

The Benefits of Nonprofit Organization:

Advantages for Byway Groups

Everyone has some familiarity with nonprofit organizations. Such organizations play an important role in meeting a community's charitable, religious, educational and social service needs. Despite the prevalence of nonprofit organizations, many people are not familiar with what truly defines these groups.

In 1988, travelers in West Virginia could choose a different route—newly opened Interstate I-64. Businesses along the old route, the Midland Trail, found themselves in an economic downturn. “It was like the faucet had been turned off.” To promote travel and tourism in the region, people joined together to form the Midland Trail Scenic Highway Association, a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization. Today, the large 23-member Board of Directors oversees byway activities. The Midland Trail’s “Freedom Trek” rides are popular with bicyclists. In 2001, cyclists retraced the footsteps of Booker T. Washington in a 450-mile “Ride Across the Virginias.” Special guests joined the ride along the way—journalists, authors, historians, religious leaders, politicians and tourism specialists. (Photo: G.P. Cooper; Quikpage Publishing Company)

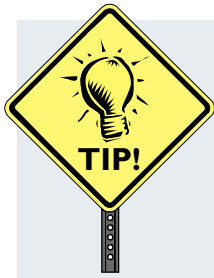


At a Glance: Nonprofit Organization

The following chart will help you understand the benefits and limitations of nonprofit organizations.

Nonprofit Organization

Basic Characteristics	Limitations	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be a corporation, trust, association or partnership, depending on state law. • Most popular form is corporation. Others (trust, association or partnership) are rare. • May or may not be tax-exempt. • Funding sources include grants, contributions, contracts. <p>Corporation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has identity separate from the people involved. Is treated as a person in most legal arenas. • Can enter into contracts, incur debts, hire/fire employees. • Members can not “profit” (financially) from membership. • Organizations can make profits, which must be used for their defined purpose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrictions apply to activities. • Documentation is only proof of existence. Poor documentation puts members at liability. • All activity must match charter and bylaws. • Annual filings with state and federal government may be required to maintain existence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be tax-exempt – receive gifts tax-exempt and buy goods tax-exempt (as allowed by state law). • Can borrow funds without putting members at risk. • Many foundations will only contribute to nonprofit organizations. • Can hire staff and enter into contracts.



Help for Nonprofits

The National Council of Nonprofit Associations (NCNA) is a network of 37 state and regional associations of nonprofits representing more than 17,000 nonprofits throughout the country. Find out who provides information, training and leadership within your state by contacting:

National Council of
Nonprofit Associations
1030 15th Street, NW
Suite 870
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: (202) 962-0322
Fax: (202) 962-0321
E-mail: ncna@ncna.org
Web page:
<http://www.ncna.org>

Interestingly, when people think of nonprofit organizations, they're usually thinking of nonprofit corporations. Three other types of nonprofits are rare among byway groups: partnerships, associations and trusts. When we discuss nonprofit organizations in this section, we mean nonprofit corporations. Nonprofit organizations differ from for-profit organizations in that their "profits" cannot be distributed to stakeholders such as the owners or investors. The "profits" that a nonprofit earns, if it provides a service, must be reinvested in the organization.

The Advantages of Incorporating

One of the biggest advantages of a nonprofit corporation is that the act of incorporating creates a legal entity separate from its founders and members. This can help shelter directors and members from legal and financial liability, assuming procedures and policies are well documented and followed. Also, nonprofit corporations continue to exist beyond membership changes. This means that volunteers or even board members can resign and be replaced without dissolving the organization. Incorporating also lends a degree of continuity and respectability that is attractive to funding sources and other community organizations.

The incorporating procedure varies from state to state, but it generally involves drafting a legal incorporation document often known as the articles of incorporation. Then the group files the document with the proper state office, usually the Secretary of State's office. The particular information required to incorporate can be sought from the state office responsible for incorporation. The organization generally must also hold an initial board of directors meeting and adopt initial bylaws. Once incorporated, the entity must follow the legal guidelines that apply, such as annual filing with the state organization and state and federal income tax returns.

The Benefits of Nonprofit Organization continued on page 89



Forming Your Nonprofit Organization:

A Checklist for Byways

Every nonprofit organization must have a carefully developed structure and operating procedures to effectively fulfill its purpose. Good governance starts with helping the organization begin on sound legal and financial footing in compliance with the numerous federal, state and local requirements related to nonprofits.

You can complete the incorporating procedure yourself. Many good resources are available to guide you through the process. You can also hire someone to do it. Although many nonprofits are formed without aid from an attorney, it's a good idea to seek legal advice, if only to review your work.

- Determine the purpose of the organization. Every organization should have a written statement that expresses its reason for being.
- Form a board of directors. The initial board will help translate the ideas behind the organization into reality through planning and fundraising. As the organization matures, the nature and composition of its board will also change.
- File articles of incorporation if you wish to incorporate. State law governs the requirements for forming and operating a nonprofit corporation.
- Draft bylaws. Bylaws, the operating rules of the organization, should be drafted and approved by the board early in the organization's development.
- Develop a strategic plan. The strategic planning process helps you express a vision of the organization's potential. Outline the steps necessary to work toward that potential, and determine the staffing needed to implement the plan. Establish program and operational priorities for at least one year.
- Develop a budget and resource development plan. Financial oversight and resource development (e.g., fundraising, earned income and membership) are critical board responsibilities. The resources needed to carry out the strategic plan must be described in a budget and financial plan.
- Establish a record keeping system. Corporate documents, board meeting minutes, financial reports and other official records must be preserved for the life of the organization. Your organization needs to document compliance with federal, state and local laws. Records could be subject to audits.

SIDE A



Forming Your Nonprofit Organization:

A Checklist for Byways (continued)

- Establish an accounting system. Responsible stewardship of the organization's finances requires the establishment of an accounting system that meets both current and anticipated needs.
- File for an Internal Revenue Service determination of federal tax-exempt status. Nonprofit corporations with charitable, educational, scientific, religious or cultural purposes have tax exempt status under section 501(c)(3), or sometimes section 501(c)(4), of the Internal Revenue Code. To apply for recognition of tax-exempt status, obtain form 1023 (application) and publication 557 (detailed instructions) from the local Internal Revenue Service office. The application is an important legal document, so it is advisable to seek the assistance of an experienced attorney when preparing it.
- File for state and local tax exemptions. In accordance with state, county and municipal law, apply for exemption from income, sales and property taxes.
- Meet the requirements of state, county and municipal charitable solicitation laws. Many states and local jurisdictions regulate organizations that solicit funds within that state, county or city. Usually compliance involves obtaining a permit or license and then filing an annual report and financial statement.

Other steps include:

- Obtaining an employer identification number from the IRS. (Some states also require a separate tax identification number.)
- Registering with the state unemployment insurance bureau.
- Applying for a nonprofit mailing permit from the US Postal Service.
- Obtaining directors' and officers' liability insurance.

This information is adapted from the National Center for Nonprofit Boards (now known as Board Source), an organization dedicated to increasing the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations by strengthening their boards of directors. Visit www.boardsource.org.

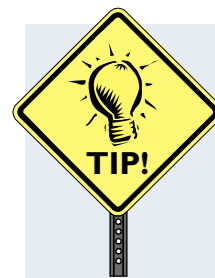
SIDE B

Tax-Exemption Isn't Automatic

Many people assume that tax-exempt status automatically comes along with being a nonprofit corporation. This isn't the case. Tax-exempt status is neither guaranteed nor automatic for a nonprofit organization. Tax-exempt status is dependent upon the express purpose for which the organization is formed and the methods by which that purpose will be accomplished. These should be stated in the articles of incorporation. What this means is that the activities of the organization must fit within certain state and federal guidelines.

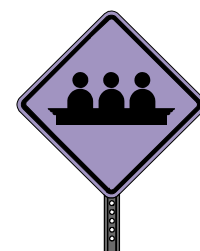
Tax-exemption is more complicated than people often realize, involving various types of taxes and levels of government. The federal tax code affects the numerous types of nonprofits differently. Also, organizations that qualify for exemption from paying federal income taxes on some or all of their income are not necessarily eligible to receive contributions that are tax deductible for the donors.

You may know the term "501(c)(3)," a common type of tax-exempt corporation. This is actually a reference to a particular section of the federal tax code. There are several other categories of tax exemption based on the purpose of the organization. Each category has specific limits with regard to the kinds and amounts of activities (such as political and fundraising) that the organization can engage in. Many nationally designated byways are represented by, or organized as, nonprofit corporations. See Appendix C for a list of types of tax-exempt organizations. To determine which type of tax-exempt status your byway qualifies for, seek advice from someone who is familiar with your organization and the legal aspects of nonprofit corporations. ★



Online Help

Find valuable information related to nonprofits at <http://www.irs.gov>. The Internal Revenue Service, Department of the Treasury provides tax information, forms and publications.



What Is a Foundation?

Nonprofit Organizations Formed to Give and Serve

Foundations are nonprofit, charitable, tax-exempt organizations that provide grants to support a wide variety of charitable causes and concerns. They are created with endowments—gifts of money, stock or other assets from individuals, families and corporations that choose to dedicate some of their private resources to serve the public good. These gifts or assets are typically invested and the income generated is used to make grants.

Foundations can be divided into several distinct types:

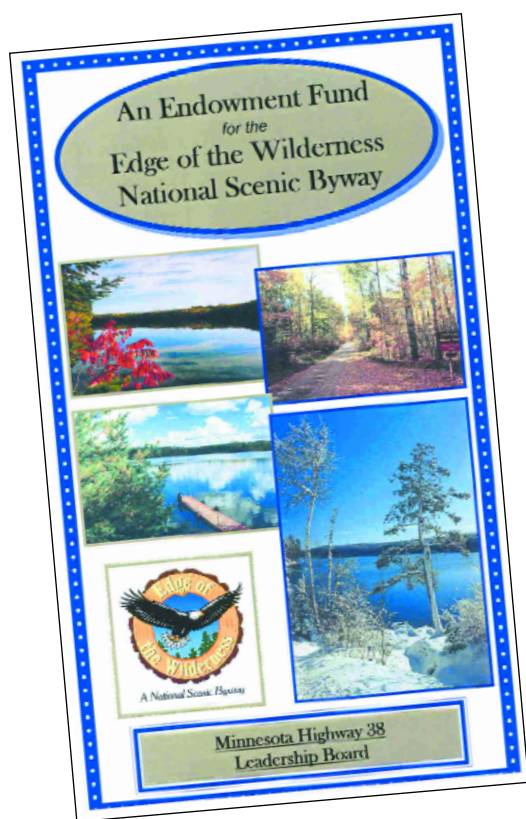
- **Independent Foundations** are the most common type of private foundation. They are generally founded by an individual, a family or a group of individuals. They may be operated by the donor or members of the donor's family—a type often referred to as a family foundation—or by an independent board.
- **Community Foundations** are organized to serve specific geographic regions. They receive their support from a variety of donors, rather than a single family or company.
- **Corporate Foundations** are created with gifts from for-profit companies to carry out the company's charitable activities. (Some companies may also choose to make direct gifts without using a separate foundation, often through corporate giving programs.)
- **Operating Foundations** typically do not make grants. These types of foundations often use funds to conduct research or provide a direct service, such as operating its own charitable programs.



Foundations are governed by strict Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regulations. For example, the IRS requires that independent and corporate foundations:

- Pay out at least 5 percent of the year-end fair market value of their assets.
- Pay an excise tax of 1 or 2 percent on their earnings.
- Give money only to nonprofit organizations, with a few rare exceptions.
- Refrain from lobbying or political activity.

Any byway organization interested in forming a foundation should seek legal advice.



Building a strong financial foundation is an important goal for all byway organizations. Minnesota's Edge of the Wilderness Scenic Byway has established an endowment fund in partnership with a local Charitable Community Foundation. An endowment is a permanent capital fund established from contributions. Contributions to the fund are invested to earn income and grow the capital. Approximately 50% of the "total return" on the fund will be distributed, with the other 50% being retained within the fund to keep it growing for the future.



What Is a Friends Group?

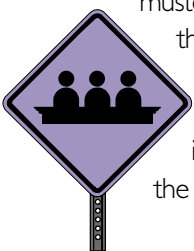
Helping Hands from Nonprofit Organizations

Everyone knows the value of friends. Friends are our advocates, allies, helpers and promoters. Just as we need personal friends, byways need professional friends.

Friends Groups are widely recognized citizen organizations that work to enhance the quality of life in their communities. For many years, Friends Groups have actively supported public libraries, schools, nature centers, zoos, wildlife refuges and many other worthwhile organizations and causes. Friends Groups can be formed within a community, a region, a state or as a national organization.

The historic Beckwith Ranch is located within the Frontier Pathways Scenic & Historic Byway corridor in south central Colorado. From 1870-1930, this was the pre-eminent ranch in the region and an important landmark. By the 1960s, the Beckwith Ranch included only ten intact ranch buildings, all suffering from years of decay and neglect. In the early 1990s, a new nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, "The Friends of Beckwith Ranch," formed to save and interpret the ranch. The Friends arranged to get the ranch complex donated to the nonprofit organization. The members have

mustered support to stabilize the structures and restore the farmhouse for adaptive reuse as an interpretive center along the byway.

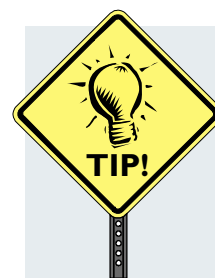


What Can Friends Do for You?

Friends provide things that an organization can't supply for itself, such as specific services, volunteers, funding or advocacy. It's important that Friends Groups have clear objectives and well-defined, publicly understood goals. They support, promote, improve and expand the work of another agency or organization. As a separate, independent entity, a Friends Group can operate in ways that are not possible for the primary organization (such as a byway group). A Friends Group has its own officers and organizational structure.

Frequently, Friends are focused on fundraising activities. The Acadia Byway (All-American Road) has benefited from gifts by the Friends of Acadia, an organization dedicated to protecting Acadia National Park and the surrounding communities. Established in 1986, this impressive Friends Group has donated over \$2 million in grants. Friends Groups whose primary objective is fundraising generally organize as a nonprofit corporation with 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. Not only does the organization receive tax benefits, but contributors and benefactors are also entitled to a personal tax deduction by making a gift or donation to the organization. The primary disadvantage to forming a 501(c)(3) is the limits on lobbying efforts. Friends Groups that are interested in significant lobbying activities should consider forming as a 501(c)(4) organization.

A Friends Group can be a strong advocate for a local byway and the scenic byways program. A Friends Group would not manage your byway, but could complement the byway's goals and mission by providing important funding and political support.



“You’ve Got to Have Friends”

When it comes to famous friends, these organizations can serve as role models:

Friends of Public Libraries

www.folusa.org/html/factsheets.html

Friends of National Wildlife Refuges

www.refugenet.org

Most National Forests and National Parks also have active Friends Groups.





CASE STUDY: Seaway Trail

Seaway Trail National Scenic Byway (New York): Making Big Dreams Come True

Big byways need big organizations. Totalling 454 miles, New York's Seaway Trail National Scenic Byway is one of the biggest! The byway receives support from one of the premier organizations in the National Scenic Byways Program.

The byway parallels the St. Lawrence River, Lake Ontario, Niagara River and Lake Erie. Travelers enjoy a drive with naturally scenic landscapes, welcoming harbors, city skylines, historic lighthouses, numerous state parks and quaint villages. Fresh fruits and vegetables can be found at roadside markets, county fairs, and you-pick farms. Byway communities offer celebrations year-round, such as the Irish Festival, Blues & Jazz Festival, Great Pumpkin Fest and more.



Visitors can experience the byway's rural flavor, as well as find high culture in cities like Rochester and Buffalo, which offer a myriad of museums and historic sites. With a route that hugs the shores of two Great Lakes, water recreation is abundant and fishing is a year-round sport.

The initial byway organization has been in existence since 1978, and has grown to include two nonprofit corporations and five full-time staff members. The two nonprofits complement one another, but fulfill distinct and separate roles. Although their objectives are different, both boards are dedicated to serving byway visitors and strengthening the overall Seaway Trail. Each has its own membership program.

New York's Seaway Trail may well be the "Grand Dame" of byway organizations. With two independent nonprofit corporations and a full-time staff, it is the largest byway organization within the National Scenic Byways Program. The byway's success can be traced back to some proven best practices—communication, commitment and cooperation.

Case Study continued on next page

The Seaway Trail, Inc.

Seaway Trail, Inc. is a 501(c)(6) nonprofit corporation focused on byway management, administration and promotion. The 16-member Board of Directors is made up of individuals representing different geographic regions along the byway (ten counties) and a broad array of interests (boating, camping, agriculture, private sector and fishing). Monthly board meetings are held at different locations along this lengthy byway.

The corporation is responsible for hiring an Executive Director, who in turn hires staff members to carry out the organization's five-year Action Plan.

Seaway Trail, Inc. general members, currently numbering over 650, elect the Board's Directors. The general membership meets four times per year to receive staff updates on projects and initiatives.

Membership to Seaway Trail, Inc. provides a variety of valuable benefits to byway businesses and organizations. The \$75 annual fee includes listings on the Web site (www.SeawayTrail.com), in the Seaway Trail's newsletter and in *Journey* magazine (200,000 copies printed).

Seaway Trail, Inc. has produced a popular series of byway guidebooks on a wide range of topics such as lighthouses, architecture, history, biking, shipwrecks and quilt patterns. The books are sold to individual consumers (full retail cost) and to wholesalers (significant discount for resale). Books provide a good source of publicity and income for the byway.

“Community outreach has been a major benefit. As byway groups reach out to neighboring communities, resources grow and the program grows. One community will usually find three to five other communities who also want to be a part of the program and part of telling the byway's story. They recognize the value of being part of the program. It's all grassroots. That just energizes me.”

David Fasser, (Retired) State Scenic Byway Coordinator New York State Department of Transportation

Case Study continued on next page

The Seaway Trail Foundation, Inc.

The Seaway Trail Foundation, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit tax-exempt organization focused on education and fundraising. The nine-member Board of Directors is described as a “good group of smart business people.” They work together to solicit donations, develop corporate giving campaigns, and foster educational opportunities along the byway for visitors. Because its mission is different than Seaway Trail, Inc., the Seaway Trail Foundation, Inc. board composition is also different. The Directors have backgrounds in economic development, fundraising, transportation and historic preservation. They meet as needed, or at least yearly, and are a self-perpetuating board. The current board finds its own replacements for outgoing members.

Executive Director Teresa Mitchell praised the commitment of the Foundation board, “They are people who already do a lot in the region, but are willing to do more. Many of them serve on boards for several organizations. They have the experience, knowledge and contacts to raise the Seaway Trail to a new level.”

The Seaway Trail Foundation has developed a partnership with Elderhostel, Inc. to offer study-travel opportunities for adults aged 55 and older. Hostelers stay in local accommodations and enjoy a variety of workshops and field trips to learn about the byway’s history, nature and culture. Local people act as instructors and tour guides. Participants learn about the area they are visiting in greater detail than they would on a regular vacation experience. The weeklong agenda also includes soft educational experiences and entertainment. Evenings might include opportunities to learn about brewing beer, yoga, or antiques. Folks enjoy outdoor picnics at a lighthouse, meals at local restaurants, and even dinners served by community church groups.

There are different categories of tax-deductible Foundation memberships: individual, business, and corporate. A \$35 annual individual membership provides free admission to the Discovery Center Museum and a 10 percent discount at the gift shop. The Foundation also established an endowment fund, which has started to receive donations.

“They are people who already do a lot in the region, but are willing to do more.”

Teresa Mitchell, Executive Director, Seaway Trail National Scenic Byway, New York

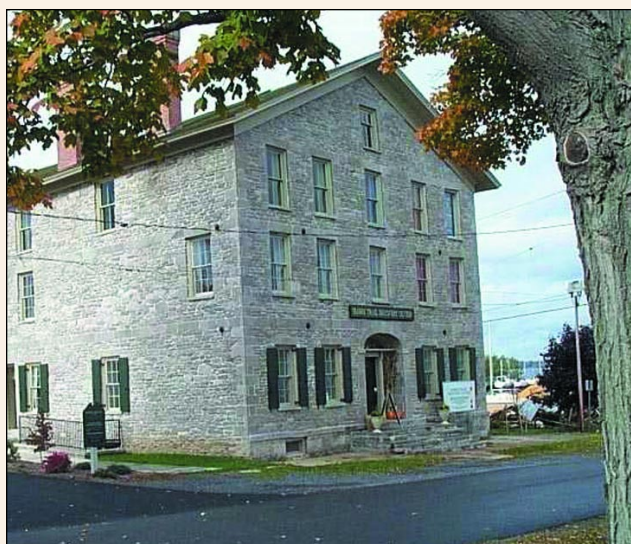
Case Study continued on next page

Communication Keeps Things Moving

How do two independent boards and a full-time byway staff coordinate their efforts? Communication is vital to keep everyone informed and on track.

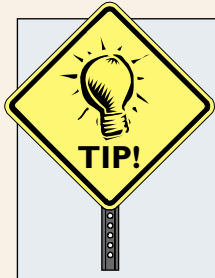
The two boards have found several ways to trade information:

- Meeting notices and agendas are shared back and forth.
- Board meetings include time for reports from staff and the opposite board.
- Staff members act as liaisons between the two boards.
- The two board chairs communicate directly with each other.
- A newsletter contains updates on board activities.
- There is a conscious effort to communicate regularly by phone, fax and e-mail.
- The two boards participated in a joint strategic planning session.



A major accomplishment of the Seaway Trail Foundation, Inc. was the successful acquisition and creation of the Seaway Trail Discovery Center. This interpretive educational facility is housed in the historic Union Hotel, a beautiful 1817 limestone building in Sackets Harbor, New York. This one-of-a-kind museum offers three floors of interactive exhibits, a gift shop and offices for staff members. Rooms that formerly served as the dining room, kitchen and guest accommodations now contain exhibits that teach curious visitors about the region's history, nature and culture.

Case Study continued on next page



Build Meeting Attendance

Board members look forward to meetings along the Seaway Trail. The byway organization has found a unique way to increase meeting attendance and have fun.

Several of the board meetings are combined with attractive social events. For example, board meetings have been combined with:

- An island shore dinner cooked by a local fishing guide.
- A holiday dinner at a historic home with entertainment by carolers.
- Hard-to-get tickets to a fine arts exhibit.
- A catered buffet in a stone castle with a three-piece band.

People talk about these special meetings for years!

Planning for the Future

The Seaway Trail has reached a level of success that most organizations aspire to achieve; however, they are continually looking for ways to grow and improve. As with many byways, funding is a constant need. The Seaway Trail has benefited from state and national grants. Ultimately, the members would like to become a self-sustaining organization. Many ideas are being discussed and evaluated, such as forming a for-profit corporation, hiring a development director, diversifying income sources and creating new partnerships.

It's a byway organization with big ideas and big accomplishments. ★



CASE STUDY: Turquoise Trail

Turquoise Trail National Scenic Byway (New Mexico): When Everyone Is a Volunteer

If you're planning to attend the monthly meeting of the Turquoise Trail Association, remember to bring a hot dish...or a dessert...or a salad. Combining monthly business meetings with potluck suppers brings a nice informality to the atmosphere within this byway organization. The popular not-to-be missed meetings take place in local B&Bs, in backyards and in members' homes. Byway volunteer Larry Valtelhas explained, "The food is terrific! We usually keep eating and drinking until we get a quorum (five board members). After that, we conduct our business."

The Association was formed in 1983 by a handful of area business owners to promote tourism, preservation of scenic and historic areas and overall promotion of the Trail as a specific destination. As early as the 1950s



and 1960s, the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce was heavily publicizing the region, but gradually visitor response decreased and tours to the area ceased.

The first meeting, held at Pete's Home of the Half-Breed Restaurant in Sandia Park, provided a glimpse of the enthusiasm that would carry this group to greater success over the course of time. Byway leader Carla Ward remembers the group's first attempts at fundraising. "We tried to take up a collection at the meeting and everyone was hemming and hawing. Suddenly, my husband, Ross, stood up, offered a hundred dollars, and asked, 'Who's going to join me?' We raised over \$700 that night and had 12 people sign up to form the Turquoise Trail Association."

Today, the Association is a 501(c)(6) nonprofit association with over 65 members. The all-volunteer Turquoise Trail Association reflects the diversity of people who live and work along the byway.

What's the secret to an effective all-volunteer group? The Turquoise Trail Association offers some valuable lessons. A shared vision, a strong network, effective distribution of work among members, resourcefulness, community inclusion and broad participation are organizational cornerstones of this successful byway. (Photo: Albuquerque Convention and Visitors Bureau)

Case Study continued on next page

The Past Plays into the Present

The byway's unique area holds a unique past. At one time, this was a booming coal-mining region. The area fell on bad times in the 1950s and thriving communities became ghost towns. In the early 1970s, artists and craftspeople arrived and converted old company stores and houses into shops and galleries filled with paintings, sculpture, pottery, textiles, jewelry, furniture, beadwork, toys, artwear and antiques. Today, these “ghost” mining towns along the byway—Madrid, Golden, and Cerrillos—are alive with art, crafts, theater, music, museums and restaurants.



The 61-mile byway is the scenic way to drive between the high country of Santa Fe and the desert of Albuquerque. Running along the east side of the Sandia Mountains, the byway allows travelers to see 15,000 square miles of central New Mexico, including Cibola National Forest and the Sandia Mountain Wilderness. With more and more development pressure, finding ways to manage growth is an increasing concern along this beautiful corridor.

The Turquoise Trail Association hosts an annual auction where bidders can buy some of the most unique items in America—perhaps in the world—that have been donated by Association members.

Case Study continued on next page

Building Participation

Broad participation is so important to the Turquoise Trail Association members that they included specific “Participation Goals” as part of their corridor management plan.

Participation Goals

- A. Ensure that public officials believe that the Turquoise Trail Scenic Byway Advisory Committee (SBAC) represents beliefs and options of the stakeholders of the Turquoise Trail Scenic Byway.
- B. Acquire greater diversity and expertise in the SBAC.

Participation Objectives

1. Continue to increase awareness of the Turquoise Trail Scenic Byway by one new group or organization each month.
2. Continue to meet one-on-one with stakeholders.
3. Continue to develop and publish press releases.
4. Involve local government staff in byway activities. Invite them to all meetings and include them on mailing lists.
5. Scenic Byway Advisory Committee should discuss expertise and diversity at monthly meetings.
6. Scenic Byway Advisory Committee members can provide names and contact information for people who should be invited to participate.
7. Staff or Scenic Byway Advisory Committee members should make individual contacts with these people to invite them to participate.
8. Develop a list of needed expertise and diversity and update as required.

Case Study continued on next page

The Scenic Byway Advisory Council Begins

A 13-member Scenic Byway Advisory Council (SBAC) was formed in 1999 from a core group of the Turquoise Trail Association. The SBAC makes ongoing efforts to solicit community input on the byway through questionnaires, a Web site, advertising in local newspapers and public meetings. The group also developed partnerships with various organizations, including three counties, the USDA Forest Service, the Chamber of Commerce, historical societies, landowner and homeowner's associations, the East Mountain Legal Defense Fund, the local ski area and tramway, and the Archeology Conservation District.

Full membership in the Association (\$250 annual fee) provides a newsletter, the right to vote on byway issues, inclusion in marketing and promotional initiatives, “the chance to meet friendly people,” and “the opportunity to make a difference in the byway community.” Association members receive a business listing in the Turquoise Trail brochure and on the organization's Web site (www.turquoisetrail.org). The membership also elects the Association's board members. There are no limitations on who can serve as board members; paid membership is not even a requirement.

There is also an Associate category (\$30) for byway supporters that don't need or want voting rights or inclusion in byway promotional packages. It's simply a way to be more inclusive.

Decision making often reflects the formality or informality of a group. This is certainly true within the Turquoise Trail Association. The bylaws give voting power to the 13 board members. However, the board usually polls all the members on issues, especially important ones that relate to policy. Decisions are generally made by the folks that “show up.” A board member explained, “Many of the members don't realize that only the board has an official vote. It's that informal. It's pretty much whomever shows up for a meeting or does work that gets to call the shots. When you're at a meeting, it appears that everyone present is voting. We only go to a board vote if it's a close vote. Most of the time, we get a strong consensus on issues.”

Burnout is a common problem in organizations. In all-volunteer groups, it's not uncommon for a few people to end up with responsibility for a large percentage of the work. To fight burnout and retain volunteers, the Turquoise Trail makes conscious efforts to try and distribute the workload a little more evenly, often assigning two to three people to a project. Outside experts and consultants are utilized as needed and as funds are available. These committed volunteers have racked up an impressive list of accomplishments.

It's an organization where the grassroots have taken root and are truly growing. ★