



How Associations Make A Better World

"Never doubt that a small group
of thoughtful, committed
citizens can change the world.
Indeed it is the only thing that
ever has."

Margaret Mead
Anthropologist

Spanning the globe from the smallest village to world capitals, a massive upsurge of organized, private, voluntary activity is taking place—a global association revolution. While well known for its work at the local level, the nonprofit sector's collective impact around the world has been little understood, recognized, or valued. Yet, to succeed in the 21st century, nonprofit associations around the world must be able to tell the story of their collective impact upon millions of lives. Recent research reveals a clearer picture of the impact of the global nonprofit sector and the many contributions of associations to society. Their story must be shared not only with the public, the media, and policymakers, but also with associations' members, boards, and supporters.

The Associations Make a Better World campaign seeks to promote understanding of the association model as a significant

contributor to societies and economies worldwide. The campaign also seeks to promote awareness and understanding of the contributions of individual associations worldwide as well as international associations operating across borders in today's increasingly interdependent world. The first stage of the campaign is to build awareness within the association sector itself, so it can then share its story with the greater public. The talking points that follow are the basis for concluding that associations, in fact, can and will make a better world. Your association can also freely use the Associations Make A Better World logo (see end of brochure for details).

Read on to learn how Associations Make A Better World and share the story with your international and domestic members, board of directors, international department, publications staff, and public relations team. At the end of the brochure, you'll find specific actions steps that you can follow.

What are these organizations that are leading the global association revolution?

Operating in almost every country around the world, associations are membership-based organizations that are private, legally incorporated entities, with a public benefit purpose. By providing benefits to their members, associations around the world impart a wider value to society. Because of their public benefit purpose, nonprofit organizations are often exempt from paying tax on income they

generate. Like any business or organization, they must earn excess revenues after expenses (or at least break even) to survive. However, any excess revenues cannot be distributed to members, staff, or anyone else—it can only go back into achieving the organization's public benefit purpose.

While often referred to as "nonprofit" and/or "non-governmental" organizations (defining them in terms of

what they are not—neither business or government), an increasingly common term for the sector is "civil society" ("civil" referring to citizens, the principal actors and leaders of independent, collective action within society). Associations represent a wide range of collective interests including professions, industry, business, and philanthropic causes. Bringing together disparate individuals, businesses, academia,

and government, associations wield a collective power that is much greater than the sum of their parts. The work of associations is woven throughout the fabric of society—citizens, the business sector, and governments have come to depend on the social and economic benefits that associations afford.

What are international associations and what do they do?

With the advent of globalization and increasing interdependence among nations, international associations are on the rise in both number and prominence. According to the Union of International Associations (Brussels, Belgium), there are currently more than 23,000 international nongovernmental organizations worldwide—a number that has been steadily increasing during the past few decades. Working across borders, international associations play an important role in today's global economy and society by facilitating commerce, communications, standards creation, knowledge sharing, and networking.

While there is no single, universally-accepted definition of an international association (even by the United Nations), they are generally identified by their

focus in at least three or more geographically dispersed countries with no one country dominating in terms of their mission, membership, governance system, finances, and appropriate products/ services. Even so, the international association definition is bending further due to globalization, which is pulling local, state, national, and regional associations into the global arena. Consequently, many such associations are now developing their own international programs and affiliations and are extending membership abroad.

Recent research confirms the tremendous economic, social, and political impact the nonprofit sector has on our increasingly global society—all of which have important implications for policymakers, business leaders, and the media, as well as the nonprofit sector's understanding of itself.

Economic Impact

In bringing people, business, and government together, associations help fuel local, national, and global prosperity. Associations help their members—both individuals and companies—operate more efficiently and productively, thereby generating more revenue. Associations create hundreds of thousands of jobs. In carrying out their activities, associations spend a considerable amount of money that helps stimulate economic growth. For example, meetings and conventions held by associations generate significant revenues for local communities thanks to delegates who spend money at hotels, restaurants, and convention centers. While associations operate as tax-exempt organizations (not being taxed on their income), they are still usually required to pay payroll, sales, property, and other tax revenues. Far from being a drain on the tax base, they contribute to it like everyone else.

A Major Economic Force

According to a John Hopkins University study (*Global Civil Society: Dimensions of the Nonprofit Sector*, John Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1999), the expenditures of the nonprofit sector in the 22 countries studied represent a US\$1.1 trillion industry (US\$1,100,000,000,000). These nonprofit expenditures averaged 4.6 percent of the total gross domestic product (GDP) collectively generated in these countries.

In fact, if the nonprofit sectors in these countries were a separate national economy, it would be the eighth largest economy in the world, ahead of Brazil, Russia, Spain, and Canada in terms of their GDP.

	Country	GDP in US\$ trillions
1	USA	7.2
2	Japan	5.1
3	China	2.8
4	Germany	2.2
5	France	1.5
6	United Kingdom	1.1
7	Italy	1.1
8	Nonprofit Expenditures	1.1
9	Brazil	0.7
10	Russia	0.7
11	Spain	0.5
12	Canada	0.5

Social Impact

Professional Development and Continuous Skill Building

Education is often the single most common association function. In many industries and professions, associations are the only source of continuing education. Associations educate their members on technical and scientific matters, business practices, and legal issues; thereby elevating the quality of publicly delivered goods and services. Thanks to associations, a nation's workforce remains competitive and skilled in the latest techniques, trends, and technologies.

EXAMPLE

International trade associations help prepare their members to operate and sell globally, which is crucial for businesses and industries seeking opportunities in unfamiliar markets.

Information

Associations collect and disseminate information on industries, issues, and trends—providing valuable background for legislative, regulatory, and policy decisions. By informing the public about the efficiency, quality, and safety of products and services, associations help bolster public confidence in the marketplace.

EXAMPLE

International professional associations act as global knowledge brokers for their members by gathering, synthesizing, translating, and disseminating the latest technical information in their field.

Standards Setting, Codes of Ethics, Certification

Associations play a prominent role in setting performance, technical and safety standards, ethical codes, and professional certification programs. All of these efforts help to reduce the risks that consumers face in the marketplace. Associations also save taxpayers money by fulfilling these vital functions that the government would otherwise have to fulfill. Standardization provides an international language to help shrink barriers to trade. If adopted throughout the world, standards create a large market instead of many fragmented markets.

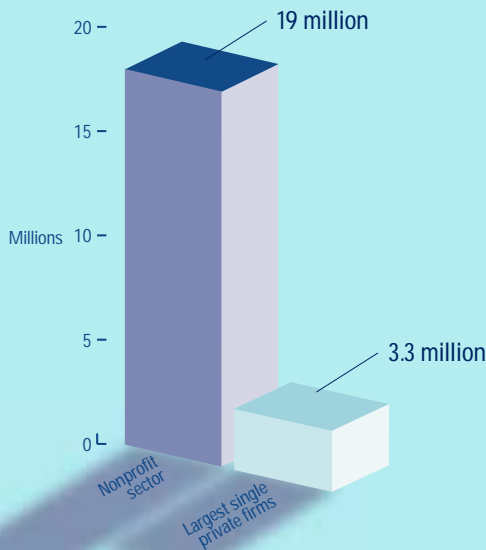
EXAMPLE

International standards brokered by trade associations and other groups have made huge contributions to modern society in everything from batteries and floppy disks to fax machines and telephone calls.

Employment

The nonprofit sector in these 22 countries employs more than 19 million full-time paid workers. Comparatively speaking, the nonprofit sector employs more people than the largest single private enterprises in these countries (3.3 million employees on average) as well as many national industries. Of course, this figure does not include the nonprofit sectors of other countries, which would make it even larger.

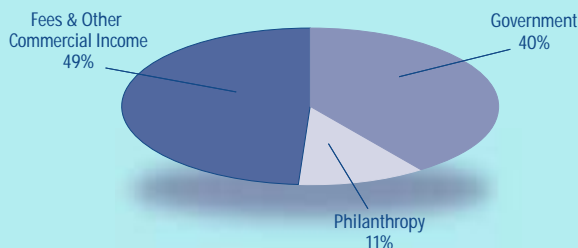
FULL-TIME PAID EMPLOYEES IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR



Revenue Generation

Contrary to the impression that nonprofits don't make money and are dependent upon donations and the government, the major sources of nonprofit income come from fees and other commercial income (49%), followed by grants/contracts from the government/public sector (40%). Private philanthropy (foundations, donations, etc.) on average accounts for only 11% of nonprofit income.

REVENUE SOURCES FOR NONPROFIT SECTOR



Advocacy Impact

Research and Statistics

Associations develop and disseminate valuable data that might otherwise be unavailable—information used by policymakers, regulators, researchers, journalists, and consumer groups, and others, to enhance a broad understanding and analysis of the economy. Governments are often dependent upon research and statistics provided by associations.

EXAMPLE

International academic and technical associations provide their members with opportunities to exchange knowledge, information, and expertise, leading to further technological innovation and progress.

Volunteerism/Community Service

Founded upon the principles of volunteerism and cooperation, associations nurture involvement in society and community service. By pooling their talents and resources, association members help the needy, provide disaster relief, mentor youth, and clean up the environment. Association activities generate what is known as social capital. Social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Social capital facilitates coordination and cooperation, it is not just the sum of the institutions that underpin a society—it is the glue that holds them together. Social networks can increase productivity by reducing the costs of doing business. Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable.

EXAMPLE

Through their volunteer members, international philanthropic associations provide relief during disasters, build homes for the homeless, provide emergency medical services, and provide other humanitarian assistance.

Constituent Contact

Associations are important, sometimes indispensable, intermediary organizations linking individuals and businesses with governments. Associations serve as a dual gateway—both as a mechanism to convey their views to government officials and a conduit through which government stays in touch with constituents.

EXAMPLE

International associations are involved in efforts to monitor international accords regarding global environmental degradation, human rights abuses, and fair trade practices.

Giving Voice to Citizens

Government relations activities conducted by associations give members a voice in government decisions impacting their members, profession, trade, and cause. Associations collect and disseminate information on public policy issues, forecast how public policy issues impact members, and help members understand and reach consensus for positions on issues. By educating legislators and regulators about issues affecting members' businesses, professions, and causes, associations help government officials make informed decisions.

EXAMPLE

With the increasing prominence of international government organizations (such as the World Trade Organization and World Health Organization), international associations are playing an expanded role in linking these institutions beyond political and national boundaries to private industry, commerce, and professions. At the same time, international associations are increasingly being granted formal "consultative status" relationships with international governmental organizations for ongoing discussions of mutual interest.



A Call to Action

Now that you know the story of how Associations Make A Better World, what can you do? Join the global association revolution and help spread the word today!

Here are a few concrete actions you can do right away:

- Use the Associations Make a Better World logo shown below. The newly revised logo is available for use in your association's newsletters, journals, publications, stationery, presentations, business cards, signage, and other media. The logo is available in black and white or color, Web formats (JPEG or GIF), and in desktop publishing formats (EPS, TIFF, etc.). To obtain a copy of the logo, go to www.asaenet.org/betterworld or contact the ASAE Global Resource Center at +1 202 626-2855.
- Add a link on your Web site to www.asaenet.org/betterworld. You'll find the complete text from this brochure, along with regular updates and illustrative examples of associations that are making a better world. The text may be used, adapted, or translated into other languages with permission and appropriate recognition from the source.
- Send us your suggestions. Do you know of an association that is making a better world? We're looking for examples of international associations (especially outside the USA) that are leading activities to help make a better world. Send your suggestions to the address on the following page.



Associations
Make A Better World

Associations Make A Better World is a global awareness campaign developed by the American Society of Association Executives. Founded in 1920, ASAE is dedicated to advancing the value of voluntary associations to society and to supporting the individuals who lead them. ASAE, the largest society for association professionals in the world, has more than 25,000 members who represent more than 13,000 associations. To learn more about ASAE, visit our Web site at www.asaenet.org, or contact us at the address below.

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For more information about the global profession of association management, visit the Global Forum of Societies of Association Executives Web site at www.asaenet.org/globalforum.

The Global Forum is a network of 13 national/international societies of association executives (SAEs) around the world, represented by the chief elected officers and chief staff executives. The Global Forum promotes sharing of information about the professional management of associations, mutually beneficial collaborative activities, and the development of a global community of associations. Among the activities of the Global Forum include a biennial World Congress of Association Executives conference, an annual International Summit leadership meeting, and the *Perspectives* biannual newsletter.

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