

50 Steps to Starting a Nonprofit

If you want to start a nonprofit, it's good to have a roadmap for success. The following 50 steps are key to launching a nonprofit. These aren't in any particular order, so map them out as you see fit. And I might add a 51st – Come to the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference! (<https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com>)

1. **Identify a Need:** Ensure that the need your nonprofit plans to address is not currently being met in your community.
2. **Do Market Research:** Conduct surveys, interviews, and focus groups to determine community support for your nonprofit.
3. **Define Your Mission:** Clearly articulate the purpose and goals of your organization.
4. **Create a Vision Statement:** Identify what you ultimately hope to achieve.
5. **Determine Your Audience:** Who are you serving? Who would be interested in supporting your cause?
6. **Write a Case Statement:** Document why your nonprofit should exist and what it plans to do.
7. **Establish a Business Plan:** Detail your organization's strategy for achieving its goals.
8. **Identify Key Roles:** Determine what roles will be necessary in your organization.
9. **Recruit a Board of Directors:** Identify and recruit individuals who are passionate about your mission.
10. **Determine Legal Structure:** Will your organization be a trust, association, or corporation?
11. **Choose a Name:** Make sure it aligns with your mission and is not already in use.
12. **File Articles of Incorporation:** This establishes your nonprofit as a legal entity.
13. **Develop Bylaws:** Create the formal rules that will govern your nonprofit.
14. **Conduct First Board Meeting:** Officially establish your organization and its board.
15. **Obtain an Employer Identification Number (EIN):** You'll need this for tax purposes.
16. **Establish a Record-Keeping System:** This will be essential for legal compliance.
17. **Register for State Tax Identification Numbers:** Check the requirements in your state.

18. **Apply for Federal Tax-Exempt Status (501(c)(3) status):** This allows donors to make tax-deductible contributions.
19. **Register with Your State's Department of Charities:** This is typically required for fundraising.
20. **Apply for a Nonprofit Mailing Permit:** This allows you to mail materials at nonprofit postal rates.
21. **Develop a Fundraising Plan:** How will your organization raise money?
22. **Identify Potential Grant Opportunities:** Start researching potential funding sources.
23. **Write a Budget:** Plan your organization's financial activities for the year.
24. **Open a Bank Account:** You will need your EIN and a copy of your articles of incorporation.
25. **Purchase Insurance:** Make sure your organization is covered against risk.
26. **Create a Logo and Branding Materials:** Make sure they align with your mission and audience.
27. **Build a Website:** This is essential for credibility and fundraising.
28. **Establish a Social Media Presence:** This is a great way to engage with your community.
29. **Recruit Volunteers:** Many nonprofits rely heavily on volunteer work.
30. **Develop a Marketing Strategy:** How will you get the word out about your nonprofit?
31. **Plan a Launch Event:** Celebrate the official launch of your nonprofit and attract initial supporters.
32. **File for Trademarks (if necessary):** Protect your logo, slogan, or program names.
33. **Create Key Partnerships:** Look for organizations that complement your mission and can help further your goals.
34. **Develop a Donor Management System:** Keep track of who's donating to your organization.
35. **Create a Donor Recognition Plan:** How will you thank and recognize your donors?
36. **Design a Program Evaluation Method:** How will you measure the success of your programs?
37. **Start Offering Programs or Services:** Begin doing the work your nonprofit was created to do.

38. **Continually Evaluate and Adjust Your Business Plan:** Things change. Be ready to adapt.
39. **File Required Annual Tax Forms:** Make sure to stay in compliance with all tax laws.
40. **Develop a Succession Plan:** Plan for the future of your organization.
41. **Join a Nonprofit Association:** Networking and professional development are key.
42. **Create a Major Gift Strategy:** How will you attract large gifts to your organization?
43. **Invest in Professional Development for Staff:** The stronger your team, the stronger your nonprofit.
44. **Plan and Execute Regular Fundraising Events:** Keep funds coming in to support your work.
45. **Cultivate Relationships with Major Donors:** Personal relationships are key in fundraising.
46. **Apply for Grants:** Diversify your funding sources.
47. **Communicate Regularly with Supporters:** Keep them informed and engaged with regular updates.
48. **Acknowledge All Contributions Promptly:** Always say thank you!
49. **Regularly Review and Update Your Strategic Plan:** Stay aligned with your mission and goals.
50. **Keep the Passion Alive:** Remember why you started your nonprofit in the first place!