

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND BEYOND:

Building the Power of Young Women, Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Leaders of Color

In October 2009, a one-of-a-kind leadership symposium took place in New York City. The two-day event, called **Leadership Development and Beyond**, which focused on building the power of young women of color and young transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) leaders of color, brought together seventy-five members of the philanthropic community and leaders from non-profits engaged in social justice work across the U.S. to explore the barriers to power facing young women and TGNC leaders of color, and to identify a set of strategic interventions to help transform and diversify non-profit leadership.

Funded by the Ms. Foundation for Women's Sophia Fund, the gathering was the result of an intense collaboration between four of the leading women's foundations in the social justice community – the Ms. Foundation for Women, the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, the New York Women's Foundation and the Third Wave Foundation – and one storied research partner – the Women of Color Policy Network at New York University. Participants were donors and funders, consultants and organizers - and many had occupied each of these roles at some point in their professional careers.

Over the course of the symposium, participants learned from panelists and enriched the discussion, contributing their own unique – and often unheard – perspectives to the conversation about how to most effectively advance the leadership of young women, transgender and gender non-conforming people of color (TGNC POC) in movements for social justice. What emerged was a set of seven strategic interventions that donors and funders, consultants and organizers alike can use to help support young women of color and TGNC POC leaders as they strive to transform their communities – and the non-profit sector as a whole.



STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS

1) INVEST IN INNOVATION

For the first time in history, four different generations are actively sharing leadership in the American workforce. With twenty years of Boomer leadership ahead, organizations are encouraged to take smart risks *now* to ensure diverse, effective and sustainable leadership in the future. This is the time to experiment wisely with new leadership models and innovate within current leadership structures, the time to make mistakes and acknowledge the role they play in building long-term success. Space must be created within and among organizations for reflecting upon lessons learned and the sharing of innovative models. Funders and other invested parties can help by supporting opportunities for organizations to envision and enact new possibilities – moving beyond both perceived and real structural barriers.

2) FOSTER INTERGENERATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

Given the previously highlighted demographics of the field, symposium participants viewed the development of intergenerational partnerships as nothing short of mission critical. Rather than simply “passing the torch” and walking away, more established leaders must be willing to share the knowledge, information, resources and relationships they've accrued to help set young leaders up for success – preferably in the context of meaningful partnerships where



the mentoring is reciprocal in nature (that is, the learning goes both ways). Funders can help cultivate these important relationships by supporting strategic intergenerational collaborations that allow for resource and knowledge sharing between tomorrow's leaders and those who are leading organizations today.

3) BURST THE PIPELINE

As one symposium participant put it, "In social justice, people don't enter a pipeline and pop out [as leaders] at the other end." Rather, individuals are leading all along the way -- whether their leadership is recognized or not. To that end, it's time to start embracing a different model of leadership, one that offers a more inclusive and sustainable definition of who and what makes a leader. Organizations must work with intention to support the development of leaders of all ages as their skills, needs and interests change; funders are encouraged to direct resources toward leadership tools that can help organizations prepare *proactively* for leadership transitions, by cultivating secondary and tertiary leadership well in advance of the day change comes to the executive suite.

4) EMBRACE AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

Intersectionality holds that the classical models of oppression within society (such as those based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, class, or disability) do not act independently of one another; instead, these forms of oppression interrelate, creating a system of pervasive social inequality.¹ Symposium participants agreed that funders and non-profit organizations must commit to applying an intersectional analysis to their various practices -- and endeavor to build strategic, and sometimes unlikely, alliances that help to address the multiple forms of oppression faced by young women of color and TGNC POC leaders. Additionally, participants stressed the need for increased funding to support the collection and presentation of data that document the realities of life lived at the "intersection" of race, class and gender (among other categories), and the impact of their interrelation on diverse leaders.

5) EMPLOY A GENDER JUSTICE FRAMEWORK; ELEVATE THE LEADERSHIP OF TGNC POC LEADERS

Despite significant obstacles to success, transgender and gender non-conforming leaders of color are creating innovative spaces and models for leadership that have the potential to re-shape the non-profit community for the better. It is clear, however, that more intentional integration of and partnership with a broad swath of TGNC POC leaders -- and more consistent application of a gender justice framework (i.e., an understanding of the impacts of patriarchy on all genders, particularly women and those who transcend gender norms) -- is needed to end the sector's tendency towards tokenization and erasure. The expertise of TGNC POC leaders should be recognized and elevated in our movements; funders and other allies must identify the mutual benefits of increased understanding of the challenges faced by the TGNC POC community and, in turn, drive more funding to donor/ally education in this arena -- as well as direct resources to organizations that emphasize TGNC POC leadership and issues.

6) SUSTAIN LEADERSHIP THROUGH OPPORTUNITIES FOR SELF-AWARENESS & SELF-CARE

Building effective, long-term leadership for the future will require an investment in more than "professional" tools alone; developing truly sustainable leadership requires a holistic understanding of leaders as human beings and an investment in leadership tools that seek to cultivate well and reflective leaders. Because young women of color and TGNC POC leaders tend to live on the front lines of multiple forms of oppression, opportunities to engage in wellness practices become particularly critical to overcoming barriers to successful leadership. Funder allies can help by directing resources toward tools that encourage the development of leaders as people -- not just as executives.

7) VALUE THE EXPERTISE, AMPLIFY THE WORK

Though as a group, young women of color and TGNC POC leaders may be years away from helming the majority of social justice organizations, many of these "future leaders" are already expert at what they do -- and deserve to be recognized as such. Funders and other allies should lift up the work of these leaders and their organizations by consistently citing their expertise as a credentialed source in funders' own work. For their part, young women of color and TGNC POC leaders must use the years ahead to diligently disseminate the knowledge they've accrued by documenting and publishing their work. Increased funding must be directed towards these leaders and their organizations as they strive to formalize and share their findings; without their unique perspectives, achieving the kind of broad paradigm shift the field so sorely needs will be nearly impossible.

For further information, or to learn more about the partnering organizations, please visit:

Ms. Foundation for Women: ms.foundation.org

Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice: astraeafoundation.org

New York Women's Foundation: nywf.org

Third Wave Foundation: thirdwavefoundation.org

Women of Color Policy Network, NYU Wagner: Wagner.nyu.edu/wocpn

¹ Wikipedia contributors. "Intersectionality." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 3 Apr. 2010. Web. 7 Apr. 2010.