

Recent Shifts in the Tennessee Nonprofit Workforce

Findings from the Nonprofit Trends and Impacts Study

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The nonprofit workforce is a vital driver of the economy and community well-being. In 2022 (the most recent year for which data are available), Tennessee’s 38,266 nonprofits generated 209,998 jobs, which accounted for 7.7 percent of the state’s private workforce, while delivering critical programs and services that supported communities across the state.¹ Nonprofit employees face challenges such as low pay, inadequate benefits, and burnout, problems that can lead to staff vacancies and in turn create long waitlists for, and reductions in, services (Im et al. 2025; National Council of Nonprofits 2023).²

This brief examines recent shifts in the Tennessee nonprofit workforce, including employee vacancies and their impact, and recent and anticipated staffing changes. The data come from the [National Survey of Nonprofit Trends and Impacts](#), a nationally representative survey of US 501(c)(3) public charities with annual expenses and revenues of \$50,000 or more that engage in activities ranging from direct service provision to community building and advocacy, and primarily receive rather than provide funds. It excludes organizations that usually fund nonprofits, such as foundations, as well as hospitals, higher education institutions, schools (day cares, preschools, and K-12 schools), churches and other houses of worship, mutual benefit organizations, philanthropic support organizations, and other organizations with unique business models and contexts. The data have been weighted to account for the sample design and nonresponse to ensure national and state representativeness.³ As a result, our findings can be generalized to the categories of public charities included in the study (henceforth referred to as nonprofits). This analysis focuses on nonprofits headquartered in Tennessee and compares these nonprofits with those across the US and in Tennessee’s peer states, as defined by the Tennessee Nonprofit Network: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, and Virginia.

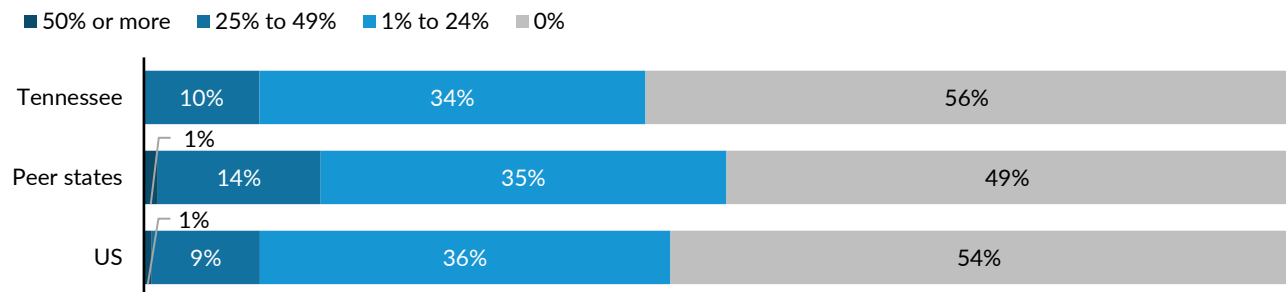
Throughout the brief, we refer to two periods: (1) “late 2024” is the period from October 29, 2024, to January 3, 2025, when respondents took the 2024 survey; and (2) “early 2025” is the period from January 1, 2025, to when respondents took the 2025 survey, sometime between April 16 and June 27, 2025. Quotations come from two open-ended questions: “What contributed to the shift in the outlook for your organization since last year?” And “All things considered, what are you most concerned about for your organization over the next year?”

What Percentage of Employee Positions Are Vacant, and How Do Those Vacancies Affect Nonprofits?

Nearly half of staffed Tennessee nonprofits reported having employee vacancies: about 1 in 3 reported having 1 to 24 percent of employee positions vacant, and 1 in 10 reported having 25 to 49 percent of employee positions vacant (figure 1).

FIGURE 1
Forty-Four Percent of Staffed Tennessee Nonprofits Reported Having Employee Vacancies in 2025

Shares of staffed Tennessee nonprofits that reported various ranges of employee positions vacant



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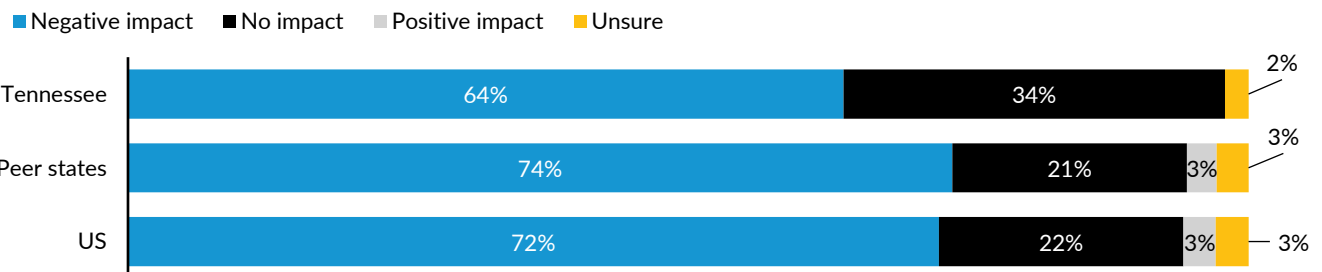
Source: [2025 National Survey of Nonprofit Trends and Impacts](#).

Notes: Data have been weighted to account for the sample design and nonresponse to ensure the estimates are representative at the national, regional, and state levels. We calculated the percentage of employee positions vacant by dividing an organization's open staff positions by the sum of its open staff positions, estimated full-time (35 or more hours/week) staff in 2025, and estimated part-time (less than 35 hours/week) staff in 2025. Respondents who expected to have 0 full-time and 0 part-time staff in 2025 are excluded from this figure.

Although many Tennessee nonprofits reported that employee vacancies negatively affected their ability to pursue their missions, they were less likely than those in peer states and across the country to report this (figure 2).

FIGURE 2
Employee Vacancies Had a Negative Effect on Many Tennessee Nonprofits in 2025

Reported impact of employee vacancies on staffed Tennessee nonprofits' ability to successfully pursue their missions



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Source: [2025 National Survey of Nonprofit Trends and Impacts](#).

Notes: Data have been weighted to account for the sample design and nonresponse to ensure the estimates are representative at the national, regional, and state levels. Respondents who expected to have 0 full-time (35 or more hours/week) and 0 part-time (less than 35 hours/week) staff in 2025 are excluded from this figure. Responses of "N/A" are also excluded. Some respondents with no current employee vacancies selected options besides "N/A" (i.e., they indicated that having all employee positions filled has a negative, a positive, or no impact on their ability to pursue their mission).

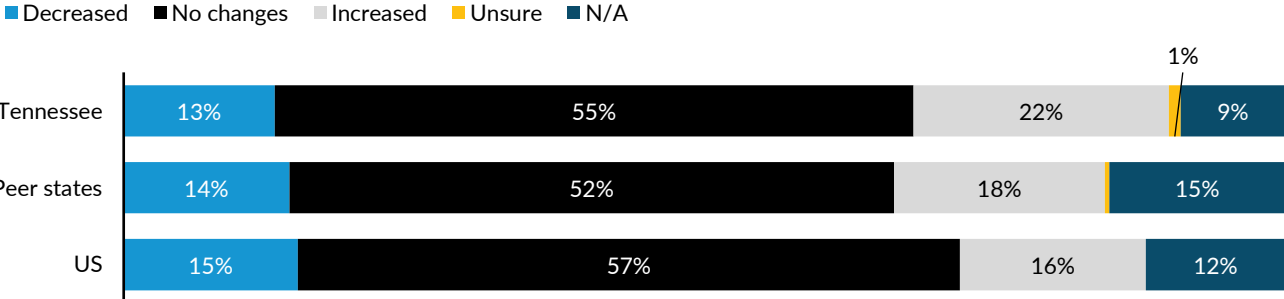
In their open-ended responses, Tennessee nonprofit leaders highlighted staffing issues—in addition to themes related to finances and programs. For example, one Tennessee nonprofit leader said their primary concern for their organization over the next year was “being understaffed.” Another responded, “Not burning out because we don’t have enough staff.” And another said the outlook for their organization’s ability to pursue its mission had worsened considerably since the previous year owing in part to “open staff positions.” This suggests that although Tennessee nonprofits may be faring better than those in peer states and nationwide when it comes to the impact of employee vacancies, they still face challenges from them.

How Is Staffing Changing?

Tennessee nonprofits were more likely than nonprofits nationwide to increase their workforces in early 2025 (figure 3).

FIGURE 3
Compared with Nonprofits in Peer States and Nationwide, Tennessee Nonprofits Were More Likely to Increase Their Workforces in Early 2025

Shares of Tennessee nonprofits that reported decreasing, making no changes to, or increasing their total number of employees in early 2025



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Source: 2025 National Survey of Nonprofit Trends and Impacts.

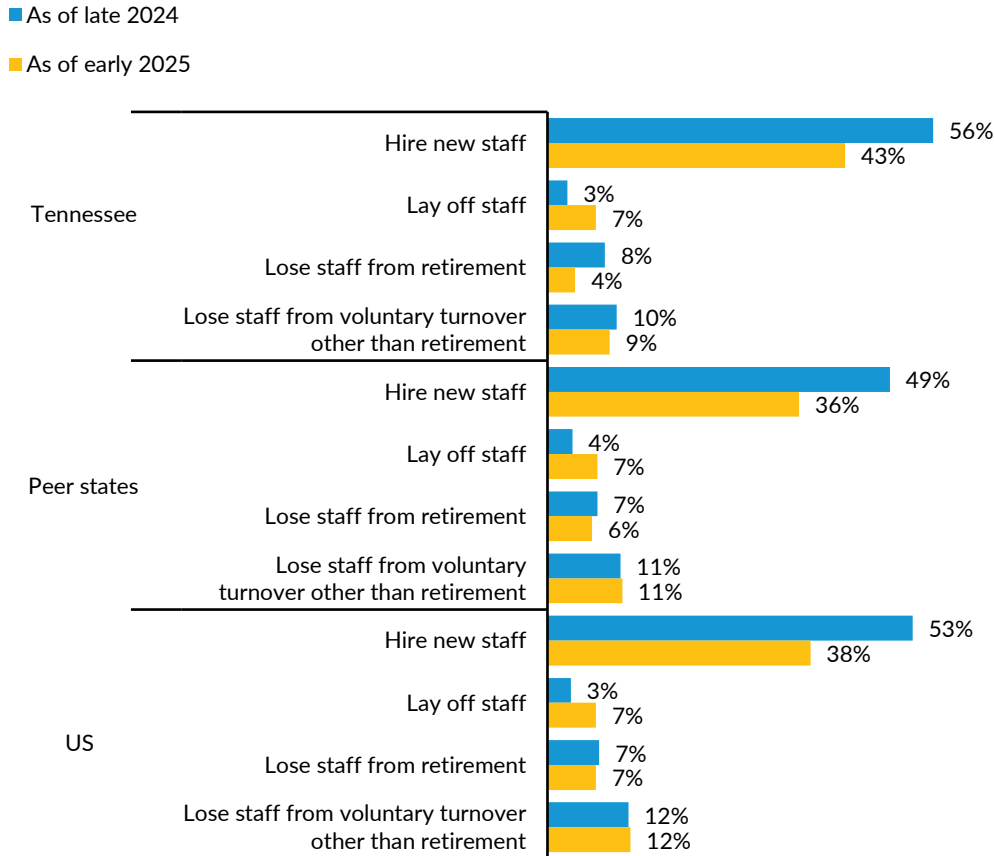
Notes: Data have been weighted to account for the sample design and nonresponse to ensure the estimates are representative at the national, regional, and state levels. Most of the respondents who selected “N/A” expected to have 0 full-time (35 or more hours/week) and 0 part-time (less than 35 hours/week) staff in 2025.

The staffing outlook for nonprofits in Tennessee, peer states, and the country as a whole worsened between late 2024 and early 2025, but Tennessee nonprofits were more optimistic about hiring new staff than those in peer states and nationwide. Across all three geographies, nonprofits were more likely in late 2024 than early 2025 to anticipate hiring new staff in the coming year; conversely, they were more likely in early 2025 than in late 2024 to anticipate laying off staff (figure 4). Compared with nonprofits in peer states and nationwide, however, those in Tennessee were more likely to anticipate hiring new staff in early 2025.

FIGURE 4

As of Early 2025, Tennessee Nonprofits Were More Likely Than Those in Peer States and Nationwide to Anticipate Hiring New Staff

Shares of Tennessee nonprofits reporting plans to change their staffing in the next 12 months



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Source: [2024 and 2025 National Surveys of Nonprofit Trends and Impacts](#).

Notes: Data have been weighted to account for the sample design and nonresponse to ensure the estimates are representative at the national, regional, and state levels.

Conclusion

Key findings on the Tennessee nonprofit workforce include the following:

- Forty-four percent of staffed Tennessee nonprofits reported employee vacancies in 2025.
- Many Tennessee nonprofits reported that employee vacancies negatively affected their ability to pursue their missions, but they were less likely than those in peer states and across the country to report this (64 percent versus 74 percent and 72 percent, respectively).
- Tennessee nonprofits were more likely than nonprofits nationwide to increase their total number of employees in early 2025 (22 percent versus 16 percent).
- As of early 2025, Tennessee nonprofits were more likely than those in peer states and across the country to anticipate hiring new staff in the next 12 months (43 percent versus 36 percent and 38 percent, respectively).

Overall, these data indicate that despite facing challenges from employee vacancies, the Tennessee nonprofit workforce is positioned for growth, with many organizations planning new hires that could strengthen their capacity to achieve their missions.

Notes

- ¹ “Nonprofit Sector State Profiles,” Independent Sector, accessed December 17, 2025, <https://independentsector.org/nonprofit-state-profiles/>.
- ² Jim Rendon, “The Nonprofit Hiring Crisis,” The Chronicle of Philanthropy, June 7, 2022, <https://www.philanthropy.com/article/the-nonprofit-hiring-crisis>; “Nonprofit Sector State Profiles,” Independent Sector, accessed December 17, 2025, <https://independentsector.org/nonprofit-state-profiles/>.
- ³ For more information on our data weighting and the survey’s national and state representativeness, see our survey methodology, available at <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/national-surveys-nonprofit-trends-and-impacts-2024-and-2025-methodology>.

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- National Council of Nonprofits. 2023. *2023 Nonprofit Workforce Survey Results: Communities Suffer as Nonprofit Workforce Shortage Crisis Continues*. Washington, DC: National Council of Nonprofits.

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