

Institutional Advisors

The 990: A Hidden Gem for Nonprofit Storytelling

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Nonprofits are built on stories. Stories of impact, of change, of community. But did you know that we often overlook one of the most potent storytelling tools a nonprofit has?

It's your Form 990. Beyond the numbers, the 990 offers a unique opportunity to share your mission, showcase your achievements, and connect with donors on a deeper level.

In this article, we show you how to leverage different sections of the 990 to narrate your story. You cannot change the numbers, but you can use the sections where you add verbiage.

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Mission Statement (Part I, Line 1)

Storytelling tip

- Use the mission statement to convey your purpose and passion. This is often the first thing readers see and should provide a clear and compelling picture of the organization's goals.
- Share how your mission translates into action and aligns with current social or community needs.

Volunteers (Part I, Line 6)

Storytelling tip

- The number of volunteers and their contributions can tell a compelling story about community involvement and grassroots support.
- Discuss the volunteers' role in advancing the mission, share impactful volunteer stories, and quantify their contributions in terms of hours or services provided.

Program Service Accomplishments (Part III)

Storytelling tip

- This section is an opportunity to highlight the organization's key programs and their impact. Describe in detail the successes, challenges, and growth in these areas.
- Include specific metrics or stories about individuals, communities, or causes that the organization's work has affected positively. Pair this with data on the number of people served or specific outcomes achieved.

Governance and Policies (Part VI)

Storytelling tip

- Governance information tells the story of how the organization is managed and its commitment to transparency, accountability, and ethical operations.
- Highlight strong board involvement, policies on conflict of interest, and any advisory committees that are committed to best practices. Explain how these governance structures help protect the nonprofit's mission and maintain public trust.

Revenue Sources (Part VIII)

Storytelling tip

- The revenue section reveals how the organization is funded — through donations, grants, program service fees, and more. This can help build a narrative about financial sustainability and the diversity of support.
- Explain how different revenue streams support various programs and how this income allows the organization to expand its services. Showcase the role of grants, major donors, or earned revenue strategies.

Functional Expenses (Part IX)

Storytelling tip

- Functional expenses break down how funds are spent on programs, management, and fundraising. A lean, well-managed operation speaks to efficiency and effective stewardship of donor dollars.
- Emphasize the percentage of funds that go directly to programs versus administrative or fundraising costs. Use this to reinforce the message that donor dollars are making a difference in the field rather than being spent on overhead.

Balance Sheet (Part X)

Storytelling tip

- The balance sheet shows the financial health of the nonprofit — its assets, liabilities, and net assets. This can indicate whether the organization is well-positioned for future growth and sustainability.
- Emphasize financial stability or growth in net assets as a reflection of the nonprofit's ability to serve its mission for the long term. Use this to reassure donors and stakeholders about the prudent management of resources.

Fundraising Activities (Schedule G, Part I)

Storytelling tip

- Fundraising events and campaigns provide insight into how the nonprofit engages with its donor base and raises awareness for its cause.
- Share stories of successful events, innovative fundraising methods, and the involvement of volunteers or community members. Illustrate how fundraising activities help sustain the organization's mission.

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Telling a comprehensive story

Using the 990 to tell the story of a nonprofit demonstrates transparency and accountability while highlighting the organization's successes and impact. By thoughtfully interpreting the 990 and sharing it in a way that connects emotionally and logically with donors and stakeholders, nonprofits can build trust and inspire greater engagement.

For more information, please contact your advisor.

KeyBank Institutional Advisors collaboratively engages stakeholders to understand their organizations' strategic mission, values, and goals. Our advisors are professionals supported by subject matter experts across client disciplines/market segments. Combining our expertise with an understanding of the client, we recommend and implement customized, coordinated financial solutions.



About the Author

As the National Director of Philanthropic Advice, Cindy is responsible for introducing KeyBank's full suite of sophisticated planning solutions to nonprofit and institutional clients, which includes growth strategies, the development of advice, thought leadership, and education on critical topics such as planned giving, fund accounting, charitable trusts, donor advised funds, and other products and services that support endowments, foundations, and pooled special needs trusts.

Cindy joined KeyCorp in 1992 and is dedicated to her profession. Her credentials include earning her CTFA through Cannon Financial Institute and attending the New York State Bankers Association and the New York State Bankers Estate and Administration School. She earned her B.S. in Business Management with a minor in finance at Plattsburgh State College.

She continues her education by attending Cannon Financial Institute, where she participates in the Advanced Trust Topics seminar annually in addition to attending multiple National Pooled Special Needs Trust Conferences. In addition, Cindy has recently obtained her ChSNC® (Chartered Special Needs Consultant) designation from the American College of Financial Services.

Cindy is also committed to serving the community and has recently joined the Board of Directors with the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation. TRF is a national nonprofit providing a lifetime sanctuary for thoroughbreds after their racing careers as well as opportunities for people wishing to improve their well-being with the healing power of horses through their second chances programs.



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About the Author

As National Director of Institutional Investment, Ken Senvisky is responsible for the articulation and implementation of a disciplined and consistent investment process employed throughout the Institutional Advisors practice serving Foundations and Endowments, ERISA and Taft-Hartley, Native American, Universities and Health Care client segments.

Ken's role is to provide leadership and oversight to the Investment Advisory and Outsourced Chief Investment Officer (OCIO) roles across the KeyBank.

Prior to joining Key in 2016, Ken held the position of Vice President and Senior Portfolio Manager at UBS Financial Services, Inc., where he provided investment management for private and institutional clients.

In previous roles, Ken has spent more than thirty years in the financial services industry providing comprehensive and personal advice on investment and risk management strategies.

Active in his community, he serves on the Board of Trustees for First Tee of Cleveland, is a member of the CFA® Institute and the CFA Society of Cleveland, and served as Treasurer of the Kent State National Alumni Association and held a position on the Dean's Advisory Board.

Ken has earned the professional designation of Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA), holds a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in Finance and Management from Kent State University and attended the Findlay University MBA Program.



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