

WORKING ACROSS GENERATIONS

DEFINING
the FUTURE
of NONPROFIT
LEADERSHIP

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Leadership Top 5

Current nonprofit leaders often ask us what they can do now to work with Gen X and Y leaders.

Here are our top 5 suggestions:

- 1. Build clear steps for advancement in your organization.** Newer generations recognize that they need to create pathways within the sector for moving up in their organizations or to positions of leadership elsewhere. Make skills-building trainings available to staff as they both prepare for and begin new positions within an organization. For smaller organizations without room for growth, consider ways that younger staff can be a part of decision-making or use their skills in other organizations in the sector.
- 2. Remember it's more than technology.** We often hear Boomer leaders talk about the benefit of younger staff members' technological savvy. Then we hear from newer leaders that they are valued for skills but not their ideas. Remember that Generations X and millennials may (or may not) have great skills for developing web sites to social networking, but they also want to contribute their ideas.
- 3. Provide mentoring opportunities.** Mentors and networks provide Generation Xers and millennials with information about jobs, the connections they need to get their foot in the door, and the legitimacy they need with others. Offer connections to trusted colleagues in the field who can provide staff with a sense of perspective and history, advice, contacts and influence. And mentoring is rarely one way; older leaders gain insight and information by listening to their younger colleagues.
- 4. Create room for more voices.** Newer generations looking for more voice in organizations has led to a revival of interest in more inclusive decision-making models. Examine how decisions are currently made and consider ways to institute places where decision-making can be open to more voices. Consider reducing the amount of time spent discussing decisions and instead distribute leadership throughout the organization, giving staff members more authority and responsibility for running their own programs.
- 5. Lead together.** Younger leaders are often more interested in sharing leadership, building more on the experiences of some of the movement organizations of the 1960s and 1970s than on current business operations. Whereas boomer leadership-sharing often resulted in power struggles, Generation Xers and Millennials are frequently recognized for their comfort with working in teams. Boards should consider phasing in co-directors, leadership teams, or other variations of sharing the top responsibility in your organization.