

The Next Generation Leadership Forum
By Darian Rodriguez Heyman, Craigslist Foundation

The U.S. Census Bureau tells us that the first of 78 million Baby Boomers have begun to retire, with only 38 million Gen X'ers to replace them. The IRS adds to any concerns this may have raised when they tell us that there are now over 1.5 million registered 501(c)3's, more than twice the number in existence just 10 or 20 years ago.

So the question many of us are asking is: "Is there a leadership vacuum facing our sector?" And perhaps more importantly, "What can and should be done?"

It was with this question in mind that Craigslist Foundation recently launched the **Next Generation Leadership Forum**, which convened at the GEO national conference in San Francisco. As the group grew and spilled over into two breakout sessions, it became apparent that those present were in agreement with the funders and nonprofit leaders we had already brought together through the forum.

The collective conclusion we reached was that there is no real way to *know* if a vacuum is going to hit the sector. Research has proven both scenarios possible, so debating the point is moot.

But never mind that. The path to ensure a vibrant, sustainable, and diverse social sector remains the same regardless:

- Increase the flow of new leaders into the sector;
- Retain and support our talent;
- Engage the Baby Boomers as mentors and through pro bono service; and
- Promote alternatives to starting a nonprofit and encourage collaboration.

It is with these ideas in mind that we went into the GEO conference. We were honored to have several members of the [Nonprofit Sector Workforce Coalition](#) join us.

The group agreed that two initiatives held the most promise, both of which are being pursued by the 40+ organizations participating in the Forum moving forward:

- 1. Analysis of the Evolution of Expectations.** What does it mean to be a nonprofit leader, and to be a nonprofit organization? How do the expectations associated with both differ from 10 or 20 years ago, and what are the implications on nonprofit sector leadership? One way to answer these questions, we feel, is to aggregate the research and case studies that are out there on the subject of next generation leadership, which has never been attempted before. Our intention is to analyze this research and seek out commonalities. How can we translate this research into information, into knowledge, and how do we disseminate that knowledge? What gaps exist in the research, and how do we best address those?

Part of our approach will include identifying digestible trends for a variety of audiences, including Boomers, Gen X'ers, agencies facing succession planning and thinking through leadership development etc. Another component will be to develop a series of exercises for the distribution of best practices and thought leadership. As new resources are added to the toolkit of articles, podcasts, reports, and more, an iterative process will continue, with more audiences being identified and new conclusions drawn. The team driving this effort continues to meet and is currently working on a project summary and work plan, and expects to make substantial progress by year-end.

2. Building the On-Ramp. Once we get people into the sector, how do we support, engage, and retain them? What are the key levers that can address the tremendous turnover highlighted in *Daring to Lead*, the 2006 report produced by CompassPoint Nonprofit Services and The Meyer Foundation? This dialog is really just beginning to take root, but conversations at the GEO conference and subsequent Forum calls have focused on identifying areas where we can work together to add unique value to the sector, bolstering pre-existing efforts, and launching initiatives only where needed. Some of the areas we are looking at moving forward include:

- Removing structural barriers to leadership transfer, including the need for healthcare coverage and the inability of sector veterans to retire;
- Succession planning and building bench strength;
- Mentoring, executive coaching, and career counseling, including the need for an online matching and support platform;
- Diversity and cultural competency, and;
- Aggregating a toolkit similar to the one discussed above, but containing a comprehensive set of professional development resources and programs;

Moving forward, Craigslist Foundation is committed to continuing to nurture this dialog and facilitate this work. Organizations interested in contributing to future conversations, receiving updates as these conversations progress, and/or supporting this work may [contact us](#).

ABOUT CRAIGSLIST FOUNDATION

Founded in 2000 by Craig Newmark and others, Craigslist Foundation applies the spirit and values of craigslist to the nonprofit world; craigslist is about “people helping people,” while Craigslist Foundation is about “helping people help.” Craigslist Foundation is a publicly supported, non-endowed 501(c)3 operating foundation. The organization focuses on producing educational programs and online resources that benefit as many nonprofits, causes, and people as possible.