



Nonprofit Association of Oregon

2017 Annual Meeting

Portland, Oregon – September 28, 2017

NAO Board President Nancy Ramirez Arriaga's Remarks

Thank you Councilman George! It's an honor to have you here to open and bless our proceedings.

Buenos Dias! Good morning everyone! My name is Nancy Ramirez Arriaga and it is a privilege to welcome you on behalf of NAO's Board to our 40th Anniversary celebration and 2017 Annual meeting! I am proud to be here with all of you today.

I think it is important you know something about me, as a person and the outlook I bring to the support I give NAO through my Board service. So I want to share a brief story with you.

I first learned about nonprofits at the age of ten. What I most vividly remember is the sense of relief I felt every time I walked through the doors of this new place that felt like home. I was always received by staff wearing big smiles and beautiful bright colors. I remember the confidence I felt when I spoke while I was there because I could communicate in my first language without judgement or hesitation. I remember being able to be a child during my visits there because someone else was always ready and willing to walk my family through forms or systems that I was just beginning to learn about and was often expected to interpret and translate for my family. I remember feeling seen, represented and supported. And I truly believe this contributed to my ability to thrive in my new home. This is the power of nonprofits!

As diverse as our members' missions may be, I do believe that this is the impact the sector seeks to make - to enrich the lives of ALL Oregonians. This is the reason I have spent nearly two decades serving through nonprofits in various capacities. Regardless of the titles I've held, I have always been called on to support necessary change. So, I do know that nonprofits have always sought continuous improvement, and I have been around the minds and hearts of people driving that commitment. We may not always do it right, and we have to do better and I know we want to.

If you would have asked me at the age of ten what I was going to be doing today, I would not have answered, "delivering opening remarks as the first Board President of color and the youngest to serve in this role for the Nonprofit Association of Oregon as we celebrate our 40th anniversary." And I am proud to be here with all of you today. If you would have asked my mom, she would have said I was going to be a lawyer, because she always said I was very good at arguing, which I called making my case.

I have been serving on the board of NAO for the past four years, and I have been a part of a lot of changes. We have worked hard to shift from a management service organization with a 40-year history of providing consulting and training to nonprofits to *the* membership-based state association serving nonprofits across Oregon.

As the state association, it is our responsibility to stay relevant. As we ask tougher questions of ourselves and the impact we wish to make through our mission, NAO continues to grow and evolve. I won't give you all of Oregon's demographics because there are always undercount challenges but I will say that:



Our rural communities have always been here. Our LGBTQ community has always been here. Our disability community has always been here. Our low income communities have always been here and continued to grow. Our Native American communities, whose land we stand on, have always been here. Immigrants, like myself and people of color are also here.

But does the leadership of our nonprofit sector in Oregon represent that same diversity? We know in fact it does not and our keynote speaker today is going to help us better understand that. These challenges and the richness of diversity I just described inspire me to continue looking for ways to work together and explore the depths of opportunity in all communities of Oregon.

I am committed to our mission – to strengthen the collective voice, leadership, and capacity of nonprofits. In my role at NAO, I will continue to challenge us to ensure all voices are represented through our membership and across our sector. I also take very seriously our responsibility to model the way and to support organizations in their pursuit to stay relevant to all communities.

I am very proud to say that the NAO board and staff are committed to leading with excellence and ensuring that we are taking steps to meet the full needs of Oregon’s diverse nonprofits. Our board and organization-wide commitment builds on the thinking, leadership and work of staff who have walked before us and have supported the sector in the area of Diversity and Inclusion for decades. Staff like Guadalupe Guajardo, Cliff Jones, and many others. Thank you!

You may not be aware, but NAO is a global majority organization, with the staff of NAO reflecting the society that lives, plays and works in our communities.

But Equity, diversity and inclusion cannot be moved on commitment alone, we must allocate resources and our board has done just that. We are investing in our learning and leaning on the expertise of the Center for Equity and Inclusion: a consulting firm. Yes, even we need consultants to help us sometimes.

Diversity, equity and inclusion also cannot be moved without strong leadership. I want to thank Jim - someone, I could not have the most contrasted lived experience from. I want to thank him for being a strong partner in this pursuit. He understands that as a white, middle class, older male it is critical that he be a champion of this work, a thought leader in the spaces he has been given access to and responsible for the hands-on work to create systems change.

And as we have engaged in this work for the past year, we have been reminded that while we are ultimately trying to change a system, we cannot disconnect ourselves as people and the process of raising consciousness can sometimes be painful. So I also want to give a big appreciation to our full board and staff who have been willing to sit in discomfort, and out of this work we are building the tools for a more inclusive organization and the culture we believe in. We are developing a clear statement of our equity commitment and focusing our lens for decision making that will guide the policies we develop to sustain this work. Rest assured, we will share them widely once they are ready.

In closing, to our membership and diverse sector I want to say:

We see you.

We are listening.

We exist to support you.

We are not done and we are accountable to you.