

Episode 16: 2021 Nonprofit New Year's Resolutions

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This is a transcript of Nancy Bacon and Sarah Brooks talking on the Nonprofit Radio Show podcast. You can listen [here](#) or however you prefer to listen to podcasts.

Nancy Bacon

Hello, and welcome to the Nonprofit Radio Show -- a podcast with tips and tools for small nonprofits. If you feel in the dark about how to run a nonprofit, sunshine is on its way. I'm Nancy Bacon. And I'm joined by Sarah Brooks. And this week, we're thinking about our 2021 nonprofit New Year's resolutions.

Sarah Brooks

Ah, I have to say one of my more dreaded times of the year. I'm terrible at making personal New Year's resolutions, or I guess I should say, I'm terrible at keeping them. But I do think New Year's resolutions for your nonprofit organization can have some value. It's important to take stock of the past year and resolve to do some things differently, especially after the year we've had this year. Even if you don't meet every resolution perfectly, having those intentions sets you on a good path.

Nancy

I totally agree. And as you know, it's not just the intention of the goal. It's the intentionality around learning that it takes time to actually sit and think, just really deeply think, what happened. What did we learn from that? And how do we take those, you know, people are now calling it, we've heard so much about silver linings, people are now calling them silver learnings and what are those silver learnings that we're bringing forward?

Sarah

Yeah. And so I thought it might be kind of fun for you and I, Nancy, to think a little bit about the silver learnings that we've gained from the Nonprofit Radio Show this year. We've done, I don't know, a number of episodes by now. And maybe it would be fun for you and I just to think back on what we've talked about and make a few resolutions we hope the nonprofits listening out there might consider.

Nancy

I think that's a great idea. And I think it's really important to remember kind of who we are. Sarah sits in Winthrop in the leadership of a wonderful organization running a nonprofit and really, in the work of running a nonprofit. I sit in Seattle, I'm a nonprofit educator. And I think a whole lot about those nonprofits, and how do we move people to action? So you'll see those threads in our comments in terms of what we're reflecting on and what we want to pull forward.

Sarah

Absolutely. And it's important to have both of those elevations of perspective when you're thinking about what is good for your nonprofit organization.

Nancy

For sure. So what's your first resolution?

Sarah

My first resolution, of course, because we all know it's near and dear to my heart, is, has to do with fundraising. And I hope that nonprofits out there resolve to see fundraising through a new lens: remove the words arm twisting, or selling, or any of those other phrases about fundraising that nag in your head. And instead, think about, what if you thought of it as providing an opportunity for people to share their values? What if you saw it as part of your mission, to bring people in-- a way for them to share their joy and the impact in the work you do, and not just see it as a necessary evil to make your programs work. Sometimes just making the mental shift before getting practical with what that looks like or what it does, sets you on the right path to a whole new world of learning and discovery.

Nancy

I love that. I love that just simple attitude shift. So, my first resolution is to be open to the moonshot idea. Now we've seen a whole lot of out of the box thinking: new partnerships, program ideas, kind of things that never would have happened have come out of COVID. And I hope that we can hold on to this higher appreciation for risk and innovation that may help us to achieve our missions effectively and efficiently going forward. That we think about oh, you know, things were easier back before COVID. I had the plan for that I had the checklist for that. And that's great. I'm not saying innovate everything. But let's hold on to that exploration, that curiosity that I think we've discovered during these times.

Sarah

I think that's so important. Nancy, I when I reflect back on my organization, I'm most proud of some of the ways we've actually figured our way out of a conundrum we were in about what to do with COVID. And I hope that spirit of bringing together a team of people to think hard about a challenge, and realize that together we can come up with a solution, is a spirit that stays in the organization.

Nancy

Mm hmm. So what's your next resolution?

Sarah

Super practical, because you know, it's sort of like saying, I'm going to drink more water in 2021. Sometimes you do just have to do the super practical ones. And so, my resolution for nonprofit organizations out there listening would be to make a six-month financial forecast. Scary, not as much fun, but go back and listen to our podcast on it. It's actually fairly straightforward and simple, and it is so comforting and reassuring to actually have written on a piece of paper, what your real financial status is, then you can decide what to do from there and how much to worry or how much not to worry. But until you have a real firm handle on what you think your revenue is going to look like, what your expenses are going to look like, just for the next six months, and make that accessible to all your board and staff, you live in a sort of state of uncertainty and fear. And that's not a good place to live, In 2021, we're going to try to be in a state of greater calm.

Nancy

You know, Sarah, I love that. And it reminds me of something I learned this year, which is called the Zeigarnik effect. The Zeigarnik effect is when you have something unresolved in your head, and you don't therefore stop thinking about it until you resolve it. And there's some great research involving waiters in a restaurant.

Sarah

Interesting.

Nancy

And so this, this whole idea of, of really putting your financial numbers down on the back of an envelope, which I remember how you described in our last podcast, it does actually reduce the

overwhelm. It reduces the mulling in the middle of the night, because you've resolved it in your head. So, I love that.

Sarah

Yep. How about you what's next on your list?

Nancy

So, next on my list is to see the potential in the online world. You know, I miss being with people, I miss that energy in the room. You know, I'm a classic teacher, where I love seeing the faces and feeling the chemistry. But there's so much to gain from having online tools in our toolbox. Over the last eight months, I have watched a faith community gather online with people from Seattle to Spokane sharing tips for how to celebrate the High Holidays. They never could have done that without being on Zoom together. I saw a statewide board use breakout rooms for the first time, for the first time building those interpersonal relationships, which they never did before, because they just didn't know how to use breakout rooms before. There's benefits to getting good at being online. And I hope we continue to use those skills even when we can come back together again.

Sarah

It's a great point, Nancy. And I think what will be really interesting, once we get through the pandemic phase will be to see how we bring the real life and the online together. There's an opportunity there for some really powerful blending that makes things both more accessible for people and allows more people to participate, but also still provides for that human connection we know we, we all need and miss.

Nancy

Mm hmm. In fact, there's great adult learning research that says that when we're just delivering information, that's better online. If we're looking for interpersonal connection, that's when we need to physically be together in the room. So that idea of blended is -- there's actually research behind that, and I, I do hope we carry that forward.

Sarah

Oh, yeah. No, no, it will be so, it'll be so exciting to watch it, to watch this new model sort of unfold.

Nancy

Absolutely. What's your third resolution?

Sarah

Well, my last one is, I think I want to use the phrase resolve to toot your own horn. I've been doing lots of research lately on idioms because I often find they actually have horrible originations. This one I think actually has an okay origination, which is it came from someone playing their trumpet loudly. And I love that image of. I think nonprofits actually do a terrible job--we're awful at playing our trumpet loudly and making sure we get heard. Because we're so busy moving on to the next great project, we finish something that is amazing, that has a huge impact and we forget to tell anyone about it. Because oh, there's still more to do. We haven't resolved our main mission yet. There are still people who need help or waters that need saving. So, I really want to encourage all the nonprofits I know, to pause, actually think about some amazing things you did this year and take a moment to write it down. Write down the success story. You might think all your donors and supporters and volunteers and those you serve--Oh, they all know that, of course, everybody knows we do that. But people don't, they don't stop and think about your organization in the same way that you do. You live and breathe it. Others are just sort of thinking about it here and there. And you need to feed them those real stories of what you did well, because every organization out there is making a big difference right now. And we need to take the time to share those stories, because they're also great bright spots for people. We also just need this as humans, we need good stories right now of things that actually are getting better because of work that's being done. So, you can consider that resolution not just good for your organization, but good for all of us.

Nancy

I agree. I agree. I love reading those stories. They, that little burst of kind of positivity runs through my body and I have to imagine that also helps with fundraising. Right?

Sarah

Absolutely.

Nancy

I think I do remember the groups that made me smile.

Sarah

Yep.

Nancy

Yeah. Well, my third resolution is, is similar in that it's, it's, it's to remember that we're all in this together. That whether you need to reach out for help or use an opportunity to build relationships with people where we are collectively as leaders in the nonprofit community as people who care, we are all in this journey together to serve our communities and to make the world a better place. I've heard from too many nonprofit leaders that they feel like failures because they can't hold all the balls in the air at the same time. You were never meant to hold all of those balls alone, you were never meant to fundamentally change how you do your work, and raise the money and be everything to everyone and your staff, your volunteers and all that you were never meant to do that alone. And I hope we all remember that going into the new year.

Sarah

You know, that reminds me, Nancy, I have had numerous conversations with very humble nonprofit workers, or volunteers who, who sort of play down the work they do. And I like to remind them that they're a part of a profession. We are, we are a profession. And professionals support each other. They share knowledge, they understand what works and what doesn't. They, or they have questions about what might work and what might not work. And they share those discussions and those findings and those learnings together. So, I hope, yeah, as part of that process of realizing we're in this together, we also see ourselves as professionals, who have an obligation and a responsibility to support each other, and share with each other as we go,

Nancy

For sure. And there's a whole body of tools and templates and all sorts of things there to help so you don't need to do this alone. So, Sarah, what's our Word of the Week?

Sarah

Our word is, interestingly, a word I don't think either of us actually said in this episode yet. And yet, it underlines I think, all that we've been talking about this year. Our word is aim. And when I looked up aim, I found two really important definitions that are so fitting for the Nonprofit Radio Show, The first was: point or direct at a target. I think about, you have to be clear about what you're shooting for, you actually have to have a target in order to aim towards something. And the second definition was to have an intention of achieving. And I love that part of achieving. So, it's not just having an intention. But it's an intention that leads to us actually

accomplishing something. And so when I think about that, in the nonprofit world, and especially when I think about the resolutions you and I just talked about, and all the episodes we've focused on this year, they're all centered around this idea of let's set reasonable, achievable, but lofty goals for ourselves. Let's hold ourselves to an expectation that we can do more and do better, and do it efficiently and less stressfully, but let's make them doable. But let's also really hold ourselves to that, that standard we want to aim for. What does aim mean to you?

Nancy

You know, I, I love the word. And I've actually used the word in my nonprofit educator work in the context of aim for action. And that is, that I use the metaphor of a mountain top that if I want to get to the top of Mount Rainier, for example, that is our, our target. That's, that's where we're trying to go in your definition. But then I want to go one step further and, and how do we support that intentionality. So when we aim for something, we need to make sure we have two pieces holding that up, we need to have the reflection and the accountability, we need to have time to think deeply about how we're going to get to that goal. And we need to have our team along with us that holds us accountable. So, I love the word aim. Because it's, it's like a triangle, it's the focus, but then it's the two bottom points of the triangle that allow us to keep, keep moving in that direction.

Sarah

Mm hmm. Great words to end 2020 on-- how to aim for what your mission and your organization need in 2021. Look, we know the last few weeks of the calendar year are crazy busy in most nonprofit organizations. But we hope that over the next few weeks, you'll take a moment to make two or three resolutions for your organization. That means you do need to aim. Take that time for that reflection. Think deeply about what's happened, what you've been good at. And what you can be even better at in 2021. 2020 has been incredibly hard. But Nancy and I want to share that we know you're doing a really good job. We also know you have everything you need to endure and to thrive, particularly as you look across your community and see all of the people who are walking alongside you and cheering you on. Just find your aim. Stay focused and trust that you are capable of amazing things. We'll be here for you in 2021. You've totally got this.

Nancy

Before we wrap up 2020, we want to give you a quick update on the Nonprofit Radio Show. Our friend and partner in starting the Nonprofit Radio Show, Joanne Crabtree, has stepped away to pursue other projects. We are eternally grateful to Joanne for so much.

Sarah

Thank you Joanne.

Nancy

Thank you for your masterful editing technology know how and nonprofit wisdom. Thank you Joanne for everything you do. But don't worry, Sarah and I aren't going anywhere. And we are excited to continue to bring new episodes to you on a regular basis. And you may notice some new voices in those episodes. We're excited to invite some guests along the way to add to the conversation. First up will be HR expert Skye Mercer - look for that episode in January. We are planning a live show on February 19 at 9am. Mark your calendar. We hope you will join the conversation as we answer your questions and talk about what is on your mind. Visit our website, Nonprofit Radio Show.com to register. Lastly, we are eager to grow our community. So please rate us on the podcast system that you use. Share the episode with your friends and family. We want to grow this community because we want to make sure that every nonprofit has access to nonprofit learning, connection conversation. And we're just so glad you're along with us,

Sarah

Best wishes for the New Year.

Nancy

Happy New Year.

JoAnn Crabtree

Thank you for joining us today. We hope you'll share this episode of the Nonprofit Radio Show with your colleagues, friends and family. Nonprofit Radio Show. Sunshine for small nonprofits. Tune in for our next episode on your favorite podcasting site or at NonprofitRadioShow.com. Nonprofit Radio Show is hosted by Nancy Bacon, Sarah Brooks, and Joanne Crabtree. Music composed by Riley Crabtree.

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