

Improving Nonprofit Compensation

Letter from the King County Executive



King County

Veterans, Seniors & Human Services Levy

Dear Fellow King County Resident:

Across our region, we depend on nonprofit agencies to provide essential services like supportive housing, shelters, behavioral health, legal system alternatives, services for survivors of gender-based violence, outreach, and case management. As we envision growing roles for community-based services in the region we want to become, we must also examine whether current practices support the nonprofit agencies that will carry forward our community-based work. Nonprofit agencies have long reported that public funding models for community-based services make it difficult to hire and sustain the strong nonprofit work force our region needs to deliver essential services.

This letter accompanies the first edition of the Veterans, Seniors and Human Services Levy (VSHSL)-funded King County Nonprofit Wage & Benefits Survey. King County contracted with 501 Commons to administer in 2021 the wage survey and a Nonprofit Employee Engagement Survey. The surveys and an accompanying online database establish a baseline to inform analyses and decisions about how to best support the nonprofit sector, which performs so much essential work in our region. This report and accompanying website make data on nonprofit employee compensation freely and widely available to nonprofit agencies, other governments, philanthropic funders, and the public.

This report shows that many nonprofit employees working in critical services like shelter provision, violence prevention, and community health make wages at levels that make it difficult to sustain a career doing community-based work in our region. The survey allows us to analyze with greater precision where public investment is and is not supporting nonprofit agencies commensurate with the importance and difficulty of the work our community asks of them. The survey also allows us to examine where current nonprofit funding practices are reversing – or perpetuating – patterns of inequity.

At King County, we are committed to continuously improving and adapting our practices to elevate the efficacy, equity, and efficiency of our work. Our community increasingly looks to and invests in community-based approaches that can provide essential services and break cycles and systems that perpetuate poverty, racism, violence, and inequitable distributions of benefit and burden. It is a matter of stewardship to adjust our funding practices so that they set the conditions for nonprofit agencies to appropriately pay workforces that can afford to live in the communities they serve, sustain careers that allow them to attain mastery in difficult and essential community services, and meet our commitments to creating a welcoming community where every person can thrive.

King County will not be able to solve alone or immediately the challenges this survey illuminates. Nonprofit wage inequity has taken decades to develop to current levels. But, we must first understand problems to solve them. This survey and its future updates allow a data-based examination of a long-reported challenge, will inform new strategies to improve conditions, and will provide periodic updates to measure the results of adjustments. These data and findings can similarly inform other funders of nonprofit agencies and nurture the coalition that it will take to make durable change at a regional scale.

The data in the following *Putting People First: Wage & Benefits Survey* report is valuable as a platform to launch policy and systems changes that will help to strengthen the nonprofit sector as we call upon that sector to strengthen our communities. Thank you for joining us as we endeavor to adapt nonprofit funding practices so that the people doing some of our region's most important and difficult work can sustain the long-term effort that it will take to turn the tide on generational problems like poverty, homelessness, and displacement. This report illuminates things we can change in our time to improve long-standing problems. The outcomes we all want for our communities depend on improving the wages and benefits for nonprofit employees. Let's use this data to understand the problem and act together at scale to solve it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dow Constantine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial "D".

Dow Constantine
King County Executive