

Starting a Nonprofit in Pennsylvania

A Step-by-Step Guide to Get Your Ducks in a Row!

Created by The Nonprofit Partnership

1. Identifying the Need and Mission

- Clearly define the problem you aim to address and who you will serve
- Assess whether the need is real, significant, and requires creating a nonprofit
- Research existing organizations — if a mission-aligned nonprofit already exists, consider partnering or exploring whether your idea could fit as a program under their work
- Confirm that forming a new nonprofit is the most effective and responsible path for your mission

2. Assemble Your Founding Board

- Pennsylvania requires a minimum of three board members
- Select individuals with relevant skills, experience, and ability to significantly commit
- Develop initial governance expectations

3. Assess Resources & Incorporate

- Understand the financial and administrative resources needed to start and sustain a nonprofit before you are legally able to fundraise
- Recognize that startup costs may require out-of-pocket expenses, similar to starting any business
- Choose a nonprofit name and verify availability through the [PA Department of State](#)
- File [Articles of Incorporation](#) with required charitable purpose language
- Retain stamped Articles for IRS and future compliance steps

4. Draft & Approve Bylaws

- Outline decision-making processes, board roles, and organizational structure
- Include IRS-required language for tax-exempt eligibility
- Have your board review and formally adopt the bylaws

5. Obtain an EIN (Employer Identification Number)

- Apply through the [IRS website](#) (free)
- Required to open a bank account, apply for grants, or hire staff

6. Apply for 501(c)(3) Federal Tax-Exempt Status

- File [Form 1023](#) or [1023-EZ](#)
- Prepare supporting documents: budgets, bylaws, narrative program descriptions, conflict-of-interest policy
- Processing times vary — patience is key!

7. Register with the [Pennsylvania Bureau of Charitable Organizations \(BCO\)](#)

- Required for most nonprofits before soliciting donations
- Determine if you qualify for an exemption
- Annual renewal is required to maintain good standing

8. Build Your Year-One Framework

- Develop a business plan outlining programs, goals, and sustainability
- Establish financial and fundraising systems
- Create communication, compliance, and administrative processes to [maintain tax-exempt status](#)



These steps offer a general overview of starting a nonprofit. Each organization's path is different, and the process may vary based on your mission, structure, and circumstances.

Flip this sheet over to access NPP's FREE on-demand "Starting a Nonprofit" webinar for additional context, including fiscal sponsorship and next steps after receiving 501(c)(3) status.



Starting a Nonprofit Webinar

Get your ducks in a row with NPP's Executive Director, Adam Bratton!

Beginning a nonprofit can be exciting — and overwhelming. This **beginner-friendly** webinar provides clear, accessible guidance on every major step of forming a nonprofit in Pennsylvania and navigating the federal 501(c)(3) process.

What You'll Learn

- Legal and technical requirements at both the state and federal level
- What the IRS expects in a 501(c)(3) application (Form 1023 / 1023-EZ)
- Ongoing compliance requirements to maintain nonprofit status
- Community expectations — including when partnering or fiscal sponsorship may be a better option than forming a new nonprofit

Bonus: Players Philanthropy Fund (PPF)

Hear how fiscal sponsorship can support your charitable initiative through back-office administration and compliance support — whether or not you pursue your own tax-exempt status.



Scan the QR or visit
bit.ly/NPPsan to
access the webinar

When You're Ready: Join The Nonprofit Partnership

NPP is proud to welcome organizations **after they receive official 501(c)(3) status**. While we cannot provide individualized support during the formation phase, we are committed to helping your nonprofit thrive once you are legally established.

As a member, you'll gain access to:

- One-on-one consultations and technical assistance
- Governance, compliance, and fundraising guidance
- A wide range of trainings and workshops
- Tools, templates, and best-practice resources
- A supportive network of nonprofit professionals

Membership Dues Structure	Regional
Level 1: Annual Operating Budget Below \$50,000	\$105
Level 2: Annual Operating Budget Between \$50,000 & \$250,000	\$185
Level 3: Annual Operating Budget Between \$250,000 & \$1 Million	\$385
Level 4: Annual Operating Budget Between \$1 Million & \$5 Million	\$705
Level 5: Annual Operating Budget Above \$5 Million	\$885

Visit YourNPP.org for a full list of benefits and steps to become a member!