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Why we undertook Engage 501

By Barry Silverberg, President & CEO, Texas Association of Nonprofit Organizations

TANO envisions a Texas nonprofit sector that works together to be among the healthiest and most vibrant in the nation. BUT traveling throughout Texas for the past several years - spreading our message of the importance of all nonprofits being engaged in public policy and advocacy – I am acutely aware of the cultural divisions that pervade our state. It is clear there is much work to be done to build cultural bridges, to promote greater multi-cultural understanding, and to bring diverse communities together. All are essential to ensuring the present and future health and vitality of Texas.

Our key message, wherever we travel, is to stress as strongly as we can, that we in the nonprofit sector must think of ourselves as interconnected and interdependent. As a sector we make an enormous difference in others' lives and in the communities in which we live and serve. To continue doing so, we need to better understand each other, feel comfort and trust with each other, and be engaged TOGETHER in a common vision and purposes.

There are *haves* and *have-nots* everywhere in our state and within our nonprofit community. The shifting demographics – already reality! – demand that we make addressing these inequities an immediate priority. That means we need to be able to talk to all and understand and be understood by all who live in Texas.

As the only statewide organization of nonprofits in Texas concerned with all nonprofits – regardless of budget, field of service, or geography – we see it as our role, with YOUR help, to give voice to the more than 70,000 501 (C)(3) charitable organizations within Texas. To do that we work daily to build the largest community of nonprofits in Texas so as to leverage our collective power and influence with government, business and others. We seek to provide the organizational and professional development tools we all need to ensure that effective nonprofits thrive throughout Texas.

We believe a strong nonprofit sector requires everyone to be engaged. We need everyone working together. That requires good communication, understanding and appreciation of the enormous benefits and strengths that only come from diversity – within our boards and among our donors and staff. As we in this sector know only too well, if we want to change the world to a better place, we must start with ourselves. We cannot count on others to do “the right thing”.

To address these challenge and the manifold opportunities before us once we unleash the potential of a fully engaged Texas, the Texas Association of Nonprofit Organizations has partnered with Cultural Strategies to create Engage 501. Through it, we will discuss the demographic shifts, strategies to create and sustain diverse and inclusive boards of directors, fundraising within diverse populations, and greater Latino/ Hispanic engagement within our nonprofit community – through presentations and forums throughout Texas, webinars and in other ways.

We ask you to join in our vision and to help strengthen, grow and sustain it. Help us to become stronger so that we can do what we are created to do – to help all of our fellow Texans to aspire to and attain a good quality of life.