

A Nonprofit Lawyer isn't a Luxury—It's a Leadership Essential

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When I founded my first nonprofit, I assumed being a lawyer was enough. I quickly learned how complex and misunderstood the legal landscape is for mission-driven organizations.

When I think back to how I got here—to founding a law firm that serves nonprofits full-time—it all traces back to a simple flyer.

It came home, tucked into my son's lunchbox. The [innovative charter school](#) he attended was looking for a parent (who was also a lawyer) to volunteer and help start a nonprofit foundation to support its fundraising efforts. I was the only one who responded.

At the time, I figured: I'm a lawyer. How hard can it be?

The truth? It was harder than I expected—and far more important than I realized.

The Limits of Good Intentions

Law school didn't teach me nonprofit law. So I did what most founders do: I relied on templates, researched a lot, and made it work. Eventually, we launched the organization and we began raising significant funds, including a \$1.7 million, multi-year federal grant for a consortium of charter schools in San Diego, California.

Some might call that a win. But I could almost immediately see the gaps.

As the organization grew, I stepped into the executive director role and quickly found myself asking: *What don't I know yet? And how do I learn it before it hurts us?*

That's what led me back to the [University of San Diego](#) to earn a Master's Degree in Nonprofit Leadership and Management while running the very nonprofit I had helped to form.

A Field Full of Blind Spots

In that program, surrounded by other nonprofit leaders, I started hearing the same pain points over and over:

- “We didn’t know we had to register to fundraise in other states.”
- “Our board is great, but no one really understands governance.”
- “We assumed having a lawyer on our board meant we had legal counsel.”

I saw how pervasive the misconceptions were—not just about nonprofit law, but about leadership and structure. Most organizations were doing the best they could with the resources they had. But they weren't protected. And they certainly weren't set up to scale or sustain.

That's when I knew this was the work I needed to be doing.

In 2012, I founded For Purpose Law Group to serve nonprofit organizations the way they actually operate—in messy real life, not textbook theory.

The Role of a Nonprofit Lawyer

When people hear “nonprofit lawyer,” they often assume it's just about filing the Form 1023, or writing corporate bylaws. And yes, that's part of it. But the legal work of a nonprofit is ***about so much more:***

- Creating clear and functional governance structures
- Navigating risk in fundraising and grant agreements
- Managing employment and HR issues ethically and legally
- Helping boards understand and meet their fiduciary duties
- Ensuring compliance in a multi-state and highly regulated environment

The legal landscape isn't just background noise. It's the infrastructure on which mission-driven work is built.

Experience First, Then Expertise

What makes this work meaningful for me is that I've been where so many of my clients are. I've made the mistakes. I've learned by doing. And I've come to believe that ***compliance isn't the ceiling—it's the floor.***

Once you understand the legal and structural framework of your organization, you're free to lead boldly. To grow wisely. To protect your mission with the same care and clarity you bring to your community work.

And here's what I wish more nonprofit leaders knew: ***you don't have to figure it out alone.***

A New Way Forward for Nonprofit Leaders

Over the years, I've worked with hundreds of nonprofit founders, board members, and executives—each navigating their own version of what I once faced. I've come to believe that what nonprofit leaders need most isn't just legal advice, but a space to grow their leadership with confidence, clarity, and community.

Establishing your organization as a nonprofit means you've made a public commitment to operate differently. That commitment deserves legal, accounting and leadership support tailored to your mission—not just in moments of crisis, but as part of how you build and lead.

Leadership in the nonprofit world requires more than passion—we can't build resilient organizations on outdated assumptions about what it takes to lead. It requires the right tools, and the right support, at the right time.