Nonprofit Infrastructure Investment Advocacy Group (NIIAG) Policy Agenda - December 2020

The Nonprofit Infrastructure Investment Advocacy Group (NIIAG), chaired by Independent Sector and KABOOM!, supports policies that recognize the essential role of civic and community infrastructure in meeting our public health and economic crisis. NIIAG is comprised of a diverse community of leaders from across the nonprofit sector. It prioritizes investments in and through nonprofit organizations that strengthen civic bonds across the country, put people back to work rebuilding our communities, and provide – at a national scale -- the critical resources and services nonprofits need to accomplish their missions.

We have organized our priority policy requests into three categories: (1) civic infrastructure; (2) community infrastructure; and (3) critical national infrastructure.

Civic Infrastructure Priority Items

We consider civic infrastructure to be the structure and systems, practices and norms that knit and hold together the fabric of our communities and our nation and create the conditions for societal change. Investment into our civic infrastructure is vital to our civil society – the very foundation upon which the nation is built.

1. **Build the capacity and representation of nonprofit institutions** - We call for the creation of a single agency (cabinet-level or board-led commission accountable to Congress) that ensures the interests and the expertise of the nonprofit sector are fully represented in the policy making process, existing services and programs are streamlined by placing them within one agency, and smaller, community-based organizations have easier access to government support. We also call for expanded government collection and timely dissemination of disaggregated data about the nonprofit sector.

2. **Strengthen the capacity of the volunteer force in the United States to respond to national crises** – We call for $250 million in federal funding to: (1) support the creation and launch of a nationally-scaled digital platform to connect, mobilize, and manage the volunteer networks across the nation, particularly those in long-underserved communities, and; (2) to build the professional capacity of nonprofit organizations to effectively develop and engage their volunteers.

3. **Ensure robust and reliable federal funding for an expanded vision of national service in the U.S.** - We call for consistent, robust funding for AmeriCorps (formerly the Corporation for National and Community Service) to grow the number of funded positions. We support many of the recommendations made in the Inspired to Serve report of March 2020, including recommendations to: open service opportunities to people of differing mental and physical abilities; increase compensation, education benefits, and wraparound benefits to make service more accessible to all applicants; encourage participation by members of low income and underrepresented communities; and collect and track economic and demographic data to monitor and ensure the diversity of the service corps. We support expanding the scope of federally supported national service programs, beginning with a new service year fellowship recommended in Inspired 2 Serve and then extending to all AmeriCorps programs. This expansion will enable nonprofit organizations of all types – such as those focused on the arts, the environment, or social justice – can be supported by national service corps members. (*also see digital service corps*)

4. **Extend key deadlines to enable a complete and accurate census** - The importance of a complete and accurate census to the nonprofit sector cannot be overstated. Reliable census data informs critical funding formulas, provides new insights into the communities we serve, and determines the voice our

communities will have in Congress. Extension of statutory deadlines is necessary to ensure accurate response rates from historically undercounted communities, particularly communities of color.

5. **Improve access to, and oversight of, national fundraising by nonprofits** - It is critical, especially in times of crisis, that nonprofits can quickly raise funds from outside their own communities while still complying with all state regulations. To facilitate this aim, we request a $3 million investment to create a single online portal that enables nonprofits of all sizes to easily ask for donations in response to a national disaster. Not only will such a tool provide a critical revenue raising opportunity for nonprofits, it will increase compliance with state solicitation laws, provide greater ability for charity regulators to investigate potential cases of wrong-doing or fraud and, in the end, build deeper public trust in the sector.

6. **Support state and tribal governments to ensure healthy and secure elections** - One critical marker of a healthy civic infrastructure is the rate at which its citizens vote. We support policies that help every American safely and easily participate in our democracy, while also bolstering public confidence in the security and legitimacy of our election process.

Community Infrastructure Priority Items

We consider community infrastructure to be public assets like libraries, recreation centers, schools, museums, parks, and playgrounds that anchor strong, vibrant, resilient communities.

1. **Provide additional funding for childcare for working parents** - The childcare system is on the verge of collapse due to COVID-19. We call on Congress to appropriate $50 billion to support childcare to allow providers to safely reopen and operate. Without this emergency stabilization funding, many nonprofit employees will not be able to return to work full-time even once infection rates begin to decline. In addition to this emergency funding, we support long-term investment to increase access to affordable, quality childcare as critical infrastructure for our workforce and economy, including home-based childcare.

2. **Invest in culture, arts, and humanities workers and programs** - Culture, arts, and humanities organizations are vital contributors to the nonprofit sector, are essential to the economy, vitality, and wellbeing of the communities they serve, and must be supported by all forms of relief. We support a $10 billion federal investment in nonprofit cultural organizations and governmental agencies at the federal, state, tribal and local levels, with details available in "Put Creative Workers To Work," a 15-action national recovery and equity strategy. We call for increasing the federal investment in the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to support nonprofit, state, tribal and local governmental and cultural organizations across the country by indexing each of their budgets to $1 per person. We request increased funding for the Administration for Native Americans' native languages and traditions programs.

3. **Provide additional funding for housing and community development** – We call for $22.5 billion in the HOME Investment Partnerships Program, a flexible formula grant program that supports new construction and rehabilitation of multifamily housing, homeowner rehabilitation, and tenant-based rental assistance. In addition, we support a $24 billion investment in the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, which provides flexible funding to cities and states to address housing, infrastructure, and public services in low and moderate-income neighborhoods. Access to secure housing is a key component of – or a prerequisite to – the effectiveness of many nonprofit services.

4. **Expand access to 211 Health and Human Service hub** – We call for a $150 million investment to expand 211 Health and Human Service hub to provide one place for nonprofit employees and individual members of our communities to find a range of services to support their needs during the pandemic crisis and beyond.

5. **Ensure robust funding for more equitable access to parks and recreation** - We recommend a one-time, historic investment of $500 million for local parks in any future economic relief or infrastructure package as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. We support H.R. 7264, the 21st Century Conservation Corps for Our Health and Our Jobs Act) which makes emergency changes to the Outdoor Recreation and Learning Program (ORLP). The ORLP provides grants to state or local government agencies (cities, counties, park districts) or federally recognized Indian tribes.

Critical National Infrastructure Priority Items

We consider critical national infrastructure to be core services and assets that nonprofits and others need to fulfill their missions of serving their communities.

1. **Ensure digital access for all** - Distance learning, telemedicine, and spiritual services require accessible and reliable internet services. While many nonprofits are able to convert to virtual operations, the persistent digital divide prevents them from fully serving their communities. We call for an immediate investment of $15 billion to support broadband internet access: $12 billion to close the homework, $3 billion for emergency home connectivity, $200 million for telemedicine grants, and $24 million for broadband mapping. In the long term, federal investment is needed to guarantee all citizens can access the internet, prioritizing the "last mile," hardest to serve communities. Additionally, reinstatement of net neutrality rules could help ensure all individuals and institutions, including nonprofits, have the same level of access to the internet.

2. **Build nonprofits' technical and skill-based technology capacity** – Systemic investment in building nonprofits' ability to effectively use technology is needed to ensure all of civil society is accessible in times of increased need. We support the establishment of a Negotiated Indirect Cost Reimbursement Agreement (NICRA) – style rate for government grants to help nonprofits build their digital infrastructure. We also support the creation of a digital service corps that could provide job training in a growing field, while also delivering to nonprofits and government baseline practices for technology security and data management.

3. **Prioritize public & civil society interests in digital infrastructure** – Most digital policy and virtual spaces are currently created by the business sector, but it is critical that products and platforms are also designed to advance the common good. We call for the creation of a quasi-governmental Corporation for Public Software & Digital Infrastructure, or other digital commons to ensure that data collected using government funds can be shared with fellow researchers to advance public understanding. Because nonprofit organizations rely on public trust to best serve their communities, we also support public policies that protect public trust and freedom of association, such as those that help identify and control bot-based content, discourage the use of facial recognition software at protests, and allow for the removal of private information from internet searches.

4. **Stabilize the U.S. Postal Service** - Nonprofits and the communities they serve rely on the U.S. Postal Service to facilitate a wide range of critical services and communication. We support emergency funding needed to sustain operations while evaluating long term policy solutions that improve the fiscal health of the institution. Long term solutions should recognize the Universal Service Obligation as a public good, without significantly decreasing service or raising rates on nonprofits and marginalized communities.

5. **Increase home energy efficiency and weatherization** – As more people spend 24 hours a day in their homes in 2020, it becomes increasingly important to ensure they can pay increased energy costs. We support increased federal investment in the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and the Weatherization Assistance Program.

6. **Support clean healthy transit** – In order to keep people safe during the pandemic, fight climate change, and improve public health, we support emergency funding of up to $32 billion to support clean, healthy transit. In the long term, public transit for underserved communities and vehicle electrification are achievable through infrastructure and tax incentives like those included in H.R. 2, the Moving Forward Act.

7. **Safe drinking water** – We call on policymakers to reauthorize and increase funding for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund and other programs to ensure all communities have clean drinking water and to help remove dangerous contaminants like PFAS from local water systems.

8. **Ensure environmentally sustainable infrastructure projects** – We call on policymakers to reinstate National Environmental Policy Act rules requiring federal agencies to assess the cumulative impact of infrastructure projects on climate change. We request explicit language funding environmental and sustainable infrastructure projects for tribal communities, and we support efforts to educate nonprofits about sustainable infrastructure resources.

More information on NIIAG can be found at independentsector.org/civil-society-infrastructure.