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In Women's March, Nonprofit Leaders See Galvanizing Moment

By Rebecca Koenig and Eden Stiffman



CATHERINE AVALONE/NEW HAVEN REGISTER/AP IMAGES

Members of the Connecticut chapter of the National Organization for Women prepare for the Women's March on Washington. People from across the country plan to participate.

When it comes to large-scale protests, Oxfam isn't the first nonprofit that pops to mind. The 75-year-old organization is better known for its international poverty-relief work than for public demonstrations. But Oxfam America is one of hundreds of nonprofits endorsing and sending staff members to the Women's March on Washington, a progressive protest Saturday predicted to be one of the largest to descend on the nation's capital in recent years.

Some organizations have made six-figure contributions to support the event, which will take place one day after Donald Trump's inauguration.

"Our staff have been very enthusiastic to participate since the first day the march was announced," said Nancy Delaney, Oxfam America's associate director of community engagement. "Our focus is on having people join us to help carry our message of inclusion."

The Women's March began as a grass-roots effort sparked by Mr. Trump's election. Its origins excite nonprofit leaders, who see the event as evidence that the public is ready to "stand together against the kind of attacks that are coming" from the new administration, said Susan Casey-Lefkowitz, chief program officer for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

"This march feels like a great kickoff to some phenomenal grass-roots organizing in the next few years," said Margaret Huang, executive director of Amnesty International USA.

Advocacy, not fundraising, is the top priority for many participating charities, whose leaders say they are not soliciting donations around the march. They are, however, hoping to attract new supporters among the marchers.

"We definitely see it as a place to capture people's attention and get them into a pipeline of advocacy, whether with the center or other organizations," said Kelly Baden, interim senior director for U.S. policy and advocacy at Center for Reproductive Rights. "The march is just one day, but the work that we need to do is for years to come."

Nonprofit Experts

March organizers say the event could draw as many as 200,000 attendees. A Washington sports stadium handling parking for out-of-town charter buses received at least 1,200 requests for parking for Saturday, according to *The Washington Post*, compared with just 200 requests for inauguration day.

Because of its large size, the march's success may hinge on the guidance of nonprofit experts, despite the event's grass-roots origins. Concrete plans for the march didn't materialize until a trio of experienced nonprofit leaders took charge as co-chairs along with one of the original march organizers.



Carmen Perez, executive director of the Gathering for Justice; Linda Sarsour, executive director of the Arab American Association of New York; and Tamika Mallory, former executive director of National Action Network, have experience organizing as a team: In 2015, they led a walk from New York to Washington to protest police brutality.

This isn't the first time that Women's March co-chairs Carmen Perez, Tamika Mallory, and Linda Sarsour have worked together as organizers. In 2015, they led a walk from New York to Washington to protest police brutality.

"Having their leadership has been instrumental to the success of the march itself," said Paola Mendoza, an artistic director for the march.

She especially credits them with helping to attract organizations that focus on a variety of issues.

"Women's rights are connected to reproductive rights, they're connected to climate justice, they're connected to immigrant rights," Ms. Mendoza said. "We have to see this as a whole picture instead of functioning in our silos. The co-chairs have been fundamental in pushing that forward."

Mobilizing Support

Indeed, nonprofits representing an array of causes have financially supported the event, and many more have endorsed it and contributed to its policy platform. Several organizations, including Planned Parenthood, National Resources Defense Council, and the American Civil Liberties Union, are listed as financial sponsors. March organizers declined to confirm sponsorship amounts, but an official document listed four levels of support from \$20,000 to \$150,000. In addition, the march has raised more than \$1.5 million from individual donors via a CrowdRise campaign.

"An important part of the weeks and days since the election has been a real coming together across many different sectors," said Ms. Casey-Lefkowitz. "All are welcome. It's really a march about solidarity."

However, the march's pro-abortion rights stance has alienated some groups. In one case, an anti-abortion nonprofit called New Wave Feminists was granted "partner" status in error, which was later revoked, according to *The New York Times*.

Oxfam America is one of more than 400 organizations that have endorsed the march and are inviting staff, supporters, and other interested people to participate.

The charity is not helping staff and supporters pay their way. "In many cases, people are more than willing to take on the expense," said Ms. Delaney. Some staff are carpooling, and others are joining one of the many charter buses that will ferry activists from communities around the country to Washington.

The last time Oxfam had a large presence at a demonstration was the 2014 People's Climate March in New York. Ms. Delaney expects at least 100 people affiliated with Oxfam to participate in the national march as well as a sister march in Boston, where the organization is headquartered.

The charity's signs will display a wide range of messages on the theme of inclusion, promoting climate justice, fair wages, and rights for refugees, immigrants, and women.

"As a global movement of people working together to end the injustice of poverty, we believe deeply in the power of the grass-roots," Ms. Delaney said. "We are excited to stand together on January 21 and shine a light on these issues that we care so deeply about."

Unaffiliated activists, she said, are welcome to join with Oxfam.

Cristina Jiménez, executive director of United We Dream, said the national immigrant youth organization saw a big spike in donations following the election, bringing in \$500,000 in two weeks. That money will be key to helping United We Dream scale up its work after the inauguration and the march, she said: "For immigrants and refugees, this is a very scary time."

She is encouraging her group's members to join the march to put promote justice, inclusivity, and love.

"It's a vision of the country that is inclusive and free of hate and respects the dignity of women and people in general," she said. "That's contrary to what Trump promoted on the campaign trail and that he has shown consistently in the choices of his nominees."

Staff, supporters, and members of her organization, which has chapters in 25 states, have also participated in other demonstrations following the election.

"Communities attacked by Trump are really coming together to create a unified front to reject the hateful vision the new president has for our country," she said.

Thinking Ahead

Nonprofit activity during inauguration weekend will extend beyond the march in Washington. Solidarity marches in cities including New York, San Francisco, and Chicago are planned for Saturday. Some communities are using crowdfunding platforms to help cover costs for march expenses like permits and first aid.

Offshoot gatherings are planned in the nation's capital following the main march. On the evening of January 21, at an event called "Roll Up Your Sleeves: How We Fight Back," leaders from the Environmental Defense Fund, the National Institute for Reproductive Health, and other charities will share their strategies for the road ahead. On January 22, the Ms. Foundation, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, and other groups will host a daylong workshop with briefings on policy issues and training on leading grass-roots organizing events in attendees' own communities.

Nonprofit leaders hope the march will inspire participants to become activists for the long haul.

"We really try to drive home that the march is amazing, incredible, exciting, and it's only the beginning," Ms. Baden said. "We need everyone to channel that energy and excitement into advocacy."