volunteer hours and the value of this time, as calculated by the IRS.

When asked the following question, “Which of the following choices best illustrates how your organization measures its success?” 56% of respondents answered that “Nights of shelter, career counseling sessions, number of safety plans completed, number of hotline calls.” 22% of respondents answered that they report their impact in terms of outcomes such as “permanent housing received, increase in income, increase in successful injunctions, successful prosecutions,” while another 22% was unsure how they measured impact.

It’s worth noting that even [studies](#) on national outcome measures only reflect self-reports from survivors on how they feel about services, not the true impact that could be turned into a return on investment statement. What is clear for organizations addressing violence against women is that they must start examining the real impact of their work in ways that appeal and attract donors who can make major contributions if they are ever to reach sustainability.

This may highlight one of the most critical roadblocks that the movement needs to overcome if it’s to move into the mainstream and compete for major gifts successfully.

While this is telling, domestic violence organizations are not alone in their struggle to show their work’s true impact. A [study](#) by Oracle NetSuite found that [71% of](#) nonprofits struggle to measure outcomes, while only [29 percent](#) of nonprofits are able to effectively measure the outcomes of dollars invested.

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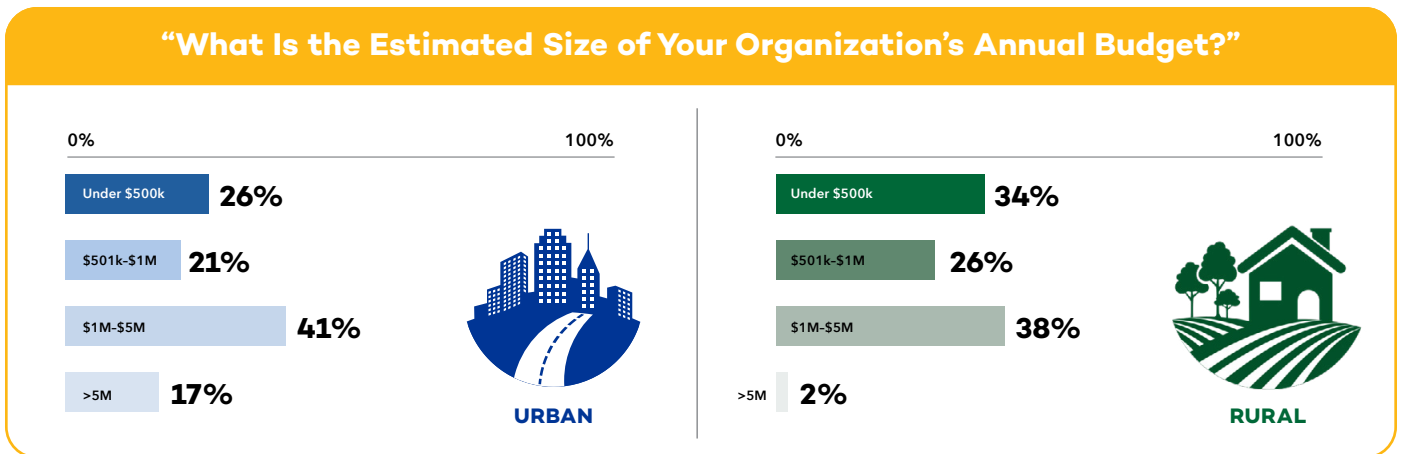
FINANCE

Size of the Organization

Domestic violence organizations tend to have larger budgets than the average nonprofit in the US. Small nonprofits composed the [majority](#) of public charities, with 67% having less than \$500,000 in expenses. In comparison, only 22% of domestic violence organizations had budgets of less than \$500,000—larger organizations, those greater than \$5 million, comprised 10% of domestic violence organizations. The majority had budgets of between \$500,000 and \$5 million (63%).

Several important things happen when organizations reach the \$500,000 mark and \$1M mark in size. After \$500k, many funders expect that all nonprofits will complete an annual audit. The Federal government [requires an audit](#) after \$750k. With an audit comes additional infrastructure and costs that were not previously needed. Additionally, once a nonprofit exceeds \$1M – an [elusive goal](#) for many nonprofits -- fundraising typically has more dedicated resources and more focus on major gifts.

Rural organizations are smaller in budget size than urban organizations overall, with 61% of rural organizations having budgets under \$1 million and 53% of urban organizations over \$1 million. Only one rural organization reported having a budget of over \$5 million.....



True Cost of Doing Business

Most organizations develop a budget a few months before the end of the fiscal year. The next year’s budget is based on what they spent the prior year and how much they feel they can make the upcoming year for any additional expenses. This expense based budgeting does many nonprofits a disservice – as COVID-19 has shown. The pandemic has made it extremely difficult to rely on volunteers, especially retirees, who are most at risk from the virus.

Pre-pandemic, most DV centers relied heavily on donation drives – whereby people bring their donations to the church or their civic group meeting. Without in-person meetings during the pandemic, donation drives went away, forcing centers to purchase items.

DV organizations should evaluate their budgets and determine if they truly reflect the cost of doing business or if they need to look deeper into what it takes to run their programming. If you have not done this, major donors will quickly see that the numbers don't add up. If nonprofits are ever to break out of the "[starvation cycle](#)," a vexing pattern of underfunding," they must be honest about how much it costs to do business and have the calculations and justification for the amounts.

Budget Projection

The next step is to create a realistic budget to outline how much the plan will cost to implement. It's impossible to achieve sustainable funding without a clear projection of what it will cost to run the organization for several years in the future. A budget that looks at the organization's anticipated growth shows a prospective investor that you have a plan that a multi-year gift will support.



Major donors will want to see the plan and will recognize right away if the numbers are adequate. The first cursory glance at a "budget needs" shouldn't raise red flags with a DV organization's donors that it will come back and tell donors that it didn't adequately estimate the plan's actual expense. The more comprehensive a budget, the more investors will see your organization as a nonprofit that has its act together. Donors want to know that the DV organization will be around and raise needed funds, either through donations or earned revenue, long into the future.

Transparency

Financial transparency builds trust and gives the prospective donor the confidence that the board of directors is managing the organization in an ethical way. Earning trust through financial transparency and accountability goes beyond what the law requires. This study looked at two areas, typically [recommended](#), that nonprofits address to reduce potential financial transparency issues: conflict of interest and annual independent audits.

Financial audits are expensive, and many nonprofits hold off doing one until funders or the IRS requires them. The price tag of \$10,000 to \$20,000 for a smaller nonprofit under \$1M in revenue is often one of the most expensive overhead items they will have to pay for. Typically audits are not covered by grants and must be paid for through fundraising. In our study, only 15% of respondents reported they have not yet had an audit.

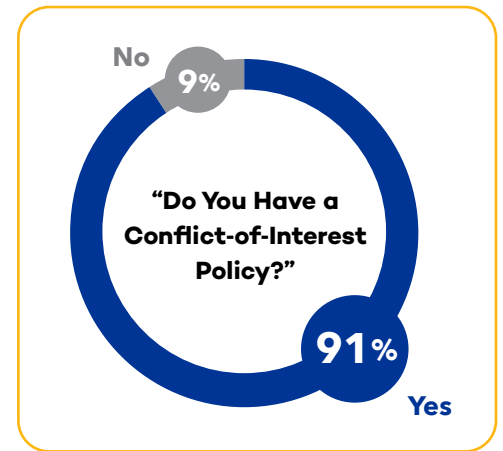
Having audits and those audits resulting in no findings is one area that domestic violence organizations excel. Ninety-five percent (95%) of those who did have an audit reported no management letter. A [management letter](#) explains whether there are any problems identified with the nonprofit's internal financial controls. Donors want to ensure that the organizations they invest in have robust financial systems, checks, and balances in place, especially during times of uncertainty. While nonprofits are [required to disclose](#) certain financial information such as the IRS 990 to the

public upon request, making that information easily accessible by placing financial information, including the latest audit results, on the website adds credibility.

Many major donors right now are concerned about giving – especially to organizations with declining reserves – as the organization may not be able to survive. Donors don't want to throw away money. Having current financial statements available for review and offering them to major donors upfront will show that the organization is healthy and a good investment for the long-term.

Having up to date financial information available for immediate review for donors – such as the current profit loss statement and balance sheet – is critical in this environment.

Board members must not benefit financially from being on the board. All board members and executive staff need to sign off on a conflict-of-interest form annually to ensure that this does not happen. It might be more difficult to refrain from doing business with a board member's company in smaller, rural areas. Still, that relationship should be vetted and understood. In our study, 91% of organizations surveyed reported that they did have a conflict of interest policy in place. For that 9%, that does not, implementing one is critical.



Beyond being a legal requirement, the policy should serve as a guide for the board and staff to handle conflicts in personal, financial, business, and professional interests. Now more than ever, disclosure and transparency need to become the rule. The media, the authorities, and the public have zero tolerance for double-dealing executives and board members using nonprofits as their piggy banks.



HAVING THE RIGHT TEAM

It takes a team to run a domestic violence organization. Typically the first part of any team that comes to mind when thinking of domestic violence services is that of the critical role that advocates provide answering the hotline, picking up a family in the middle of the night, or holding a survivor's hand during a court hearing. This work is critical and cannot be understated. But when prospective investors look to give philanthropic funds to support a plan, they want to know that the organization's leaders can deliver that plan long term. This team is often viewed as the senior staff and the board of directors in a nonprofit organization. This study looked at several components of how potential major donors might view whether or not the existing team was the right team to invest in.

A Strong Board

The first component reviewed was the Board of Directors. An organization's governing board should be composed of respected leaders; whose collective reputation can execute a successful funding campaign and effectively implement the proposed project. Board members should be enthusiastic, committed, and capable of supporting the campaign generously with their financial means, time, and other resources. An organization must have a positive reputation, a track record of success, or other attributes that will instill a sense of confidence in its ability to manage and implement the proposed project or program.

A goal for every nonprofit should be to become the coveted "Board of Choice." A position on the board must be a significant achievement in the community. This will draw

the strongest fundraisers and those with the connections necessary to grow the organization. For many Boards, this is the most challenging strategic move to make. A board may be hardworking but not well known in the community. Having known champions will accelerate the brand recognition and credibility of the organization.

Although there are numerous areas in which to evaluate boards, for this brief survey, we looked at three critical areas:

- 1. Do they attend meetings?**
- 2. Do 100% give?**
- 3. Do they help fundraise?**

The results were illuminating.

The majority of organizations in the study reported that their board members make attendance at meetings a priority for its members. During stay-at-home orders and for safety, most organizations have shifted to teleconference or videoconference board meetings over the past few months. It's essential to continue to engage board members and keep cameras on so that members still feel part of the organization despite the physical distance. Overall, 86% of respondents indicated that attendance was a priority.

The responses, when further subdivided into urban versus rural, were not significant. They showed that those who volunteer on domestic violence boards are engaged in this way. Nationally the average attendance is [75%](#), so it is crucial that while attendance may be a priority, regularly tracked metrics seek to achieve or exceed this national average.



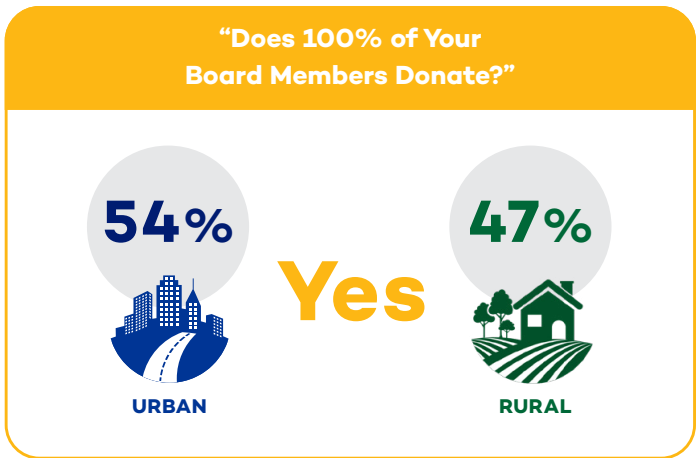
Another measure of board effectiveness is their involvement in fundraising. The findings in this area revealed that 83% of respondents answered yes to the question, "Do your board members engage in fundraising activities?"

While a significant majority felt their board members were fundraising, only 51% said yes to the question, "Does 100% of your board make an annual financial donation?" The giving dropped even further for rural board members where the majority, 56%, of boards did not have 100% giving.

This is significant for several reasons. When organizations launch major fundraising campaigns, one of the first questions is, "Do 100% of your board members give?" Major donors want to know that those closest to the organization are committed to the plan and support the plan. When those leading and guiding the organization don't contribute, it signals that there may be a more serious problem afoot.

Eighty percent of the study respondents – most of whom are executive directors or fundraising staff – reported that their board is engaged in fundraising. Yet nearly half (49%) reported not having 100% giving, a fundamental component of successful fundraising, and critical to success with major gifts

The solution to this problem is twofold. Every nonprofit organization must have a giving policy that clearly outlines every member of the board's expectations regarding personal financial contributions. Organizations must discuss this policy with each prospective member before joining the board. Second, the organization should establish metrics tracked quarterly for attendance, personal giving, and the board's fundraising performance. If domestic violence organizations are serious about increasing revenue through major gifts, they must not be shy about measuring board performance on a transparent dashboard. Those members who don't feel they can contribute in the identified ways should be provided with other volunteer opportunities that allow them to be involved but keep the board focused on moving the organization forward and achieving the plan.



Fundraising Staff

When asked, "Does your organization have enough staff to separately manage major donor campaigns and continue annual fundraising?" the results reveal a clear need for domestic violence organizations to successfully execute a major campaign. Eighty-four percent (84%) of organizations reported that they did not have enough staff to simultaneously perform both a major gifts campaign and the annual fund strategy. The average number of staff dedicated to fundraising was "1.5" positions, with 59% of organizations reporting that they had only "half a position" devoted to fundraising.

As mentioned earlier, many nonprofits have traditionally relied heavily on special events for their annual revenue. The stay at home orders and continuing COVID crisis have stopped large in-person events that many relied on to ensure they covered operating expenses each year. Staff whose skill set was more towards event planning may not be the same skill set needed for major gifts. Most organizations [struggle to hire and retain](#) major gift officers because they expect them to help with other duties such as events or operational activities. The results here indicate that many organizations are asking their fundraisers to split their time with other duties, resulting in less effective outcomes.

Too often, when this is the situation, the executive director has the difficult job of running the agency and fundraising. Suppose the budget does not allow for a full-time staff member to fundraise. In that case, the executive director has to be freed from day to day administrative duties to cultivate major donors and increase awareness and brand visibility until funds are available to hire someone dedicated to fundraising. It's important to acknowledge that the typical nonprofit environment, one where all hands are on deck for any job that is needed, may not be an [environment](#) that is conducive to successful major gift cultivation.

Succession Planning

To make the leap to the next level, investors will want to see that there is enough staff and the right staff to pull off a broader vision that is laid out in the new plan. They also want to know that if something happens to a key leader, the work will continue uninterrupted as planned. Having a strong succession plan in place for current staff and a plan to fill needed seats will be critical to show organizational capacity.

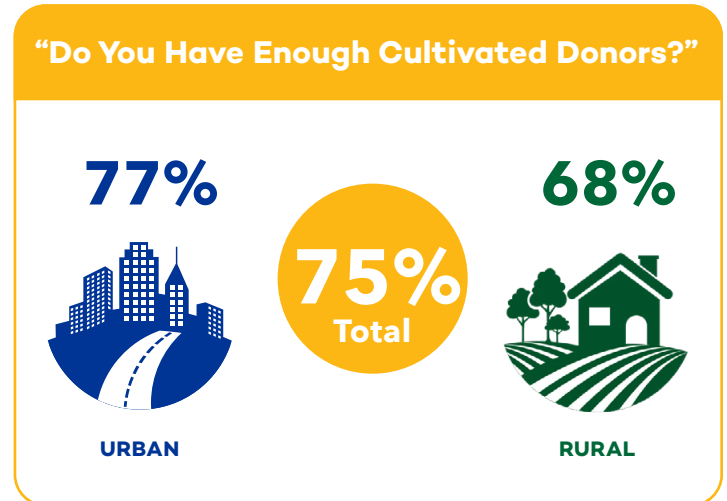
When asked, "Does your organization have a leadership succession plan in place?" 56% of respondents stated that they did not have a plan. This could cause donors to pause before making a major investment decision. Having a clearly defined plan in writing that shows what will happen if key leaders leave or are unable to work is critical to reassuring donors, volunteers, and staff that the organization's operation is not dependent on one person or a small number of individuals.

Having a plan does take some time and effort but is easily undertaken by a task force of board members and volunteers. When evaluating succession planning, it is also important to evaluate whether or not those key leaders can be replaced for what they are currently being paid. If a key leader is making significantly less than the market rate, having a plan to replace them but not the funds to pay a new person will be a challenge. Under market rate executives is another red flag for major donors and should be addressed with annual or bi-annual salary surveys for all organization positions.



SECURING DONORS TO FUND THE PLAN

The final area addressed in the study was about the capacity of the organization's donor base to adequately fund their plan if they have one or operations otherwise. When asked, "Do you have enough donors cultivated who can support the financial goal you have proposed?" 75% of survey participants responded, "no." When the responses were split between urban and rural organizations, more urban organizations (77%) said they did not have enough cultivated donors than rural (68%) organizations. This could be due to the competition for funding that urban nonprofits face but other reasons should be explored.



When considering whether or not to launch a major campaign, many nonprofits will hire a consultant to evaluate their readiness. These are often called [feasibility studies](#) and are designed to determine the likelihood a campaign will succeed. When they do, it is almost always because the organization has not taken the time to cultivate the donors needed to meet the plan. Major donors want to see that they are not expected to fund the entire plan and that others in the community support it as well. This starts with the most inner circle, the board of directors, and then flows outward to those who already give and finally, new prospective donors.

When an organization is hoping to grow, well known, highly respected individuals must be willing to donate both their financial capital and their social capital. Whether this is as an awareness campaign chair or fundraising chair, well-respected individuals give a stamp of approval on the plan. They encourage others in the community to support the effort as well. Developing a board that consists of highly respected board members and that 100% give should be the goal. Many organizations can also benefit from a high-profile advisory board, which provides instant brand recognition instantly. More publicity around the board, even small social media videos or op-eds, can help elevate the brand and help with reputation building.



Beyond the board and advisory board, organizations must develop a strong cultivation strategy to reach out to those who may have an interest in the plan. Once a financial goal has been determined, a gift range chart can be pulled that outlines the size of gifts you should look for to reach your goal. Depending on your plan timeline, contributions would be made over 3-to-5 years. A spreadsheet can be used to create a list of prospective investors who might give to the plan. Know that many board members and key stakeholders might be reluctant to help fundraise if they do not believe the plan is possible to achieve. Major donor prospects must be engaged BEFORE the plan is finalized. As the [saying](#) goes, "If you want money, ask for advice. If you want advice, ask for money."

CONCLUSIONS & FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

It is unlikely that fundraising will recover and return to a pre-COVID environment soon, if at all. Those organizations that have fewer resources, fewer staff, and dwindling reserves are in jeopardy. Given the need for every service that currently exists and more, shelters, services, and advocates mustn't be lost over the next 12 months.

The following are recommendations that have come out of the findings of this report. It is recommended that some should be implemented immediately while others can be implemented long term. Regardless of the timeframe, it is critical that the movement shift in order to be competitive and ensure the resources that are needed will be available well into the future.

Two things stood out in the findings of this report. First, domestic violence organizations are seeing increases in demand for services. Despite increased giving for nonprofits [nationally](#) in the second quarter of 2020, many DV organizations have been forced to draw down their reserves to operate and meet survivors' needs. Secondly, while donors may be moving away from nonprofits that don't show clear outcomes, DV organizations have not followed suit on the whole. This puts them at an extreme disadvantage, given the overall focus on women and girls ending violence against women specifically.

Creation Of A National Emergency Action Plan

A more thorough national assessment of services' financial standing, especially those in critical rural areas, should be undertaken immediately. A subsequent plan should be developed to create a fund that will help those organizations stabilize and build fundraising capacity. While there is an inherent competition for funds, even within the movement, it's critical that a national collaborative plan be developed to shore up these services at a time when losing them will most certainly cost lives.

Care should be taken to include all providers, not just those who are members of coalitions or who operate emergency shelters. Now is the time for everyone to come together and rise above membership lists, state boundaries, or other restrictions that can prevent partnerships.

The plan should have a strong assessment of needs, how stabilization will be accomplished, and outcomes. Major donors will need to trust the organization or organizations leading the effort and know that they will produce measurable impact so that their funds are not wasted but result in measurable change.

National vendor discounts should also be sought for the technology needed to reach more survivors remotely, fundraise online, and use social media like never before. The more national strategies that can be available for those without access to those services, the more survivors can be served, and the more funds that will be raised.



National Program Outcomes

Collectively, there should be agreement on national clear, measurable outcomes that show how DV organizations' programs impact efforts to end violence against women. These outcomes would become the benchmark by which donors can measure those organizations under consideration for an investment.

The data used to measure success needs to be standardized nationally with universal definitions of "domestic violence," "intimate partner violence," and "femicide." Currently definitions vary based on whether or not they are sociological or criminal in nature and those vary state by state in how they are measured.

Local agencies should be able to track and report their performance based on these common national outcome measures. Many organizations don't have the infrastructure, such as staffing and technology, to track data. It will be essential to have a system that gathers and reports data that all providers, regardless of membership in an organization, report to in the future. Having a system that gathers and reports data that all providers – regardless of membership in an organization – report to will be critical in the future.

There are security concerns around the collection of data on a national level. Software and reporting should be developed with the safety of survivors as a priority. With today's technology, it's possible to address these concerns and collect data in ways that show the work's impact. These concerns should not be allowed to stop the investigation and development of safe, secure data tracking software. Finally, this software must be available for use at little to no cost so that collection is widespread. Without this important consideration in mind, collection would be limited to those with the extra resources available for this upgrade. Based on this study, those additional resources are not widely available, nor will they be in the near future.

Best Practice Operational Metrics

Domestic Violence organizations need to ensure that they recognize national best practices and track their performance against them on an annual or more basis. Metrics goals should be established annually and shared with the board and staff regularly.

Transparency is critical. There are some short-term actions that organizations should take immediately, like implementing succession plans, conflict of interest policies, and publishing their audits and 990's online for easy access and transparency.

Training on Planning, Budgeting, and Fundraising

Training should be developed and offered, with technical assistance on how to develop a multi-year plan in the format that attracts donors with the potential to make a major gift. National organizations should make available specialized training that focuses on the unique needs and challenges domestic violence providers face in calculating and communicating impact. The creation of templates, tools, and suggested outcomes would assist organizations with fewer fundraising resources and staff.

Additionally, assistance should be provided to train the leadership in calculating the cost of business based budgets and a multi-year projection of expenses that covers the plans developed. This will help improve the movement's stability when the true cost of emergency shelter operation, hotline services, and counseling is communicated nationwide. The longer organizations continue to show that they operate without the existence of in-kind, volunteers, and submarket pay, the longer we do a disservice to those who dedicate their lives to this mission and to the survivors who need our help.

Final Word

Fifty years ago, the domestic violence movement started as sparks of passionate women and men who pulled together meager resources that led to the betterment of society and countless lives.

Today, with demand for services greater than ever and budgets being cut, the movement once again finds itself at a critical crossroads. For months now, I've heard from many of you how challenging it is to meet all survivors' needs during the pandemic. Whether we succeed or fail in the future comes down to our ability to rise as a movement and the decisions we make right now. It all starts with the extraordinary leaders, selfless advocates, and staff reading this report.



WE LOOK FORWARD TO A FUTURE WHERE WE CAN ONCE AGAIN RISE TOGETHER

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ABOUT SHARITY

At Sharity, we ensure philanthropists can trust the nonprofits they invest in by knowing what they're looking for, and nonprofits can empirically show how their work is making a difference.

Clients choose Sharity because our Sharity experts bring decades of nonprofit and government leadership experience – to every project – that will save you time and grow your impact. We provide our clients with tips and tools to make fundraising and running a nonprofit easier. Sharity's customized plans help clients engage donors and communicate exactly how they will achieve their mission. We also help clients cultivate and retain major donors who will invest in them and their impact.

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