

# ***Building Movement***

**Inspiring Activism in the Nonprofit Community**

## **Generational Leadership Listening Sessions**

**The Building Movement Project**

**Frances Kunreuther  
Ludovic Blain  
Kim Fellner**

## Acknowledgments

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## Building Movement Project

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*Many working in the nonprofit sector are strongly motivated by the desire to address injustices and to promote fairness, equality, and sustainability. The Building Movement Project supports nonprofit organizations to work towards social change by integrating movement building strategies into their work.*

*Building Movement engages four strategies to accomplish its goals. These include:*

- *Changing the discourse and practice within the nonprofit sector to endorse values of social change and social justice.*
- *Identifying and working with social service organizations as neglected sites for social change/justice activities.*
- *Supporting young leaders who bring new ideas and energy to social change work.*
- *Listening to and engaging people working in social change organizations to strengthen their ability to have an impact on policies that affect their work.*

## About the Authors

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## Executive Summary

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### Nonprofit Social Change Leadership: A Generational Transition

Who will lead nonprofit organizations dedicated to progressive social change in the difficult decade ahead – and what resources and skills will they need to meet the challenge? In 2004, the Building Movement Project convened Generational Leadership Listening Sessions (GLLS) with young nonprofit leaders in nine cities to explore these critical questions in the context of leadership transition from the Baby Boomers to a new generation.

The Listening Sessions followed up on a 2002 *Generational Changes and Leadership Study* which examined the differences between Baby Boomer and Gen X/Y leaders, and how these factors play out in nonprofits that consider social change part of their mission. The 122 GLLS participants, mostly leaders of color between the ages of 25 and 40, were gleaned from a mix of sources that included the Building Movement staff and project team, sponsoring foundations, and referrals from colleagues around the country. They came from nonprofit organizations large and small, spanning service providers and community organizing, as well as consultants, cultural groups and academic institutions.

### Generational Leadership Listening Session Findings

1. Most Gen X leaders pursuing social change work in the nonprofit sector enter organizations dominated by Baby Boomers.
  - New Gen X/Y leaders often have difficulty acquiring organizational space that values their skills and respects their experience.
  - Race and gender remain obstacles to validation.
  - The growth of immigrant communities, and organizations based in those communities, has redefined diversity within the nonprofit social change sector.
  - Creating healthy multiracial, multicultural organizations remains a challenge to leaders of all races and generations.
2. Once young leaders gain entry and standing in their organizations, they are confronted with the realities of structure, power, accountability and culture that define organizational life.
  - Decision-making in nonprofit social change organizations often lacks the clarity and transparency.
  - Young leaders grapple with developing good models for exercising leadership, power and accountability.
  - Power and structure: who is accountable – and to whom – is part of the responsible exercise of power and leadership.

- Young leaders are often disenchanted when there is a gap between an organization's external values and its internal culture.
  - Balance between work and personal life remains a daunting challenge for young leaders in a culture still steeped in sacrificing all one's time to the work.
3. Literature on the role of mentors in the organizational advancement of younger leaders rarely focuses on those working in smaller nonprofits. Yet, these relationships loomed large for GLLS participants.
- Good mentors are hard to come by – and urgently needed – as we look toward the future of movement building.
  - There are specific complications in mentoring and support when leadership is being transferred from one generation to the next in organizations that include family members.
  - The lack of adequate mentorship and broader intergenerational dialogue means that important lessons of history and experience are inadequately transmitted, or are lost to a new generation.
  - GLLS leaders seem particularly eager to be good mentors to the next generation coming up after them
4. Young leaders were concerned that the relationships the Baby Boomers had established with foundation staff were not willingly transferred, or easily transferable.
- Young leaders feel that the Baby Boom generation has cultivated relationships with funders that are not being passed on – and that they need assistance in making those connections.
  - In some regions of the country, funders were perceived as biased toward certain models of work to the detriment of new models, especially those conceived in communities of color.
5. All the issues of structure, race, culture, funding and mentorship converge at moments of transition – and put some of the tensions between the Boomer and Gen X leaders into sharp relief.
- Young social change leaders are ambivalent about their relationship to the Baby Boom generation, and they feel squeezed between the older leaders who are not leaving (as of yet) and an even younger generation coming up fast.
  - There is no infrastructure to support the transition of older leaders, and no roles into which they can readily move.
  - The culture of transition should be supportive and affirming, not blaming and punitive. Smooth transitions can be helped by personal and organizational planning.

6. As they evaluate the lives and legacies of the Baby Boomers, and consider what their own lives and legacies might look like to subsequent generations, younger leaders are offering some new insights based on their own aspirations and experiences.
  - Many young leaders are reluctant to become executive directors.
  - Young leaders desire to create better spaces for learning and mentoring for the leadership generations coming up after them.
  - Young leaders are looking for balance and reconciliation with older generations.

## **Recommendations**

1. Create Opportunities to Build Relationships and Analysis Within and Across Generations.
  - Support structured local and regional meetings of younger leaders.
  - Hold a national summit of younger leaders where they meet across different geographic and issue specific boundaries.
  - Convene conversation among Baby Boom leaders to discuss their future challenges
  - Organize intergenerational discussions between Baby Boomers and Generations X/Y
2. Define the Needs and Costs of Support for Departing and Emerging Leaders
  - Develop infrastructure that invests in human capital.
  - Support board training to nurture innovation and sustain organization
  - Provide mentoring, training and other forms of support, such as executive coaching, for the next tier of leaders below the executive director level.
  - Foster mentoring structures to provide support for new leadership, and pass on history and share lessons
3. Generate Tools and Information for the Next Generation of Leaders
  - Gather and disseminate information on different decision-making structures and models in nonprofits including role of constituents, volunteers, staff and board.
  - Add to existing sites that provide support for succession and transition.
  - Develop toolkit/curriculum for groups to use to understand generational differences within nonprofits including but not exclusively devoted to leadership change.

- Provide historical context for current state of social change nonprofits.
4. Pursue New Studies to Fill in Gaps in Existing Research such as:
- Compensation and Vocation in the Generational Transition Dynamic
  - Race and Leadership in the History of Social Change Nonprofits
  - Growth for Social Change Nonprofits

## GENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP LISTENING SESSIONS

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*“We have three generations in our organization, some carrying on legacy, others trying to forget it”*

*“You can’t have strong organizations without strong people, and you can’t have strong people without mentorship, and if you haven’t been mentored you’re not going to mentor another person. So if your vision of movement is just your generation and you want to live well and get affordable housing, that’s fine. But if you want to lay the seeds for several generations of movement, then I think you have to think about mentorship and structure in a political and historical context.”*

Participants, Generational Leadership  
Listening Sessions

### Introduction

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#### **Nonprofit Social Change Leadership: A Generational Transition**

Who will lead nonprofit organizations dedicated to progressive social change in the difficult decade ahead – and what resources and skills will they need to meet the challenge? In 2004, the Building Movement Project convened Generational Leadership Listening Sessions (GLLS) with young nonprofit leaders in nine cities to explore these critical questions in the context of leadership transition from the Baby Boomers to a new generation.<sup>1</sup>

The Building Movement Project (BMP) was launched in the summer of 2000 to promote nonprofit organizations as sites of democratic practice and movement building for progressive social change. As part of that work, the Project initiated a *Generational Changes and Leadership* study to examine the differences between Baby Boomer and Gen X/Y leaders, and look at how these factors play out in nonprofits that consider social change part of their mission. The initial study was completed by Building Movement Project Director Frances Kunreuther in 2002, and includes interviews with 38 executive directors and senior staff at 16 organizations; half of the interviewed directors were under 40.<sup>2</sup>

The study revealed that, while there were not consistent and sharp differences between older and younger generation leaders and staff, the pathway for the next generation to assume leadership was often difficult, especially for those who were not starting their own organizations. In several cases, organizational culture and structure

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<sup>1</sup> Leader was loosely defined as someone who held a position of responsibility and authority in the organization. Although the vast majority of those we met with worked in nonprofit organizations, some participants worked in government, were elected officials or worked in non-incorporated nonprofit groups. There were also a few who were planning to change to for-profit work.

<sup>2</sup> Kunreuther, F. (2002) *Generational Changes and Leadership: Implications for Social Change Organizations*, ([www.buildingmovement.org](http://www.buildingmovement.org)).

were neglectful at best and hostile at worst to an accountable and successful generational transition process.<sup>3</sup>

GLLS was conceived by Ludovic Blain – who worked with the project to further probe the study’s findings and explore how they resonated with young practitioners in the field. Together with the Building Movement Project, Blain hoped to put the issue of generation change on the sectoral radar screen; record some of the successes and failures people have had in dealing with the issues; and provide some lessons and directions for future action. The 122 participants, mostly leaders of color between the ages of 25 and 40, were garnered from a mix of sources that included the Building Movement staff and project team, sponsoring foundations, and referrals from colleagues around the country.<sup>4</sup> They came from nonprofit organizations large and small, spanning service providers and community organizing, as well as consultants, cultural groups and academic institutions. What united the bulk of participants was that social change appeared either in their organizational mission statements or their personal career paths.

The Listening Sessions took place in nine cities – Albuquerque, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Durham, Honolulu, New York, San Francisco and Washington, DC. The first event was held in December 2003, the last in early September 2004. The smallest group had 5 participants, the largest 21. Sessions were generally four to five hours long and, with some minor variations, included: a summary of the Generational Changes and Leadership Study findings; a round of introductions that surfaced organizational challenges; a group discussion focusing on organizational structure and the future of leaders/leadership; a break-out session that probed structural approaches to these issues, plus report-back; a quick brainstorm on building national and local connections; and an evaluation.<sup>5</sup>

In one city, the dialogue was personal and deep, involving a small group of young leaders from a cluster of related organizations. In other cities, where the participants came from a broader mix of organizations and backgrounds, the conversations were eclectic and wide-ranging. However, despite the differences between sessions, the concerns and observations that emerged were remarkably similar. Participants explored the relationship between nonprofit organizations and movement building; the impact of an increasingly hostile political, social and economic climate; funding in a time of scarcity; the state of mentoring; the challenges of building democratic and effective structures; and the nuances of organizational interaction and transition between the generations.<sup>6</sup>

There was a startling level of consistency across location in the issues and concerns young leaders identified as most pressing. These included:

- Difficulty younger leaders had in establishing their credibility
- Deficient models of organizational structure, leadership and power

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<sup>3</sup> The study summary can be found in Appendix B.

<sup>4</sup> The breakdown in race and gender can be seen in Appendix A.

<sup>5</sup> In the two smallest sessions – Raleigh and Albuquerque – there were no break-out groups.

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed description of the methodology, see Appendix A.

- Tensions between the mission, and organizational process and culture
- Complicated, uneasy dynamics around race, gender and class privilege within and across social change groups
- Lack of mentoring and other methods of informational transfer from one generation to the next
- Squeeze between baby boomer leaders who are not leaving their positions and a new, even younger generation coming into the pipeline
- Struggles to balance the demands of work with personal needs
- Reluctance among many younger leaders to assume directorships
- The quest to find a satisfying role in both their organizations and the larger social change movement

This report probes these issues as they emerged in the gatherings, building on the insights and reflections of the participants. Together, they mirror the experiences of a younger generation of social change practitioners in a field dominated by leaders of the Baby Boom generation – their present-day realities, their personal aspirations and their vision for a social justice movement in a changing and challenging environment.

## A Shifting Landscape for Social Change Nonprofits

Looking at the US nonprofit sector today, it's hard to believe that, as recently as 50 years ago, it barely existed. Of the more than 900,000 nonprofits registered as 501(c)(3)s in 2002, only 138 had ruling dates<sup>7</sup> prior to 1920<sup>8</sup>. A sector that accounted for less than 1 percent of jobs in 1900 employs 9 percent of the population today. Peter Dobkin Hall at the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations at Harvard suggests that nonprofits generally had no consciousness of being a sector before the 1970s. He also notes that, "what we call the 'nonprofit sector' changes constantly in scale and scope." Before 1950, most arts and culture organizations were for-profit and until several decades ago, most hospitals were nonprofit while, today, due to changes in tax codes and governmental regulations, those two have switched positions; most hospitals are now for-profit, most cultural institutions nonprofit.<sup>9</sup>

Of the total number of US nonprofits, which include churches and universities, as well as all manner of charities, service providers and civic organizations, only a small number see their work as progressive social change or have social justice as part of their mission. Most of these have emerged since the 1960s, when the country underwent a transformation that expanded democratic participation and civil rights to a much broader constituency. Charity, social service and political advocacy were reframed to include poor and disenfranchised people collectively representing themselves and fighting for their rights.<sup>10</sup> Major long-standing institutions from the progressive eras such as the NAACP were joined by new groups that addressed the civil rights of Chicanos, women, gays and lesbians and others; raised environmental issues; and advocated for peace and social justice. Many organizations dedicated to service recalibrated their work to reflect these new, expanded democratic trends, and new service groups emerged to provide help for battered women, substance users, residents in low-income communities and other neglected populations.

Many of the young people that joined the staffs of existing groups, or started new social change organizations, were born between 1946 and 1964. The iconic Baby Boomers were part of the large generation, which swept into the public eye in the late 1960s and '70s, shaking up culture and civil society. And although the social change activists were a statistically small percentage of the generation, they created a significant and enduring presence, making a lasting imprint on the nonprofit sector in the process.

Today, the Boomers are approaching 60, and they are at the helm of most of the social change organizations that they joined, founded and shaped over the past three decades. Those young upstarts, who shook up old institutions and formed new ones,

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<sup>7</sup> The ruling date is the date on which a nonprofit is certified as a nonprofit/501(c)3 and provides a rough idea of a founding date, although prior to computerization in the 1960s records were iffy, and many universities, for example, have ruling dates in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, despite much earlier founding dates.

<sup>8</sup> National Center for Charitable Statistics. *Births and Deaths of Nonprofit Organizations*.

<http://nccsdataweb.urban.org/FAQ/detail.php?linkID=174&category=8&xrefID=1766>

<sup>9</sup> Hall, P.D. (2005). "Historical Perspectives on Nonprofit Organizations in the United States," in eds R.D. Herman and Assoc. *The Jossey-Bass Handbook of Nonprofit Leadership and Management*.

<sup>10</sup> Paget, Karen. "Citizen Organizing: Many movements, no majority". *The American Prospect* 6-1-90

are now the nonprofit social change establishment. They determine the terms and rules of engagement for a new generation – setting the expectations, and sometimes the obstacles, for the Gen X/Y leaders coming up behind them. Still, the Boomers struggle with some of the same issues that face their young colleagues, albeit from a different point in their life and work cycles: how to retool organizations to meet standards of internal democracy; how to encourage and institutionalize racial and gender equity; how to refresh their own skills while passing on their accumulated experience; how to rebalance their work and personal lives; and how to take leave and imagine another role for themselves beyond their current positions.

But the biggest challenge is one that the two generations – the reluctant-to-leave Boomers and the restive Gen X-ers – must face together: how to confront an increasingly hostile political environment to save and sustain the social change organizations that embody their hopes for greater justice and democracy tomorrow.

The growing conservatism in the US body politic and a global move toward corporate dominance, accompanied by pressures to cut taxes and privatize public services, will have serious consequences for nonprofit groups.<sup>11</sup> In state after state, as well as at the federal level, the issues they address – including community building, child welfare, juvenile justice, affordable housing, health, education, and civil rights, among many others – are all on the chopping block. Funds from foundations and charitable giving are dwarfed compared to the potential losses of government support the sector faces.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the starvation of public services across the globe has imposed a huge burden on the nonprofit sector to compensate for the shortfall in tax/government support.<sup>13</sup> This is straining not merely budgets, but structures and human resources, demanding a greater capacity than the sector can easily muster. Much of this is for basic needs – food banks struggling to deal with an increased demand for meals, schools scavenging for books, and emergency rooms overflowing from the closure of public hospitals.

Within this frame, there are several global trends affecting nonprofits working for social change. For example:

- The alarming growth in religious fundamentalism, across religious denominations, challenges the separation of church and state and threatens the civil rights and liberties of women, gays, and members of minority religious faiths.
- Populations on the move, driven by persecution, natural disaster and economic deprivation, continue to make the United States a “nation of immigrants” and transform the black/white paradigm that for so long defined race in the US. It is also changing the nation’s demographic composition.

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<sup>11</sup> OMBWatch, Federal Budget Weblog, March 18, 2005.  
<http://www.ombwatch.org/article/blogs/2/0/2005/3>.

<sup>12</sup> See OMBWatch ([www.ombwatch.org](http://www.ombwatch.org)), Center for Budget and Policy Priorities ([www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)), and the Urban Institute ([www.ui.org](http://www.ui.org)) for analyses of the impact of tax cuts on the nonprofit sector and beyond.

<sup>13</sup> See Project Censored (<http://www.projectcensored.org/publications/2003/2.html>). *New Trade Treaty Seeks to Privatize Global Social Services* -- Source: The Ecologist February, 2001 Title: The Last Frontier Author: Maude Barlow.

- Technological changes facilitate the concentration of power and media, but also provide expanded global access to information, new strategies for organizing and a tool for greater democratization.

The Baby Boomers who flowed into the nonprofit sector in the 1970s were fueled by anger at injustices and optimism that equality in the US was within reach. Today, that hope has been supplanted by distress as the Baby Boom generation and their successors see the gains of several decades under attack. Thousands of African American and Latino voters face challenges to their fundamental voting rights, and Alabama has voted to affirm segregation in its state constitution.<sup>14</sup> Women's reproductive rights and freedoms are under renewed attack, curtailing access to basic health services; the newly elected senator from Oklahoma favors the death penalty for abortion providers and a new southern congressman has said that gays and single moms should be banned from teaching in the schools.<sup>15</sup> As one young Listening Session participant noted, "We're in a different cycle – we're not moving forward since the civil rights movement, especially in terms of the criminalization process. We're seeing a decimation and destruction that are unequalled in the black community. In the '40s and '50s, despite the oppression, there were things in place to rejuvenate the community that don't exist now...we're scrambling to create those mechanisms."

This lack of impact, both real and perceived, has disheartened and discouraged those who labor in the sector. "Our issues are always incredibly difficult to win," lamented one GLLS participant. "You have to be in it for the long haul if you ever want to see a victory. I was just updating our victories and it stopped at 1999. And I was calling all my colleagues saying, 'Didn't we win anything in the last four years?'"

It is within this critical broader context that the *Generational Changes and Leadership* study and subsequent Listening Sessions were undertaken. "Are people seeing results from their work?" one GLLS attendee asked her colleagues. "I mean, I know you see it to a certain extent but when you look at, kind of the societal issues and the kind of fight that's out there, it's kind of very disenchanting. And it's like well, is this making a difference?"

"Everybody in nonprofits is talking about how this is the most difficult time they've ever seen," said another. "It's a lot of pressure on us – and I have to talk to a lot of people to remind myself it's not me – it's not my fault."

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<sup>14</sup> "Alabama Vote Opens Old Racial Wounds" (washingtonpost.com). [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16443-2004Nov27.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16443-2004Nov27.html)

<sup>15</sup> See Online News Hour Update ([www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/ok\\_debate\\_10-5.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/ok_debate_10-5.html)); and Mau, B. "Teaching Hate: S.C. politician targets gays, single mothers". The Houstonian Online. <http://www.houstonianonline.com/news/2004/10/07/Viewpoints/Teaching.Hate.S.C.Politician.Targets.Gays.Single.Mothers-745545.shtml>

## **The Generational Leadership Listening Sessions: At a Crossroads of Context and History**

The GLLS discussions traversed the journeys that Generation X leaders take in social change organizations, with a special focus on where their paths intersect with those of the Baby Boomers. It's a relationship characterized by ambivalence, and shadowed by history. On the one hand, the new leaders expressed respect for the Baby Boomers who forged the sector, energetically pursued a progressive agenda, and have not given up on their organizations or their ideals. On the other hand, they are exasperated by the contradictions between the ideals the sector espouses, and the way it actually functions. Most social change organizations remain hierarchical in structure, which young leaders often see as a detriment to internal democracy or transparency. Despite efforts to expand participation, decision-making remains fairly concentrated. Young leaders feel undervalued and micro-managed. Mentorship is often spotty and information only grudgingly shared.

These GLLS sessions, by design, were conducted to amplify the voices of younger leaders. What struck us was the importance of the different contextual frame in which this new generation is coming into leadership. Three themes were especially significant: (1) The need to re-examine the paradigm of movement building and social change that was developed in the 1960s and '70s; (2) the acknowledgement of the changing conditions of work; and (3) the position of young leaders who follow the baby boomers and proceed the next larger generational cohort, Generation Y.

### **1. Moving On**

Some of the struggles between the two generations, not always explicitly articulated yet deeply felt, involve the contradictory pulls of movement and organization. As the initial study suggests, the '60s generation entered the work propelled by a shared sense of "movement," and was often less concerned with management skills and professional credentials. Generations X and Y have distinctive identities but lack a collective movement identity, though not a commitment to justice. In addition, young leaders, especially young leaders of color, want to be taken seriously, and have often acquired stellar professional credentials to bolster their credibility – only to find those credentials discounted by the '60s leadership. One participant told us she honored her parents and their generation for putting their lives on the line in the Civil Rights movement to pave the way for new opportunities. As a result she was able to go to school for her master's degree. Now, she explained, she works in an organization where the director tells her that her master's degree means nothing compared to living through the Civil Rights movement.

Many of the GLLS participants expressed the frustrations of trying to live up to a movement legacy glossed in mythology. They were eager to explore the lessons of the '60s, but did not wish to be dismissed just because they were born too late to be there. One participant complained,

*Okay, you were born at a time, at a cycle in the movement, where it took off. But it's like they will tell you that somehow their generation just decided...they had a deeper sense of movement and we are just lost to the*

winds ...

He goes on,

*We need to start really doing an analysis of the cycle of movement, so that we understand how did that happen? And what place are we in? And I think that will humble us a little bit, and also help us to be really effective at not trying to bring the '60s back. We have limited power, and we need to figure out, how do we best work in the moment that we're in.*

This experienced was echoed by another participant who told us,

*I'm not on the board of one organization anymore because a lot of older people came in and told us we're doing it wrong. Because I didn't live through the '60s, and struggle the same way, our legitimacy as leaders is questioned, or not understood, or challenged because we haven't had the same life experiences. Not only were we not part of those movements, but we may not even know what happened or know how to relate to the people who were in those movements. And yet we're supposed to pick up torch and know how to do that!*

## **2. Changing Times**

While the movement-driven Boomers often seemed to cultivate a culture of vocational self-sacrifice, the Gen X/Y leaders seek greater balance than their predecessors between work and family. Some of the issues around work/family culture and power are anchored in changing configurations of race, gender, and class in the leadership cadre. The new generation of leaders is more racially diverse and, while many have attained educational privilege, they cannot necessarily fall back on family wealth or position for security or back-up. Therefore issues of compensation and time to care for family take on a different significance.

This has been confirmed by several studies and in popular books on next generation leadership. They affirm the consistent desire expressed by younger cohorts – across gender lines – for more time to spend with family.<sup>16</sup>

In the book *Geeks and Geezers*, Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas look at leaders over seventy and those under thirty-five. They note that, “no issue or attitude divided geeks from geezers more dramatically than the importance of balance in their lives.” (Bennis and Thomas, 2002) They wondered if, in this highly competitive time, the culture of work will change. Still, they were especially impressed with the length young fathers would go in order to spend more time with their kids.

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<sup>16</sup>For example, Catalyst (2001) *The Next Generation: Today's Professional, Tomorrow's Leaders*. Catalyst, New York, NY: Radcliffe Public Policy Center with Harris Interactive. (2000). *Life's Work: Generational Attitudes Toward Work and Life Integration*, Cambridge, MA.; Light, P.C. (2003) *The Health of the Human Services Workforce*. Center for Public Service: the Brookings Institution, Washington, DC;

### 3. Coming and Staying

Finally, the Baby Boomers love their work and it is not clear if they will be leaving any time soon. The fact that they are glued to their organizational seats means that the next generation has a hard time finding a voice and a place, even as their experience and skill levels rise. As one participant wryly noted, “I have an associate director position. Our ED founded the organization, and has been there for 16 or 17 years. So it’s a challenge figuring out my role and her role.”

Although those thinking about succession in the nonprofit sector fear a mass exodus of leaders<sup>17</sup>, the Generational Leadership Listening Sessions presented a co-existing and contradictory perception. As the Generational Change study indicates, Gen X leaders, especially those aged 30 to 40, find themselves squeezed between the Boomer generation that is not interested in leaving, and a new, even younger generation coming into the pipeline. As a result, many of the sessions’ participants expressed dissatisfaction and anxiety, as they tried to figure out whether to push harder for leadership positions in their existing organizations, move to other groups, start new ones, or leave the sector. A number of participants suggested that while the founder generation remains constant, the next generations turn over more rapidly – leaving the only experienced staff at the top and a plethora of succession issues.<sup>18</sup> As one participant put it:

*There are some people who are lifers at the organization, and some who come and go within a couple of years. There’s the old generation that’s been there since the organization was founded, and there’s the new generation that comes in, stays a couple of years and then leaves. Personally, I’m questioning how much longer I’m going to be involved – not because of my commitment to the community, but is there really an opportunity for me to make change there if the older generation isn’t willing to give up some of that power? Give us a real voice.*

These sectoral challenges are explored below. Since no reporting structure fully captures the inter-connectivity of subjects, we have included many quotes from GLLS participants to add texture to the observations. Together, they help shed light on how a new generation enters the field, how they fare in the organizations and what determines whether they will remain or take their talents elsewhere. The Listening Sessions offer a view of that journey and suggest some directions for the future.

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<sup>17</sup> Hinden and Hull, [2003] “Executive Leadership Transition: What We Know” in *The Nonprofit Quarterly*; Birdsell, D and Muzzio, D. [2003] *The Next Leaders: UWNYP Grantee Leadership Development and Succession Management Needs*. United Way of New York City.

<sup>18</sup> However, the study found that younger generation leaders are also in no hurry to leave their positions; as Ludovic Blain suggested, “we have to be careful not to become ‘perps’” of the same organizational problems that have characterized the Boomers.

## Findings

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### **Knocking at the Door: Gaining Entry and Legitimacy**

Most Gen X leaders pursuing social change work in the nonprofit sector enter organizations dominated by Baby Boomers. Despite a shared commitment to broad social justice ideals, the new leaders often have difficulty acquiring organizational space that values their skills and respects their experience. As one participant said,

*In the organizations I've worked for, I see people hire you because you bring added value to the organization, but then they don't take what you have to offer. This is my last job; I've accomplished what I've accomplished. I'm going to go open a nice coffee shop somewhere.*

This struggle for space and place may well be true for each new generation of job-seekers, but the Boomers constitute a particularly large cadre of founders and long-time directors – and the organizations they adopted and created, now define the sector's structure and culture.

#### **1. New Gen X/Y leaders often have difficulty acquiring organizational space that values their skills and respects their experience.**

*The challenge for our generation of leaders is credibility – being celebrated when we know what we need to know, but being chastised when someone else leads, a Boomer who believes that we don't know enough. Balancing on someone else's beam becomes frustrating, rather than cultivating and strengthening our own voice, despite what others might think...*

The Generational Leadership Listening Sessions (GLLS) confirmed that many Gen X leaders come to the nonprofit sector with sophisticated skills and a level of experience beyond their years. In the original study, virtually all of the young directors had gone to elite colleges.<sup>19</sup> Unlike leaders from the Boomer generation, a number of younger leaders have also worked in the for-profit sector, and/or have studied organizational process, and tend to be more open to the lessons that can be transferred from other sectors. They have also grown up in the computer and internet age and tend to take advantage of the management systems and communications opportunities that it offers. Nonetheless, GLLS participants often found it difficult to gain the respect they needed to maximize their skills in the service of their organizations.

Boards of Directors were one place that this difficulty played out for young executive directors and staff. One director noted that, “It's a challenge coming into an organization and managing an older board. It's something about being taken seriously. Is it age, because I'm female? If I had more gray hair it wouldn't be so difficult.” Another who was a member of an organization's executive staff explained,

*I am the youngest person that sits on their executive committee or executive staff. But do I have any power really? I don't know. You know, I'm in an 85-*

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<sup>19</sup> The majority of these were people of color.

*year old-organization this year and we have board members that have been sitting on the board longer than I've been alive.*

Many participants reported, with some exasperation, that they were treated almost like youth, even though they were actually young leaders in their 30s, with years of experience in the field. “It’s a challenge being one of the youngest doing this work and getting mixed messages from those who are older,” said one participant, “On the one hand, I’m bright and talented and go girl; and then on the other hand, as soon as I start going someplace, they don’t want me to go – then I’m young, inexperienced and in need of mentoring. Like am I grown up or am I not?”

And another participant gave a sense of the push and pull that many felt in their organizations.

*There’s sort of a them-and-us dynamic that’s been occurring recently and it’s very hard for some of the younger senior managers to really push through ideas...I think a lot of that responsibility falls on me as the younger leader to really be able to step up and make amends and try to communicate, so that they understand that I’m respecting their position but that I don’t feel like I shouldn’t be bringing things to the table.*

An underlying factor in this dynamic seems to be that older leaders remain younger for longer – and since they are not ready to retire or be replaced, they keep the younger leaders from getting older. Participants were stymied about how to break the barrier, especially in a sector that does not provide other positions into which older leaders can move. As one participant described the dilemma:

*When you ask a Baby Boomer about retirement, like what they plan to do after this...They kind of look at you like you have three heads. I think it forces us to create all new organizations because they're not going anywhere. And I don't know if that's good or bad but I know I see that with my own parents. And I don't necessarily think that they should move on. Because it is move and do what? You know, they've developed this expertise. They're good at it.*

Reflecting he added,

*Maybe they should have a different role to allow new leadership. But they have all this experience, and they're kind of redefining what it means to be a senior and stuff. None of them really consider themselves to be seniors. And if you step to them like that, they get angry...They're like, what?*

## **2. Race and gender remain obstacles to validation.**

Throughout the conversations, race and gender were lifted up as critical – and inescapable – components of our organizational dynamics.

The new leaders who attended our sessions were, by design, far more racially diverse than what they saw in the nonprofit leadership of the baby boom generation. Many GLLS participants felt that young leaders of color are still struggling to be accorded

the legitimacy to which their training and experience entitles them. “Power brokers all tend to be the same race and gender,” observed one participant. Another noted,

*In terms of systemic advocacy, in my experience persons of color tend to be organizers or program people providing direct services, but there aren't a lot of people of color at that high policy level – I'm figuring out how to be that person in that place and not lose myself.*

Listening session participants felt the gender issue was perhaps more relevant than the initial study suggested. There was an acknowledgment that more women were heading local social change organizations, and the staff of many groups was heavily female; yet the women who attended the GLLS sessions did not express confidence in their power within the sector. Not surprising, women of color saw themselves as doubly challenged. One explained:

*My staff is all older than me, and I'm the only woman of color in the organization. I came into the organization thinking I didn't need legitimacy because it was a collective, and they had to vote unanimously to have a director. But I was wrong...*

Another stated,

*The challenge has been how can we do the work and not replicate the same oppressions internally that we see outside, and how can we grow and sustain women of color to stay in the work? Women of color are doing the work, so why doesn't the leadership reflect that?*

In many instances, creating multicultural leadership in an organization was a lonely burden for young leaders of color. Some talked about resisting the culture of the organizations that courted them where individual recognition came from older white leaders. Where leaders of color succeeded in white-run organizations, they often expressed an undercurrent of tension, both at work, and in their relationships with their communities. One participant talked about how in her work life she was considered “too black” while at home in her community she was teased for trying to be white. Another commented,

*The big challenge for me, was having been one of the first people of color in a white organization and one of the first people of color that stuck with it long enough to actually develop an aspiration to have power in the organization.*

### **3. The growth of immigrant communities, and organizations based in those communities, has redefined diversity and organizational culture within the nonprofit social change sector.**

In several of the cities, a significant number of participants came out of immigrant communities and many of those worked in organizations with specifically immigrant constituencies. One participant suggested that the original study's findings fail to address some immigrant communities that were informed by different histories and experiences – “we were brought in by social movements not necessarily from the US...”

A few of the participants spoke to the complex matrices of immigration and generation, where one could have a young leader who was also a first generation immigrant and an older leader who was a third generation immigrant – and vice versa. Furthermore, some generations of immigrants, and the organizations they formed, were spurred by wars or economic deprivation in the countries of origin, while others were formed in response to injustices. “One of the bigger things we had to deal with was reconciliation within our community because of the war in our country that brought some of us here,” said one participant. “The older generation has to go through that process. We have to understand that history in order for the younger generations to come in and really work to heal.”

Finally, there is a cultural nuance about organizational leadership in immigrant communities. For example, one participant said, “We are called into service to the community. It’s not about leadership development but about building a healthy community...accountable to itself.”

**4. Creating healthy multiracial, multicultural organizations remains a challenge to leaders of all races and generations – but it’s a goal worth the struggle.**

The GLLS participants also surfaced the issue of the changing racial paradigm from black-white to a racial spectrum – an issue the initial study sample was too small to address. “An organization like the one I worked for, traditional civil rights organizations, see the world very much black and white,” said one participant. She continues,

*Younger staff was much more, not that way about it, and really were always butting our heads against the wall, like, well we have to be talking about immigration, we have to be talking about gay and lesbian families, and all these different things. And they were, like, no, we’re from a Baptist tradition and we don’t deal with those issues...*

In a different city, an attendee lamented that,

*There’s not really many examples of a multi-racial organization that intentionally has three or more ethnic groups being represented. I have seen a lot of groups that are like white/black, black/Latino, Latino/Asian, Asian/white, whatever. But when you actually have three or four groups or more actually present at the table, at some level of accountability, they don’t really exist.*

At the same time, there was also enthusiasm for building multicultural/ multiracial organizations. As one participant framed it, “How do we harness our diversity when we work together and model with each other how to work as a multi-racial organization?” The creation or transformation of organizations to reflect and embrace the different needs and aspirations of different groups was a challenge. One participant reflected, “I think people of color a lot of time is just a catch all for any people that aren’t white, so we just get all kind of tossed into this one basket.”

Several white male leaders in GLLS sessions reflected on how they went through a transformation – a kind of racial consciousness-raising – in the organizations they led. As one of them explained,

*We grew up as a white organization, and made a hard transition a few years ago. Instead of saying, how do we make out there more diverse, we said, how do we make in here more diverse, and started to make a lot of changes. We've been successful. Two of four directors are now people of color – and in our constituency, we've done quite a lot. I'm the white ED who went into it, and is now going externally trying to explain to funders and other organizations that maybe an internal look is more important than an external look...I've been trying to explain to power brokers from older generations, who come back with, 'isn't it all just a personality conflict,' or 'we don't have time to deal with these issues because we have other fights.'*

## **Inside the House: Questions of Form and Function**

Once young leaders gain entry and standing in their organizations, they are confronted with the realities of structure, power, accountability and culture that define organizational life. And from the inside out, young leaders describe a myriad of problems, many rooted in the organizational habits, and some they attribute to the longevity of the Baby Boomers.

As we found in the Generational Change study, organizational structure and decision-making remains a challenge for those working for social change. GLLS participants view their organizations as frequently dysfunctional, and resistant to modification. The structure and culture are tied to how power, leadership and accountability are framed, supported and exercised. Participants most frequently cited an overarching need for transparency in decision-making. As one young leader put it,

*If there's no structure that people can see, there is a structure that people don't see; they know it's there, but they can't really name it, because it doesn't have a name, and there's no accountability to it.*

Participants also keenly feel the pressure of maintaining principles, process, program and product, while sustaining the organizations; yet they feel that the alternatives to hierarchical structure are neither well articulated, nor sufficient for the long-term health of the sector. As one participant wryly noted,

*One of the challenges of being a director was trying to experiment with process. After three years, I'm kind of over it. I'm kind of back into hierarchy and knowing what everybody needs to do. I don't know how I feel about that, I don't know that I like that.*

### **1. Decision-making in nonprofit social change organizations often lack the clarity.**

*Three things:*

*There's always a structure...*

*It exists in a context, cultural and political.*

*We need to make sure there's transparency at the staff level, whether it's hierarchical or not...*

*We must create structural space consciousness.*

Report-back from a GLLS break-out group

Participants were eloquent about the structural problems endemic to organizational life. They noted that many of the Boomers have maintained, or reverted to, hierarchical structures with “input” – a process widely viewed as both confusing and unsatisfactory. Sometimes the system worked well, “Our ED he's not top-down,” one participant reported. “He receives input from all different levels and if it's something he appreciates or agrees with, he moves forward with that...”

However there were other times that the perception of the director and the staff were at odds. This was particularly well illustrated in the story below about an

organization with two Baby Boom leaders who were trying hard to be inclusive of their younger staff.

*The Boomers where I worked...[would] say yes we want your input, and we'd sit around in staff meetings and have these great conversations and the final decision would come down and be totally different than what we talked about. And people were like, if you're just going to tell me what to do, why have the conversation? They (the directors) thought it was working until we went through a process that gave the younger staff a chance to say how they felt. The facilitator put a table in the middle of the room and said, "I'm inviting someone to use the chairs and show us where everybody is at the table." And one of my cohorts got up and he put one chair at the head of the table and one at the side, and there were other chairs at varying lengths from the table, some chairs off in the corner somewhere, and some in the corner facing the wall. And by the time he got finished painting this picture, the directors of the organization were like done, and undone. They had never perceived that's how the younger people saw it.*

Sometimes, it was hard to even find the structure. One woman told the group that, "My job has really become creating organizational infrastructure – because in 27 years there hasn't been any." However, participants astutely noted that an absence of clarity or transparency did not mean there wasn't a structure – just that there was one that was not accountable. Several participants made the observation that decision structures were ambiguous and members and staff often don't understand process. One example was shared by a participant who came into the organization and observed,

*We have a senior staff but nobody called it senior staff; it was just sort of operating out there. So I'm like let's name it, and know what they do, and who's on it, so people know whom to hold accountable. I'm wary of institutions where the structure isn't apparent. But naming structure brought up a lot of other stuff. It has caused tension and ripples that have been there, but hidden. It brought them to the surface.*

Others raised concerns about the gap between the way the process is described and the way decisions are made. One executive director talked about his struggle with correcting these disparities:

*Before and after I became ED we tried all kinds of different models, collectives, kumbaya committees. No matter what process you set up, it doesn't work unless the ED has the buy-in and is going to allow that process to affect their decision-making...Regardless of what format – for us it's been about communications both before and after the decision...If people understand why a decision is made, that's as important as the process.*

Although GLLS participants expressed dissatisfaction with hierarchical models, and felt that efforts to expand "input" often lacked clarity, they were generally at a loss to identify effective alternatives. "People come in only understanding the hierarchical model because it's ingrained in the places where we earn our degrees," said one

young leader. “When we have the power to make changes we don’t know what to do.”

## **2. Young leaders grapple with developing good models for exercising leadership and power.**

At the intersection of structure, and culture, the sessions located questions of power, leadership and accountability. These three components of organizational life were seen as inter-twined and discussed as both cause and result of organizational structure. For the young leaders at the listening sessions, how these issues were handled was often the embodiment of how the organizations – and the people in them – honored their values. One participant reflected,

*How do we bring participatory democracy in some sense to organizations in a useful way? How do we recognize people’s opinions but also have an effective organization?*

Another mused,

*I think the leadership challenge is often to balance the whole idea of visions and thinking big and growing and dreaming with the reality of where your organization is, and building the infrastructure and taking the time to focus, and building the capacity to help get the people in the organization to those places. And to be sure that the vision is always the vision that everyone is buying into. That’s a big challenge.*

Participants expressed both self doubt and deeply felt conviction on these matters, recognizing the complexities of balancing strong leadership with vibrant democracy, and idealism with organizational survival and efficacy. They struggled with how to synch up organizational values and practices, while effectively pursuing their mission. As one participant put it,

*As a leader of an organization, I don’t want us to get stuck and mired in just focusing on making our organizations perfect. But I don’t want to become like dictatorial and evil either. So I’ve found the balance between the internal and external really challenging.*

Another expressed how trying to spread decision-making authority and responsibility does not always give the intended results.

*I came in saying, as a director, I will assume responsibility for some things, but not for others. I’ll take responsibility for the overall health of the organization, but I try to give as much authority to the program associates...only to find that one didn’t know how to operate like that and one did. So I have one really productive person, and one who’s always asking, “what should I be doing?” Not everybody wants a flattened hierarchy. I’m trying to figure out what’s the best model for the organization, and what’s best for the people in the organization.*

The sessions confirmed that younger leaders were trying – as had many of their older peers – to find structures that supported the social change mission of the organization, worked for the staff, and moved forward the work. Over and over we heard how new workable models were needed. One participant analyzed the struggle in a historical context.

*If you look at organizations that positioned themselves as change agents in different times, the director was called a field secretary, or facilitator. There was an historical context for decentralization. That doesn't mean less rigorous, it just means that there's a different pedagogy around them. At some point though, a generation figured out that local leadership, which could surface more easily in a horizontal structure, was no longer relevant to the success of the organization. The interests of leadership became separated, and at that point, those organizations began to mimic the style and structure of the corporate world – like "I'm the director of social justice for everyone." There's a lot that's been sacrificed in that shift, although something has been gained. There's a conversation to be had about the gains and losses.*

### **3. Power and Structure: Who is accountable – and to whom – is part of the responsible exercise of power and leadership.**

The sessions also included discussions about the relationship between power and structure. The simple question by one participant, "How does a leader use power in a good way?" captures a common thread of dialogue from city to city. While some GLLS participants felt that the younger generation shied away from accepting power, others argued that the problem lay in the way they had seen power exercised. As one participant commented,

*A lot of the organizations that we're looking at are based on that pyramid model and those naturally attract people who are comfortable being in power, and yet if you say that, that's an unspeakable thing. To say, like, "Yeah, I'm comfortable with power. I'm cool with that. I'm willing to step in and hold power."*

Another participant raised the issue,

*For younger people, it's not being afraid of power, but afraid of how we've seen power exercised. We don't want to be the same perpetrators of negative power, always maintaining the status quo. For me it's important to have conversations at all levels around people's understanding of how that looks in terms of everyday power, structure, vision and values.*

The burden of responsibility was felt as young leaders describe their work in their organizations and beyond.

*We as leaders have not only responsibility for making our organization open to changes and allowing for more participation, but it also means that we as younger people have to step up and claim the space. And be responsible and participate.*

There was a recurring suggestion that excessive longevity by Boomer EDs had a tendency to hinder accountability, as power became centralized and entrenched – and GLLS participants were grateful for leaders who struggled to recalibrate their organizations. A number of participants noted that shared accountability was a two-way street; line staff as well as leaders needed to step up to the plate and take on responsibility for the process. As one leader laughingly commented, “As a long-standing collective, we don’t really have a leader; everyone is a leader when things are going well, I’m a leader when things go wrong.”

The idea that younger leaders need to learn now to recognize and communicate their own power was expressed in several of the sessions. In one instance, a participant described it this way.

*It is as important that people who are participating in a collaborative organization, know how to participate, as it is that the leader knows how to lead...you have to know what it means to share responsibilities, to step up and participate, to not wait for your leader to tell you what to do. You have to build your own capacity to participate so that when a leader says here’s an opportunity for you to take leadership, you know how to step into that. And you feel confident to say to your leader, I’m not comfortable with how this decision’s being made.*

Models for how older leaders have step up the plate also were shared. For example, one person told the group,

*I feel blessed working an organization where our ED struggles with how we make decisions, our structure, and how we’re accountable to our community. We do have a leadership team that makes decisions for the organization. We’ve been challenging ourselves with who can be on the team...Half are under 18 and they make decisions around budgets, program, etc. Empowerment is really worth it, even if it takes longer*

#### **4. Young leaders are often disenchanted when there is a gap between an organization’s external values and its internal culture.**

*I’ve worked at a lot of different social justice organizations. At a national one based in Washington, I found myself saying over and over again, “Love my work. Hate my job. Love my work. Hate my job.” And what I hated about it was just the incongruity between the principles my organization professed and worked so hard to send out to the world, and the way that they treated their staff, the way that things were mismanaged, and the lack of any leadership model.*

Culture is an elusive concept and a pervasive dynamic in the lives of young social change leaders. It encompasses the collective “persona” of the entire sector, as well as that of the individual organizations in which people work. GLLS participants often spoke of the sector and their own groups with ambivalence. Older leaders were encouraging yet dismissive, visionary yet disorganized, eager to change the world but not the format of a staff meeting. Young leaders struggled with contradictions between espoused principles and organizational practice, and were frustrated by the

managerial disorder and bad habits that frequently hindered the health and effectiveness of both the organization and its staff members. There was an underlying suggestion that the culture lacked a kind of generosity of spirit. Participants noted that many older leaders, and hence their organizations, do not work well together:

*I've seen the old-time tensions between different organizations; collaborations between organizations and dealing with that history can be hard.*

*Working with a range of partners was a challenge. Advocates have a certain agenda, officials have another and government agencies have a third, even though we're all trying to serve the same population.*

**5. Balance between work and personal life remains a daunting challenge for young leaders in a culture still steeped in sacrificing all one's time to the work.**

Along with a sense of movement, the Baby Boom generation brought a sense of vocation to their work that frequently obscured relationship needs and personal health. The younger leaders view that lack of balance as deeply problematic, tending to see it as ultimately ineffective and self-destructive. As one of the participants remarked, "I'm thinking beyond the sweatshop NGO or nonprofit..." Another worried about, "trying to be development director, communications director, executive director, and, you know, program director, in this so-called 30 hours a week job which is really 45..."

The Generational Change study found that younger leaders were far clearer than the Boomers about wanting more time for their families and friends – and that Gen X/Y men were much more concerned than their predecessors with having time for raising a family. In the follow-up sessions, both women and men talked about the work/personal life divide, and the need for manageable work expectations and goals. For some, the concern led them to eschew offers of positions as executive director. For others, the changes in their own lives were forcing reconsideration of the time they spent at work.

One young man related that, "I have a brand new baby. I was used to solving problems by coming in two hours earlier and staying two hours later. Well, that won't work any more." Another participant was "thinking about how do I balance motherhood and being a lead organizer?" Time was not the only concern. One participant, reacting to the original study's findings, reflected,

*That piece about family impact on the work, especially young men, really hit home to me in a very real way. I'm 38. I would like to have a family in the next few years, if the young lady I'm talking to puts up with me that long. But I also really recognize that I can't do that by founding a nonprofit where I'll be living in the Bay Area and making \$35,000 a year. It's not the quality of life that I'd like to have and that I'd like to provide for a family, so I'm really, really struggling with that, and I'm just at a little bit of a loss about where to take this.*

Another participant wondered how much the job had led her to a place where she had ignored the other pieces of her life.

*I'm 37 years old and single. Where's the nest, children, chickies...I've been through different phases of burnout. This is a spiritual crisis. I didn't develop myself enough as a spiritual person because of my activism. How do you balance these things?*

There was also the question of simply setting limits on the work without having to justify needing time away. As one person put it,

*Those who have been doing nonprofits challenge our commitment to the cause...If I take a week's vacation, and I say don't call or e-mail me, our commitment to the cause is challenged...and that makes it very difficult for us to get away.*

As one breakout group summarized, "It's really important to take care of ourselves – and not work ourselves to death."

## Training and the Mentoring Relationship

Just as creating social change is dependent on building relationships to foster collective action, relationships are also critical to personal growth. Literature on the role of mentors in the organizational advancement of younger leaders rarely focuses on those working in smaller nonprofits.<sup>20</sup> Yet, these relationships loomed large for GLLS participants.<sup>21</sup>

The Generational Change study explored the role of training in augmenting management and organizational skills. Respondents were skeptical of management training degrees offered by universities. However, some GLLS participants felt they had benefited from additional training and skills development – including some forms like executive coaching that were not widely available to the Boomers in earlier decades. One young executive director talked about the importance of receiving this type of support:

*I benefited a lot from two executive leadership programs I got put into. I was the youngest in one group... We got executive coaches – and it was wonderful, like having a therapist. The other program for 25 non-prof execs – it just gave us community with other leaders from a range of backgrounds*

Another GLLS participant explained the importance of training and education,

*I've added to my skills and education. I have commitment to growing and enhancing the sector, and it is going to be up to us to improve the sector's legitimacy and credibility. We add value to the work. I read in the study where training opportunities are not as useful – and that could be if it was all academic research. But we have opportunities and learnings that the Boomers didn't have. They didn't have nonprofit management programs and professional certifications. As the sector becomes more professional and entrepreneurial, it's become strengthened.*

However, in the listening sessions, formal training took a back seat to the discussion of mentoring. The young leaders repeatedly voiced a sense of disappointment about the lack of good mentors. As one break-out group noted,

*There's a mentor who's really there to help you and develop your skills – and there's the one that sees you as a piece of their empire and wants to create you in their model. We think mentoring is good, but need a consistent mentoring process.*

Underlying the dialogue was a profound sense of loss that the important lessons were not being passed on from one generation to the next. The young leaders often voiced

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<sup>20</sup> Lambrecht, J.J. C. Hopkins, J. Moss, Jr., C. R. Finch. “Importance of On-the-Job Experiences in Developing Leadership Capabilities (MDS-814)”.

(<http://ncrve.berkeley.edu/Summaries/814sum.html>); and Blake-Beard, Stacy.

“Mentoring through the Lens of Race and Gender”, 2001, CGO Insights, Simmons Graduate School of Management ([http://www.simmons.edu/som/cgo/insights\\_10.pdf](http://www.simmons.edu/som/cgo/insights_10.pdf))

<sup>21</sup> One excellent article on nonprofits and mentoring is Nayz'at, N. and Bailey, K. (1999) “Developing Potential Leaders Through Experience.” *Nonprofit Quarterly* (6:4, Boston, MA).

the commitment to do better for the generation coming up behind them: “I’ve sort of gotten thrown into a position. I don’t want to throw other people in that same position. People should get the sort of training and development and support that they need.”

**1. Good mentors are hard to come by – and urgently needed – as we look toward the future of movement building.**

Participants felt that having the support and wisdom of an older generation who nurtured their leadership would be invaluable. And a number of participants cited the benefits they had gained from just such mentorship. However, many of the young leaders had trouble finding older leaders to serve as mentors. This was especially true for leaders of color.

*I haven’t had a male supervisor or mentor in all my years in nonprofits. There’s not a lot of black male role models to latch onto or learn from, so that has been a challenge.*

And another noted,

*I was an ED of a grassroots community organization, the only Latina – and I had to compete against other people who had their own mentor system, but I wasn’t part of it...*

When the desire for an older mentor could not be met, the GLLS participants often filled this need through peer mentorship which was an important support. One person explained,

*There’s no sort of holistic set of mentors; if there are, they’re like peers. And they’re my colleagues of my generation... And this is a problem because my peers share my vision but they don’t have more experience or knowledge about how to get there.*

The meeting participants often saw that older leaders could teach them some things, but not others. One person commented on what was accomplished with and without the help of the previous generations.

*I think we’re in a position, where now we’re supposed to know how to do this, build a structure that’s going to work for the place and benefit the staff, when we didn’t have anybody teach us how to do that. They (previous generation) may have mentored us around a passion for the work we do, but didn’t necessarily know how to help us put it together or make it work.*

Finally, there were a number of comments suggesting that mentorship was sometimes offered for ulterior motives, to enlarge an older leader’s turf or influence, rather than help a younger person to develop his or her own perspectives and capacities.

“Sometimes mentorship is not real, not co-learning,” reported one participant, “like I’ll only mentor you if you play my game. That’s a gnarled and twisted vision of mentorship.” Another participant commented,

*I've had organizers in the city to tell me it's "not in my self-interest to mentor you," which is absurd. It's about competing organizations. The most surprising is I've heard it from more than one person, it's pretty out there...*

In one session, several participants discussed how mentoring rather than merit determined the success of younger leaders. Even those who benefited talked about it as a corruption of social change work – a kind of nepotism that stretched beyond familial lines. Many felt that funders were complicit in promoting the gate-keeping approach, as one attendee related, “When I go to funders – everyone asks me who my mentor is. I’ve learned to expect it, eventually everyone asks. It’s like who taught you, and should we let you in...”

## **2. There are specific complications when leadership is being passed on within families from one generation to the next.**

Although not common, in certain communities, especially in smaller geographic areas or in specific fields, changing leadership will take place among family members. There were organizations in which GLLS participants worked where parents or other family members were in leadership roles. Many of the younger generation had not gone directly into the organization, instead trying other types of work and living in other locations. Making a generational change within a family or very tight knit community posed challenges ranging from needing to do other work before joining the organization or building a community among a younger generation.

For example, one woman participant described working in several different small businesses before returning to the nonprofit sector and joining an organization that her family had helped to start. She talked about how the time apart was important for her own learning, but – in the end – the experiences she had in the for-profit sector reinforced the importance of working for social change.

This mix of generations, family and change was most notable in participants from immigrant and people of color populations. The continuity of struggles for social justice and social change had already been passed for several generations, and these groups failed to see that sort of generational shift as especially problematic. Mentorship took place within the community. However some of the GLLS participants talked about this transfer raising other issues especially with staff and volunteer members who were not included in the decision-making circles.

## **3. The lack of adequate mentorship and broader intergenerational dialogue means that important lessons of history and experience are inadequately transmitted, or are lost to a new generation.**

Young leaders worried that if they didn’t know the history of the sector, they would be forced to repeat its mistakes – and it seems a well-founded fear. Younger leaders were both concerned about leaders staying too long, but they were also worried they would leave without passing on the lessons they had learned.

One of the participants describes how important it has been to work with an older leader who is addressing this issue:

*One of the founders is still on our staff and it's been so valuable to be able to go to him because he documented the whole history of the organization. Anytime we're having a discussion about something, he can pull something out where they had the exact same discussion that we think is brand new...In a way it's made me more humble because I feel like I don't have any new ideas. And that's fine. I learned it from people who were 30 years older than me, and they learned it from people who were 30 years older than them.*

Good mentors gave a sense of history, reflected on what worked and what did not and why, and encouraged and supported younger leaders. They recognized that they had important information to pass on, but that their work had not always succeeded. Their role was to help a new generation to move things forward on their own terms. This gave younger leaders a stronger foundation to carry on social change work.

#### **4. GLLS leaders seem particularly eager to be good mentors to the next generation coming up after them.**

The GLLS participants talked both about their own experiences finding and maintaining positive mentoring relationships and how that has an impact on how they plan to serve as mentors to those younger. It also inspired them to think about mutual mentoring between older and younger generations.

*I've had really, really great mentors, ...Now that I'm getting older, I'm 40 now, whether I like it or not, I become a mentor to other people and that actually really scares me. People will look up to me and I try to also have conversation with them. Like, I actually consider you as mentors. I think we always look for older people as mentors, but the political analysis that I learned from my younger mentors can really be inspiring, so I'm also trying to figure out how do we break the cycles of these traditional notions of mentorship, as well.*

Another participant explained,

*When I work with younger folks, I'm very much like, ...let's work together. And I think that that's a new paradigm. Because I didn't grow up with that. I grew up with, you're quiet, you overhear, and that kind of thing. And I'm growing up with, "I want to hear what you have to say. I respect it and I think you've got something to offer." And I think that kind of connects with the racial/ethnic thing as well.*

## Money Relationships: Supporting the Work

Having financial resources is an important aspect of being able to succeed as a leader in a social change nonprofit. Here too, relationships are key to being successful. Some of the young leaders, especially those from more elite backgrounds, have relationships that lead them to resources. Others do not. This was an important topic of conversation among the participants.

### **1. Young leaders feel that the Baby Boom generation has cultivated relationships with funders that are not being passed on – and that they need assistance in making those connections.**

Although the initial study did not directly address the impact of funding on generational changes and leadership, the subject repeatedly cropped up in the Listening Sessions. Young leaders were concerned that the relationships the Baby Boomers had established with foundation staff were not willingly transferred, or easily transferable. “There is a funding factor,” one young leader acknowledged. “Funders fund leadership – and that can be jeopardized in a transition. Tack that on with the credibility factor, and the organization is in jeopardy when the incoming person is perceived as less seasoned.” Another noted that,

*We’re already seen as a gamble by a lot of places, because of our youth. We need to convince them an ED doesn’t need to be there for 30 years for the organization to be stable.*

Many participants hoped that the older generation of leadership would step in to help smooth the way. They recognized the importance of knowing the script that interests funders and lends credibility to the work.

*What the older folks can do is support the 25-to-40 year olds in understanding why did people create the relationships with foundations the way it did? But there also needs to be a space to talk about the song and dance. A lot of older directors actually have friends who are program officers so they know a certain song and dance. We’re beginning to need friends among program officers. Do we want to create another song and dance? That’s the conversation that should happen between older folks and us, and of course young people.*

There was a sense that the leadership of the funding world was also shifting towards a new generation. One participant observed,

*At the national level, we should enter into dialogue with new leadership in foundations. Young people are taking over the family boards and coming into these foundations in charge of a lot of money. We could start an intergenerational discussion between funders and fundees.*

Others who attended the sessions were looking to the future of movement building and the need for funders to recognize the importance of young leadership.

*We need to help them (funders) understand why to support more efforts around younger leaders at this moment in history. There's way more people in their 20s than their 30s. They need to see it as part of their work and invest in it now. We need training and support about how to have these conversations. We need more help in figuring out how to help foundation folk understand the pressures on us, and how to push them to have the conversations we need to have, without totally losing our funding. We could use some training around that.*

**2. In some regions of the country, funders were perceived as biased toward certain models of work to the detriment of new models, especially those conceived in communities of color.**

Just as funders were sometimes seen as reinforcing gate-keeping through their relationships, they were also perceived as favoring the certain models for running organizations and styles of organizing. Even in the marginalized world of social change, the result was viewed as a way to keep some young leaders, especially those of color, out of the mainstream. One participant described her experience,

*I feel like I've learned from liberation theology, the civil rights movement, and the Alinsky style [of organizing]. There's a combination model, and funders are like no, you don't fit the structure. And if you don't fit that model, something's wrong with you.*

Another put it,

*We're moving...to the social entrepreneurial model, based on challenges we have dealt with – especially the old boy network when it comes to funding. The money consistently goes to same individuals regardless of whether they produce the outcome.*

Frustration with how funders treated young leaders was expressed in several sessions. One participant commented,

*Funders want to meet me, and hear my vision. Then I go to one meeting, and the funder takes me to task – like this isn't where the organization should be going, this is what you should be saying and doing...They're not into the changes that are happening...*

The disconnect between the vision of funders and practitioners, combined with the lack of access to resources, led some GLLS participants to wonder if the future of movements for social change lay outside of organizations supported by foundations.

*There weren't these foundations you know in the '50s, '60s...and there were social change groups. So how do we get back at some of that strength where we didn't need all these grants to build the movement?*

## Leaving Home: Transition and Legacy

*The way the leadership transition happened in my organization was all sharp elbows and sharp words and that's just such a not productive way to work. And it's real painful on both sides, and what a waste of time, and there's just so many ways to do it better.*

All the issues of structure, race, culture, funding and mentorship converge at moments of transition – and put some of the tensions between the Boomer and Gen X leaders into sharp relief. Many participants noted that these issues were not merely about process and procedure, but about spirit as well.

The Generational Change study suggested that many older leaders do not imagine lives beyond their current jobs, often have no plans to leave, and, even on the brink of departure, cannot seem to actually deal with preparations for succession. The study also pointed out that younger leaders seem headed toward the same pattern.

Yet, despite occasional resistance and habitual ambivalence, generational change will, and must, take place. Some organizations will weather their transitions with ease and insight, but for many others, change will be stormy, and some groups will not survive the upheaval. The course of transition in any given organization is difficult to predict; sometimes excellent transition plans yield to faulty execution and/or less-than-excellent results. In other cases, planning is minimal and the subsequent transition occurs in crisis. However, the Listening Sessions surfaced some factors that frame transition processes throughout the sector.

### **1. Young social change leaders are ambivalent about their relationship to the Baby Boom generation, and they feel squeezed between the older leaders who are not leaving (as of yet) and an even younger generation coming up fast.**

The young leaders at the GLLS sessions revealed a stew of emotions about the Baby Boom generation – admiration and empathy, impatience, resignation that they never seem ready to resign. Many feel stymied in carving out a satisfactory leadership role, hemmed in by the Boomers on the top end but crowded by a new generation of even younger leaders reaching for middle management positions. This is particularly true for those in their mid-to-late 30s who now have 10 or more years experience and are restive for new challenges.

The frustration of waiting to take over a position of someone who is constantly planning to leave was palpable for some.

*I was brought on specifically to replace someone who is planning to retire. And unfortunately, that person seems to still not want to retire. I love her to death and we all need an extra grandmother but my title has changed four times, not to step on her toes...*

Looking to the next generation, one participant observed,

*We're in this generational squeeze. I think a lot of people our age get a little bit territorial about the areas that we've carved out. We're like, God damn it, it took us so long to get even this little bit of power or space. I think if I was to say anything to younger people it's like, recognize that we're caught in this squeeze ourselves, ...caught between these people who aren't going to leave necessarily and these people who are upstarts who really expect things to happen like this. And to be more patient with that reality because we're there and we're going to be there a long time with them.*

**2. There is no infrastructure to support the transition of older leaders, and no roles into which they can readily move.**

GLLS participants identified systemic issues that deter successful and timely transitions. If they themselves have no place to go, they recognize that the Boomer leaders also have no place to which they can naturally transition within the social change community. Sometimes, that knowledge was close to home,

*My mother has been working in the nonprofit community for a very long time...there's one thing in terms of living out your vision and working in a movement and so forth. But then there's also the matter of people having homes that they either own or are renting and savings and so forth. Even if she's older, she still has a life that she has to support for herself in terms of savings or whatever, and the infrastructure of nonprofits hasn't necessarily been the most stable infrastructure.*

As previously noted in this report, these days people in their 50s still have 20 years of working life before them; they are neither old, nor ready to retire. And for many, the vision that brought them to the work is still bright, and the goal not yet accomplished.

*Letting go is difficult because this has been the focus of people's life and work, and they also have a sense of responsibility around this, and so how do you let go? The vision of what the organization can be is often a long-term vision, so how do you then quit when the vision isn't yet realized? What do we do? How can we leave? It's sort of the leap of faith of actually taking the plunge and saying okay I'm leaving, and whatever happens, happens. That's difficult.*

The sector infrastructure over the past 40 years has not provided for adequate, much less comfortable, retirement. Many of the Boomers were ill-paid, few had retirement plans, and living on social security is a dodgy prospect. All these factors contribute to their reluctance to leave their positions. As one attendee noted, "There's no incentive for change...how can we work it out for the generation that's leaving?"

Many young leaders can see the strains and the recognition of the Boomer predicament also fuels a determination among younger leaders to be paid better salaries and provided decent benefits, lest they find themselves in the same predicament a few decades down the road.

*If people don't retire, it's because they won't have anything to retire on; there's no retirement plans for people in the nonprofit industry. So where are*

*they going to go? And it's not like you can make a lateral move to some other kind of employer. You can't just go to a think tank someplace or be an emeritus professor someplace, because there're no lateral options for older activists.*

Already in a world that feels less certain than the one inhabited by their predecessors, younger generations are thinking about their future security now. To them, it is part of their commitment to make the world more secure for all people.

**3. The culture of transition should be supportive and affirming, not blaming and punitive. Smooth transitions can be helped by personal and organizational planning.**

Although the GLLS participants were eager for room at the top, they also were sympathetic to the plight of the older generation. Participants were uneasy with the insensitivity that can accompany transitions. One asked,

*Why is the fact of decades in one place bad? I don't believe the way a new generation comes in is by destroying the one before them, and some people want to do that.*

Understanding that years of leadership should be affirmed and celebrated, another observed how instead many older leaders are confronted with what they have not been able to accomplish.

*There's a big emotional dimension. What have I done well, where have I failed? When we talk to people about moving on, we're implying that they're failures, it's like a critique of what they've done wrong. We need to be backing people up, asking where do you think you've succeeded, where have you failed – where do you want the next generation to take it?*

Participants observed that transition is often undertaken in a crisis mode – when either the director or the organization is at some breaking point. The result can promote a culture of blame. As one participant suggested,

*Transition shouldn't mean that things are going badly, that doesn't have to be the model. It could be that things are going well, and that's just as good a reason*

Despite the concern they felt for departing directors, GLLS participants also expressed frustration that many Boomer directors are unwilling to plan for their departures, even after they had expressed battle fatigue or a desire to move on. The consequences are both organizational and personal. Those attending the sessions struggled to come up with solutions:

*If no one outside can think of the director as separate from the organization – that's a problem. Establish a process for determining when it's time to go. Put progress or planning at the front end i.e. build in no fewer than 7, no more than 10 years at the beginning.*

Some reflected on their own future:

*We need to look at exit plans, and how to move on. I'm realizing I can't do this another 20 years...*

Or as another participant put it,

*When you're 55, that's not the time to figure out what your exit strategy is. By that time, you're starting to count out how much money you need to make it over the next ten years in order to be able to retire, so now is really the time to figure that out and if that requires lifestyle changes. The alternative is to be there at 70, and we already see how that goes*

Thinking about their own futures and those of the generation that is nearing the age of retirement, the GLLS participants reflected on the long history many directors have with their organizations.

*Transition doesn't mean termination. Some people think, transition – I'm out of a job. But there are other spaces – it isn't just, you see the door, goodbye – there still needs to be a connection. That's really what transition is about.*

## New Aspirations for a New Leadership Generation

Today's young leaders confront an environment characterized by governmental hostility to progressive social change, more public skepticism and less public funding, and an increased burden on private funding sources and nonprofits to compensate for the gaping holes in the fraying safety net for vulnerable populations. In this context, they are rethinking their organizational and personal futures. As they evaluate the lives and legacies of the Baby Boomers, and consider what their own lives and legacies might look like to subsequent generations, they are offering some new insights based on their own aspirations and experiences.

### 1. Many young leaders are reluctant to themselves become executive directors.

An important factor that repeatedly surfaced in the discussions was that many young leaders are, in fact, reluctant to take on the executive director role. Many see it as a thankless job that, within the current structure and culture, precludes a happy and well-balanced life. The impossibly long hours and weekend work, constant scrabbling for funds, and strains on family relationships were deterrents.

*You inherit a lot of stuff and you're trying to bring new things and be a change agent. How do you still maintain power, respect, be the young face, but still hone some power? And I think for me that's where I stand now. I'm grappling, is nonprofit really my answer? Do I do my best work here? Could I be heard better somewhere else? And do I ever want to be an executive director? Like, do I ever want to run an organization?*

There were participants that talked about the advantages of not being a director – both in the flexibility it gave them and in their ability to continue to work directly with constituents.

*After ten years, you know, people are going to just burn out. So I really felt like I need to take a break. And what I realized was that, with the sheer number of years, you sort of become the middle management without you recognizing it or even being prepared as to what that means. There were some incidents regarding different organizations that I was working with that completely made me disillusioned about social justice work. So the confluence of all of that made me leave my organization and, in hindsight, I was able to do that because I wasn't an ED...I wasn't ready to be a director of an organization because my heart was really in organizing not management.*

Those in GLLS sessions who were directors often reinforced this fear. They talked of the demands on the executive director and about their own struggles with the job.

*I'm starting to think about, well, am I ever going to get to stop working, or do I have to keep working until I'm dead? Because if I stop working then I won't have any money...I could go live with my sister and work just around one particular project and I'm not the executive director anymore and, I mean,*

*there's a part of me that's, saying, "Well, you know, that's going to be better than this"...*

## **2. Young leaders desire to create better spaces for learning both for the leadership generations coming up after them and for thinking about their own future.**

As mentioned earlier, young leaders are eager to create an environment and a process that provides the next generation with better mentoring, greater voice, and more options than they themselves had. As one participant summarized, "As we take power and become directors, we need to set a new paradigm that includes mentorship and role-modeling."

Some GLLS participants talked about their responsibility for creating room for younger staff. Like their older counterparts, they too struggled with the values of the next generation as well as the continuity of the work.

*I do find that young people that come in, they want, like, the next day, the title, the this, the that, the everything. And that's part of our culture. You have to be right now. So I do think that for younger people there should be a lot more opportunities. I have a really young staff that I try to give a lot of opportunities to. But also be willing to put in the time and do the work. I do think there's stuff getting lost. I think I don't have it as much as the first mentor person I worked for. And I think the person that replaces me is going to have even less. So I think that is something that we should worry about.*

The concern was not simply about organizations, but also about the future of movement building.

*Whether formal or informal, we need to make connection between leadership and movement building. My challenge to myself is, how do I develop an infrastructure where I'm constantly creating space for growth and participation of others? How do I create that space continuously, without myself in the picture...*

One simply claimed,

*We could deal with next generation the way we wish we'd been treated.*

## **3. Reconciliation and Moving On Together**

Ultimately, the GLLS participants were passionate about balance and reconciliation, searching for ways to blend management and movement, efficacy and democracy – and nurture the vision of justice that unites the generations of social change leaders. They saw themselves as spiritually and historically connected to the Baby Boomers, and hungered for the inter-generational conversations that would reveal some important historical lessons and lay the foundation for a healthier culture that models its values. And, beyond that, they saw these conversations as critical to the health, vitality and effectiveness of the sector. As one young leader observed,

*These two generations are very similar it seems to me, after listening to the study. And that just even the fact that there is, like, a Baby Boomer generation and a Generation X; to be a generation that gets named speaks of a certain amount of noise.*

Another commented,

*I don't think we can not have this conversation with the Boomers – r.e. race, funding, transitioning, organizational health and culture of organization. I don't think we can go another 10 or 15 years without having this conversation if we are seriously interested in community and family life. The nonprofits are clearly not run by people of color, and some of the conversations with our seasoned colleagues will be difficult but we have to have that...*

Most important, the GLLS participants were looking to build toward the future together.

*How do you broach some of these questions? Beyond framing it as organizational transition, it should be framed as organizational health. If there's a desire for longevity of organizations, these structural issues have to be addressed...then they can see those issues more broadly. In terms of race, gender and also class, failure to address these issues equals organizational death – entities locked out will revolt against you. Or you become moribund, not serving anybody.*

## **Recommendations and Reflections from the Listening Sessions**

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The Listening Sessions presented a rare opportunity for young leaders to meet, share experiences and think more collectively about common issues of generational, organizational and personal change.

The participants themselves proposed many suggestions for future steps. There was a strong desire from some of those that came to the sessions to continue meeting, either within their own cohort and/or between different generations. In some cities, younger leaders already participated in some informal gatherings, some groups planned follow-up meetings. However, most of the participants felt that some modest staffing and/or financial resources were necessary to coordinate successful ongoing meeting and peer mentoring.

The following set of recommendations synthesizes the input of both participants and staff:

### **Create Opportunities to Build Relationships and Analysis Within and Across Generations**

There were several different suggestions of how to convene people – within and across generations – in order to help with the transition from the Baby Boom Generations to Generation X to Generation Y.

- **Structured local and regional meetings of younger leaders, funded and convened locally**  
There was a keen interest in younger leaders coming together in some ongoing (if not necessarily frequent) way to discuss issues such as leadership and what it means for the next generation, and management challenges in working for social change. There was also a desire to hear about reports, research, and good articles for thinking about the future of movement building.
- **National summit of younger leaders where they meet across different geographic boundaries**  
There also was discussion about moving beyond one's own community to find out what was happening in other areas of the country and to engage in peer learning. One GLLS participant called it a “summit” where younger leaders could focus on the future of social change in the US as well as discuss organizational issues such as organizational structure and decision-making, resource development, and the work/personal life balance. Several people raised the possibility of holding a national meeting of younger leaders of color to discuss the issues they face in a field that has been dominated by white and older leadership.
- **Conversation among Baby Boom leaders to discuss their future challenges**  
Younger leaders were keenly aware of the challenges facing older leaders ranging from lack of financial security to the vitality they still have after running organizations for two or more decades. As a new generation pushes

up, older leaders need places to talk about their challenges in moving over, moving on, or staying put.

- **Intergenerational discussions between Baby Boomers and Gen X/Y**  
At almost every GLLS meeting the possibility of holding intergenerational discussions were suggested by one or more participants. Some saw this within specific communities, especially in communities of color. Others had a vision of several different generations in a room. The many different suggestions spoke to the interest and need for these conversations.

### **Define the Needs and Costs of Support for Departing and Emerging Leaders**

There are many reasons that older leaders may stay in a position or that younger leaders may feel unprepared or unwilling to take on more leadership roles. We should investigate what the barriers for each group are and see if it is possible to address them.

- **Develop infrastructure that invests in human capital**  
In order for older leaders to be able to take their leave from the public sector – and for younger leaders to develop and grow into their roles – adequate retirement benefits, sabbaticals and retraining opportunities are required. We need information about the financial issues facing older leaders and how these can be addressed. In addition, there is also a need to find appropriate roles for leaders aged 50-75, that permit them to leave directorships, but still use their passion and experience in the service of the larger social change sector.
- **Support board training to nurture innovation and sustain organization**  
Boards play a critical role in the transition process, yet are rarely trained to encourage younger leadership or take on the tasks of guiding transitions. Succession planning has made important inroads in this area but often fails to include the specific issues in preparing for and shepherding generational change. Both boards and staffs need training to recalibrate the relationships, nurture each other and promote effective change.
- **Provide mentoring, training and other forms of support, such as executive coaching, for the next tier of leaders below the ED level**  
With the plethora of academic programs on nonprofit management, there has been little attention paid to the need for developing on-the-job methods for young leaders to gain the confidence, support and encouragement to take on larger leadership roles. This learning would involve younger and older leadership, and should be discussed and considered for young leaders in social change groups even before they take on director roles.
- **Foster mentoring structures to provide support for new leadership, pass on history and share lessons**  
Mentoring is often bandied about, yet seldom implemented in a serious and systematic way in nonprofit organizations. Mentoring, as we saw in the report has many components, including cross generational learning. It can take place over a short period or be life-long, and include one or many people. There is a need to develop a sectoral mentoring process and test its implementation.

## **Generate Tools and Information for the Next Generation of Leaders**

- **Gather and disseminate information on different decision-making structures and models in nonprofits including role of constituents, volunteers, staff and board**  
Share experiences to date of the sector in experimenting with non-hierarchical models, so that we can catalogue what has been learned rather than repeat mistakes.
- **Add to existing sites on succession and transition**  
Collect existing tools on generational change and executive transitions, emerging leaders programs, and relevant curriculum and keep them updated. Gather information on generational changes in leadership for others to understand the changes focusing on demographics, education, future of the nonprofit sector and global context.
- **Develop toolkit/curriculum for groups to use to understand generational differences within nonprofits including but not exclusively devoted to leadership change**  
There are no existing guides for how nonprofit groups can begin cross-generational discussions within or among organizations. Developing a guide to help with this process that could be distributed easily via the web would be an invaluable tool, especially if it is used before leadership change occurs.
- **Provide historical context for current state of social change nonprofits**  
Develop a short, clear history of the social change nonprofit sector, its growth and development, in both English and Spanish.

## **Pursue New Studies to Add Context and Fill in Gaps in Existing Research**

- **Compensation and Vocation in the Generational Transition Dynamic**  
Research on fair and reasonable compensation, as well as the real economic circumstances (income and assets) of older and younger nonprofit leaders/staff would help determine the financial needs to support organizations. Young leaders are inspired by social change, but want to be treated – and paid – as professionals in ways that allow them to pay their educational debts and live a reasonable lifestyle. The Baby Boom generation may have come from more comfortable economic circumstances (more affluent families, two-income households), felt less pressure (both economic and status) or are now faced with no financial cushion for retirement and old age – a situation not lost on younger leaders.
- **Race and Leadership in the History of Social Change Nonprofits**  
We know relatively little about race and leadership. Policy Link has begun to address this gap but it would be useful to have more research on the leadership barriers facing younger leaders of color, how they differ from an older generation and how they differ from their peers.

- **Growth for Social Change Nonprofits**  
Many organizations struggle making the move from small to larger. This transition is well-documented as a time when less hierarchical and collective structures tend to devolve and organizations expand from a cadre of people who know each other well to a larger structure that needs job descriptions and specialization. As social change groups experiment with alternative structures of decision-making, it would be useful to explore different models of growth from a new generation's perspective.

## A Last Word

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### A spontaneous summary from a GLLS participant:

*“There needs to be honest dialogue and reflection, to build those facilitative skills across all generations. There needs to be a de-romanticizing of the experiences of the civil rights movement – an education and honest conversation between those who went through it and the rest of us who did not. Bring those elders into the room and have an honest conversation with them. We need to be realistic about the expectations of what we can do. To be prepared for the long haul. It’s not about what we can do with two years or five years, or ten years. We need to get beyond this place being all about us, and us alone, so that we can look outside of ourselves, so we can cut ourselves some slack, so we don’t burn ourselves out. We need to build more partnerships, look around to action and take an active interest in what other people are doing. And not just pretend we’re the only ones doing this work. We need to look forward in unexpected places. We need to open our arms...to really build a movement that includes everyone. We have to start getting political by reaching out to politicians, figuring them out, learning how to plant seeds in their minds, to move them to supporting us and not expecting that they’re just going to come...and then establishing a commitment to civic education of younger generations, of the up and coming leaders.”*

## Appendix A: Methodology

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The Generational Leadership Listening Sessions cities were selected both to represent different regions of the US and to hold meetings where the co-conveners, especially Ludovic Blain, had contacts to form a host committee of young leaders (25-40), especially young leaders of color. Sessions were held in cities, mostly in urban areas including Albuquerque, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Honolulu, New York, Raleigh, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. The process for forming the host committee and inviting participants is explained below.

### Host Committee and Invitees

The idea of the host committee was to establish some credibility and reach into the community and to have some leadership in place in case groups decided to continue to meet. Host committees were formed by securing the participation of three to ten people in each site who agreed not only to come to the session but to be responsible for selecting a date, inviting participants, identifying a space, and helping to facilitate the meeting. Host committee members participated in a series of conferences calls with the co-conveners (Ludovic Blain and Frances Kunreuther) to discuss both logistics and the purpose of the meeting, and to gauge the interest in the site. In addition, host committee members recommended potential participants. To achieve a balance of race, gender, age, type of organization, and issue area, the host committee set priorities on who was invited. The meetings were capped at roughly twenty people.

In some cities the host committee was active and highly influential in inviting participants, in others there was less consistent follow-through and the co-conveners took a more active role. Even with what seemed to be an active host committee the responses to those invited varied. In one city the host committee claimed that they could bring in twenty people but far fewer attended. In another, the host committee not only brought people in, but scheduled and convened follow-up sessions.

### Attendees

A total of 122 people participated in the sessions. Fifty-seven percent were men and 44% women. Across the sessions, the majority (75%) who attended were people of color as shown in the table below:

▪ African-American	33%
▪ White	25%
▪ East Asian/South Asian	21%
▪ Latino/a	15%
▪ Arab	2%
▪ Mixed Race	4%
TOTAL	100% <sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Included in the African-American group were black Carribeans; included in the Asian group were Native Hawai'ians . There was also a participant from the Middle East and two who identified as bi-racial.

The sessions were scheduled for a half-day including lunch. They began with introductions and a comment on why each participant had come to the session. Then Ludovic Blain gave an introduction, went over the agenda, and talked about what we hoped to get out of the sessions. That was followed by a presentation by Frances Kunreuther on some of the findings from the original study including: how people came to the work, responses about the work/ personal life divide, the findings on decision-making and how people thought about their future. There was an open discussion about each of these issues and then participants divided into smaller groups (when the size was more than seven people) to discuss one of these issues. When reconvened, each group reported on their discussion. The wrap-up included suggestions on what to do next, both locally and nationally.

A person taking notes was present at all sessions and several (though not all) of the sessions were taped and transcribed.

## **Appendix B: Generational Leadership Study Summary**

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### **Generational Changes and Leadership Study**

The Generational Change study was designed to investigate and understand differences between older and younger people working in progressive social change organizations in the nonprofit sector with a special emphasis on building young leadership. The project is a qualitative study of thirty-seven directors and staff in sixteen nonprofits located in Boston and New York. The findings of the study seem to refute the notion of large generational differences. Older and younger people involved in these organizations have many of the same qualities: commitment, concern, energy, interest, and a strong belief in justice. However, there are differences between those who were born in the Baby Boom generation and those who identify more with Generation X. These differences and their impact on future leadership are noted below.

#### **Background**

- Older participants frequently referred to their involvement in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which provided them with an exposure to ideas and situations that unveiled the ‘causes’ of the problems facing society. They entered the nonprofit sector to work in an organization where they could “change the world” and never left.
- Most of the younger participants were drawn to social change nonprofits because of personal experiences and a desire to help those in their communities or in situations similar to their own.
- Younger directors were more likely than their older peers to report having worked in the for-profit sector, which they found especially useful in their current position. In addition, all but one of the younger directors had attended an elite college or university that no doubt added to their credibility as young leaders of social change organizations.
- Younger staff, especially those from the organizations’ constituent groups, often reported how young directors had identified and then recruited them into their current positions.

#### **Work/Personal Life Divide**

- Younger participants in the study were committed to their work and to their organizations, putting in long hours on the job. However, many of the younger respondents were struggling with how to balance the demands of their work and having a life outside the job. Several, particularly the young men, worried about how to continue their work and make time for a family.
- Directors were usually the executive director of the organization. In some cases they were one of the co-directors, and in collectives, it was either a founder or someone in the collective chosen to represent the group. Older participants were 45 years or older and younger participants were under 45

- Most of the older people interviewed seemed to have resolved the tensions between their work and their personal lives. It remains unclear whether they had less conflict because they were different than their younger peers or simply because they are in a different stage of the life cycle.
- Younger participants did not report talking with older directors or staff about the work/personal life challenges they faced, nor did older directors seem to be aware of this conflict.

### **Enjoyment**

- When asked what they enjoyed in their work, all respondents talked about the satisfaction they found in helping other people, whether it was providing a service, advocating for reform or providing venues for constituents to organize for their own political interests. For staff and directors who came from the communities being served, there was a special enjoyment in being able to help others like themselves.
- Young staff members talked about how they enjoyed working in their particular organization because of its values and the people they worked with. They especially talked about the collegiality or family-like feeling of the staff.
- Directors – both older and younger – mentioned the challenge of the position as a great source of enjoyment. They liked the creativity, problem solving and daily juggling (of time and resources) that the position required.
- In general, younger respondents were more effusive about their work, often talking about their ‘love’ of their jobs, and their desire never to have to leave.

### **Challenges**

- The interviews revealed differences between the generations in the challenges individuals felt their work and organizations presented them; however, those differences tended to be most closely tied to an individual’s role in the organization. For older directors, the challenges lay in administrative tasks and the demands of funding. Younger directors were more focused on the challenges they faced of how to grow and change their organizations while still meeting the needs of their constituents.
- Young staffers were particularly challenged by trying to meet the demands of constituents which often meant they spent long hours at the job. This challenge was exacerbated in situations where the young staff member did not feel their friends and family understood why they put so much time into their work.
- Participants at all ages and levels within organizations frequently mentioned their impatience with the slow pace of change. In addition some of the young participants were particularly struck by the inability of different groups to work together and expressed frustration that the larger goal of social change was subverted by individual “ego” needs.

### **Decision-Making**

- Overall, there was an unspoken assumption that involving staff members in decision-making was an important value in social change work. However, despite the directors' determination to include staff (and in some cases constituents), staff were often confused about the process, especially in organizations with older directors. Young staff members would talk about having "input" into decision-making, but often seemed unclear about their real power and authority.
- The study revealed two major styles of decision-making. The first, used by older and younger directors, ranged from input to collective decision-making (with high levels of discussion), which required a lot of time and energy of all staff. The second, more likely to be used by young directors, operated on a flattened hierarchical model (that gave staff autonomy and freedom to accomplish certain tasks), which required less time and process with all staff.
- Younger directors were more likely to talk about and try different approaches for making decisions. One organization had both a leadership circle and weekly staff meetings, another had several team meetings led by the director, and a third discussed a team approach that would make decisions by consensus and bring any conflicts to the executive director. All of these processes were designed to maximize staff involvement.

### **Leadership**

- Vision, communication skills, collaborative style and concern about staff were noted across all age groups and positions as qualities of good leadership in social change organizations.
- Older directors discussed leadership in two ways. Founders were more likely to focus on the values and skills that would be needed for their successor. Older directors who were not founders tended to describe leadership as a way to reflect on the qualities they have been able to bring to their work.
- Younger directors were more focused on building new leadership, both in their organization and as an important quality of a leader. They also talked about how good leaders need to listen to and get help from others.
- For younger staff members, vision and communication were key components to leadership. Their descriptions of the qualities needed for good leaders were thoughtful and extensive, yet they did not seem focused on how they would attain these skills.

### **Training for Leaders**

- The respondents in this study seemed to believe that any formal training on how to run an organization was unnecessary and perhaps even harmful. For the most part they were skeptical of graduate programs in administration or nonprofit management and felt what skills were needed could be learned from experience on the job.

- Several of the directors we talked with noted that they had gone back to get an advanced degree for “the credential”. People of color and young people were more likely to talk about this need.
- The importance of life as well as work experience was noted by several of the younger staff members that were part of the constituencies that the organizations served. Young staff members were also more likely to talk about the need to learn more theory about the root causes behind the problems that their work was intended to address.

### **Race and Gender**

- Race and gender, but especially race, are still subjects that are hard to address, though older white male directors seem to be more on the defensive than their younger counterparts.
- Many of the people of color we interviewed – both staff and directors – talked about the race dynamics among the different groups that make up the people of color category. For leaders of color, this often meant fighting stereotypes, especially that they were only interested in serving their own race/ethnicity. Older leaders of color were also more likely to talk about how the problems of race in the social change community worsened in the last twenty years.
- Older and younger white directors and staff answered the questions about the impact of race and gender on leadership in terms of their own organizations’ efforts to hire and maintain a racially diverse staff. Race was often talked about separate from its relationship to power.
- In general, there was less overt tension around the subject of gender. When asked directly, most directors, men and women, thought that gender was not an issue in their organization, citing as evidence the number of women working in the organization, especially those in leadership positions. However, the staff did not always corroborate this response.

### **Future**

- Most of the older directors had no intention of leaving their jobs. They often had built their life around their work, and the idea that they would do something else made little sense to them. They seemed at a loss imagining what they would do if they were no longer to run their current organizations.
- Younger directors’ ideas about the future were similar to their older peers. Although several were conflicted by a sense that they should move on for the sake of the organization, leaving their position was something that they were clearly in no hurry to do. Like their older counterparts, younger directors talked about the importance of staying with the organization as a place to express their creativity and passion.
- Although they were clearly dedicated to their jobs and to social change, staff members of all ages found it far easier than directors to envision future work outside of their current organization. Their responses ranged from older staff

members thinking of retirement, to young people talking about returning to school.

- Staff members who were in their mid-thirties to mid-forties experienced the most conflict. They were in supervisory or administrative jobs, but it was clear that they were not going to have the opportunity to head their current organization, so they struggled with what that meant for their future.