



SANTA BARBARA
FOUNDATION



2025

Report Highlights

The State of Nonprofits in Santa Barbara County



Every three years, the Santa Barbara Foundation (SBF) takes a close look at the nonprofits at the heart of Santa Barbara County — examining challenges, strengths, and opportunities. Developed in partnership with the UCSB Center for Evaluation and Assessment and informed by nonprofit professionals throughout the county, this report documents the vital role these organizations play in delivering housing, food, health care, education, disaster response, environmental protection, arts and culture, and more. This summary includes data highlights and recommendations for how to support this vital sector in our county.

To read the full report, scan the code.



Santa Barbara County nonprofits

- Contribute to economic vitality — represent 8.5% of all county jobs.
- Report stable financial health, but need support in the face of funding volatility.
- Adapt essential programs and services to meet 62% increased demand.
- Rely on volunteers — 70% say they are absolutely essential or very important.
- Collaborate to drive greater impact on complex problems.
- Have grown in Mid- and North/East County.

Nonprofits employ 8.5% of Santa Barbara County residents

2,137

501(c)(3) nonprofits are registered in Santa Barbara County

885

nonprofits actively operate, per IRS

665

nonprofits have paid staff



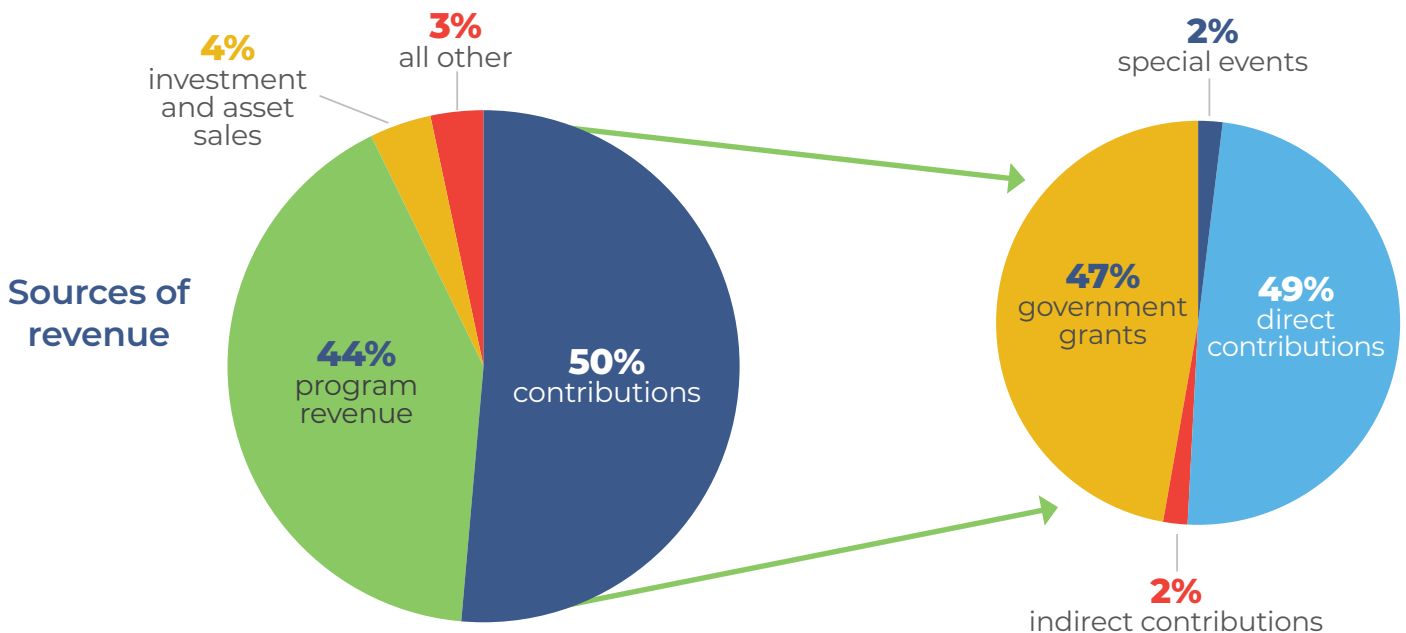
While overall county employment **decreased** 1.45% from 2019 to 2024, **nonprofit employment grew 21%** over the same period.

Majority of nonprofits report strong financial health, but anticipate volatility

As of spring 2025, most Santa Barbara County nonprofit leaders report strong financial health, but optimism about 2026 declined significantly — from 94% expecting stability or improvement in 2022 to 74% in 2025.

Nonprofits rely on diverse sources of revenue

In Santa Barbara County, fees for service account for 44% of all nonprofit funding. Government grants account for approximately 25%, and another quarter comes from direct donations.



Demand for nonprofit services continues to increase

62% of nonprofit leaders report increased demand for services — yet only 20% say their organization can fully meet the increase in community need.

Demand for organization services



Organizations' ability to meet demand for services



Volunteers play a critical role in the nonprofit workforce

88% of nonprofits engage volunteers, and 70% identify them as absolutely essential or very important to their mission. Yet 37% report difficulties recruiting volunteers. Volunteerism is down 33% from pre-COVID rates.

Adaptation, innovation, and collaboration are central strategies for nonprofit leaders

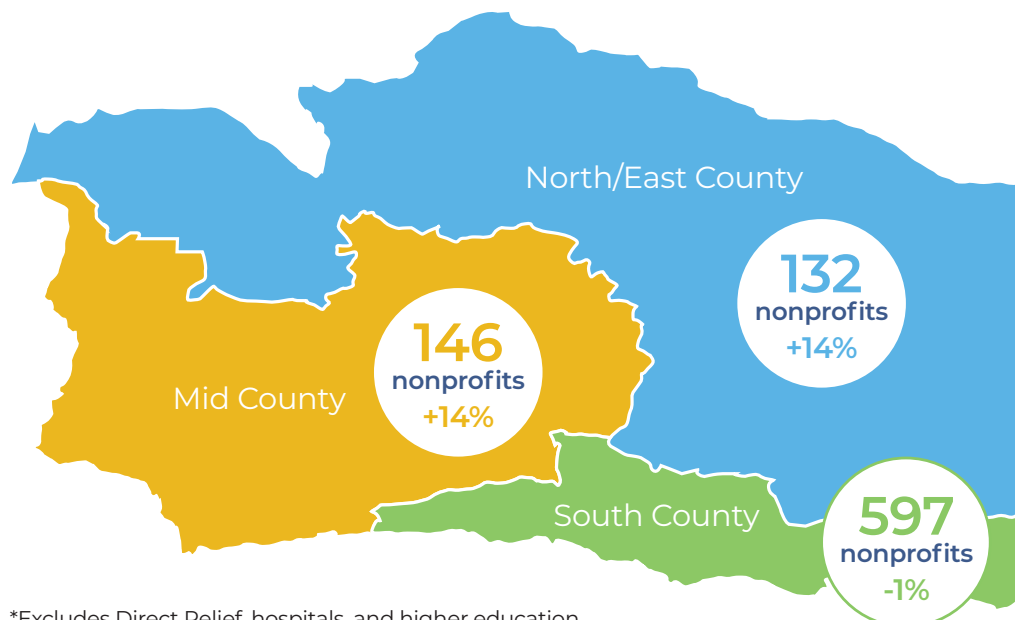
Faced with rising costs, limited funding, and rapidly changing community stressors, 80% of nonprofit leaders report participating in a network, coalition, or other initiative with nonprofits, schools, health care providers, and public agencies to extend reach and increase impact.

“ Collaboration is at our core... we’ve experienced such an exciting readiness to work together, to fill each other’s gaps, and augment each other’s opportunities. ”

Change in number of nonprofits by region, Santa Barbara County (FY2020-2023)

Growth in nonprofits in Mid- and North/East Santa Barbara County continues

The number of nonprofits headquartered in Mid- and North/East County grew 14% from 2020 to 2023 while there was a slight decrease in South County. Significant opportunities remain to expand nonprofit resources across the county.



*Excludes Direct Relief, hospitals, and higher education



Recommendations

The Santa Barbara Foundation shares this research to strengthen our nonprofits and better serve our communities. The following recommendations are intended to guide decision-makers, funders, and community partners.

- Understand and support the true costs of nonprofit services
- Strengthen volunteer recruitment and management
- Build on positive trends in Mid- and North/East County
- Support innovation and collective effort



To see the complete recommendations in our full report, scan the code.



Photos:

Front cover, clockwise from top left.
 Santa Barbara Channelkeeper
 Santa Barbara County Education Office
 La Boheme Dance
Ronald Williams
 Blue Sky Center
Bridgette Bugay
 Hillside
 Good Samaritan Shelter
Veronica Slavin

Back cover, clockwise from top left.
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