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OPINION

Opinion: We do not need any more nonprofits

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From food service organizations to reproductive justice groups, Oregon doesn't lack for nonprofits, the author writes. But as funding shrinks, the state needs organizations to collaborate better and make the most of available dollars. Cory Morse, MLive.com



By [Guest Columnist | The Oregonian](#)

Libra Forde

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Forde is executive director of Women's Foundation of Oregon, a grant-making, research and policy advocacy organization in Portland. She lives in Damascus.

It's time we confront a difficult truth in the social impact sector: we do not need any more nonprofits in Oregon.

This may sound counterintuitive, even unconventional, especially to those who believe that the more missions we have in motion, the more communities we can serve. There is much respect for this thinking.

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But here's the reality - federal dollars are drying up, and the scramble for funding that nonprofits have always known is intensifying. As federal dollars diminish, the burden shifts to Oregon's local governments, foundations and donors to fill the widening gap. This puts immense pressure on local dollars, which are now expected to do more with less — supporting a growing number of nonprofits while struggling to meet the rising needs of communities. The result is a fragmented ecosystem where everyone is underfunded and overstretched.

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The warning signs have been with us for years. Even before the Trump Administration's slashing of funding to federal agencies, several Oregon organizations have laid off employees and pulled back, as [Oregon Public Broadcasting reported](#) last year. But changes on the federal scene are translating into even steeper cuts in grants and contracts for nonprofits. Nonprofits are chasing a dwindling pool of grants, donors and sponsorships. The result? A competitive, fragmented sector where Oregon organizations fight for survival instead of finding strength in collaboration. Oregon has hundreds of nonprofits with overlapping missions, all duplicating administrative structures, all scrambling for limited resources, while our communities wait for meaningful, sustainable solutions.

We are entering a new era that requires bold, collective action. The answer is not in building more silos. The solution lies in building stronger bridges, airtight connections and community-focused actions.

In Oregon, this call to unity is especially urgent. Our state has one of the highest numbers of nonprofits per capita in the country outside of New England, [based on IRS figures](#). While this reflects a deeply caring and community-oriented population, it also creates inefficiency.

Whether it's in Portland, Pendleton, or Phoenix, Oregon's nonprofits are too often working in isolation, competing for the same limited sources of funding, employees and expertise. Rural organizations are especially vulnerable; under-resourced, under-supported and left to fill gaps in services that should be addressed through systemic change.

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We see this across sectors: education, health equity, housing, reproductive justice and climate resilience. Imagine what would be possible if Oregon coordinated more intentionally; if we merged missions where possible, consolidated administrative costs, and focused on impact over ego. Oregon's communities – especially those furthest from opportunity - deserve this kind of collaboration and can create a much stronger future for the state.

This is a moment for Oregon foundations and philanthropic institutions – including the one I lead – to step up, not just with more money, but with leadership. We must take a new kind of responsibility: support the gathering of nonprofits that are sunsetting, struggling or duplicative, and create intentional pathways toward collaboration, strategic merging and resource-sharing. We cannot stand by and watch those who can't "make it," but instead honor the missions they were built upon and ensure their impact can continue through stronger, unified entities.

Nonprofit mergers are often seen as failures. They should be seen as a strategy. A thoughtful merger can reduce overhead, deepen impact and offer communities a more consistent, coordinated response. Shared services models, backbone organizations and cooperative leadership are not theoretical; they are proven practices that must be scaled.

This is not a time for division, it is a time for disciplined unity. We must shift from survival mode to systems thinking. Instead of asking how an organization can stay afloat, we should ask how missions can thrive; whether that's in the current form or in coalition with others.

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Communities deserve more than exhausted leaders supporting and managing underfunded programs and laws. They deserve ecosystems of care that are built to last. Foundations and philanthropy should support this shift. Let's stop building more nonprofits and start building more power – together.

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