

# Involving Youth in the Arts Project

## Phase II – Focus Groups on Next Generation Leadership

Commissioned by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation  
Prepared by Barry Hessenius



*Next Generation Arts Leaders at the San Francisco Bay Area Emerging Arts Professionals  
“Evolve and Vocalize” event. April 11, 2009, SOMARTS, San Francisco. Photo by Kari Orvik.*

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## INTRODUCTION

April 2009

Two years ago we commissioned and presented a report on “Involving Youth in Non Profit Arts Organization” that illustrated how the recruitment and retention of the next generation’s “best and brightest” was critical to the future of all nonprofit arts organizations. Although the political and economic landscape has changed dramatically since then, the thesis that the future vitality of arts organizations requires the engagement of exceptionally talented and motivated young people is no less true today.

In this follow-up report, “Involving Youth in the Arts Project Phase II – Focus Groups on Next Generation Leadership,” we convened 50 emerging, mid-career and established administrators from a wide range of arts organizations to put forward their ideas about how that engagement can work better.

Some of the key findings are ones we may have long known but have rarely called out:

- There are entrepreneurial souls working for organizations with good ideas that never get heard, much less acted on.
- There are passionate young people with the desire and skills to take on crucial assignments that never get asked.
- There are too many potential leaders who get handed responsibility for achieving results but not the training to do a good job, nor the trust to make important decisions.

Some other findings are more nuanced and compel us to think more deeply about our professional practice no matter the size, type or mission of our particular organization or our role within it.

*While a life in and around the arts may always attract great talent, the lack of professional development opportunities, of a support network, of constructive reviews on job performance, of guidance on how to map out a career path and, all too often, miscommunication between colleagues of different generations (on top of the chronic undercompensation that permeates the nonprofit sector) makes retaining such talent extremely difficult.*

What we learned in conducting the research that informs this report is that deriving intelligent responses to these findings requires the active involvement of those who have been in the field the longest as well as those who have just arrived (and everyone in between). Some of this report’s recommendations about how to inspire staff at all levels to be more invested in the organization’s success are simple and inexpensive. Others will require deeper investments of money, of time, and of trust.

Whether you are leading an organization or have just been hired to your first job in the sector we hope that this report will encourage you to adopt recommendations and engage your peers, staff and friends in the field to adapt them to your circumstances and innovate as you go. The innovation, as we learned from focus group participants, is already happening and to share your experiences and ideas on the topic please join in on the discussions already in progress online here:

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=42171556599>

We look forward to hearing more in real time and online about your efforts on this important issue.

Moy Eng  
Program Director, Performing Arts  
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

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### **BACKGROUND:**

Every organization in every sector has to attract new people to its ranks if it wants to survive. Over time, one generation transitions out to make room for the next generation. Increasingly, we have as many as four different generations working side by side in our organizations, and the intersections of those generations is changing the dynamics of what we do and how we do it. This report is on Phase II of the INVOLVING YOUTH IN NONPROFIT ARTS ORGANIZATIONS initiative of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation – designed to attempt to better understand those dynamics.

Phase I of the Project:: 1) mapped existing efforts to involve youth in California Arts organizations in five areas: (i) as paid administrators, (ii) volunteers, (iii) financial supporters, (iv) advocates and (v) audiences; 2) identified existing successful programs that could serve as potential replicable models, 3) compared and contrasted the efforts of the nonprofit arts and environmental fields to involve young people; 4) made easy and virtually cost-free recommendations to arts organizations that would move them to greater youth involvement, and 5) via wide dissemination of the Report, coupled with a tour of Town Hall meetings in California to present the findings, sought to raise sector wide awareness of, and appreciation for, generational challenges.

### **CURRENT PROJECT PHASE II OBJECTIVES:**

The current Phase II of the Project was centered on exploring what members of different generations (Millennials, Generation Xers and Baby Boomers, in that order) thought about arts administration as a career path, and to identify the obstacles, barriers, challenges, and the assets and opportunities in recruiting, retaining and managing different generations within our workforce.

The three principal generational cohorts are defined as follows:

- Millennials – born between 1980 and 2000
- Generation Xers – born between 1965 and 1980
- Boomers – born between 1944 and 1965

We sought specific recommendations as to how both individual organizations, funders, and the field as a whole, might address the generational challenges and better exploit our assets to become more sensitive to generational issues. We stipulated that we wanted practical recommendations that took into consideration: i) budgets and financial constraints, particularly in the current economic climate; ii) staff / senior management time limitations; and iii) complexity of implementation.

Our purpose in this Phase remains to educate and inform the sector as to the scope and depth of the impact of generational differences within our work places, so that increased awareness of the realities can empower management within the sector to address the challenges, and exploit the opportunities, as the same relates to recruiting, retaining and managing different generations.

#### **FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY:**

The core of this project phase was the formation of eight focus groups, six of which were composed exclusively of Millennials and Gen Xers, and two of which were composed exclusively of Boomers. Group participants were chosen from a pool of applicants comprising a representative cross section sampling of San Francisco Bay Area arts organizations and arts administrators. Each focus group met for a total of six hours over a three month period in facilitated discussions examining the generational differences in attitudes, preferences and behaviors within the nonprofit arts sector. Separate group meetings examined: i) obstacles and barriers, ii) assets and opportunities, and iii) specific recommendations to the field.

## CONCLUSIONS:

### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

**Recruitment:** The projected fierce competition (based on upcoming baby boomer retirement) for a shrinking pool of new managerial talent is now not likely to be a factor for three reasons: 1) the current global economic crisis has already resulted in downsizing and a reduced demand for new employees across the entire economy. What was a clear seller's market a decade ago is now gone; 2) because of the stock market downturn, and because numerous boomers failed to adequately plan for retirement, a percentage of baby boomers aren't likely to retire on schedule, and of those who do, many will continue to work part time, further expanding the pool of available employees. It is also likely that many boomers from the private sector will transition to the nonprofit sector; and 3) the arts will continue to be an attractive alternative for many entry level workers who want to be involved in creative enterprises. Thus, recruitment is not likely to be a major challenge for arts & culture organizations in the near term. Recruiting the best and the brightest will, of course, continue to challenge every sector.

**Retention:** The real challenge for both public and private, nonprofit and 'for profit' organizations will be to effectively manage different generations working side by side in the same workplace, and doing so in a way which optimizes retention of employees already trained and experienced.

### CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE FOCUS GROUPS:

1. There are profound and sharp differences in generational attitudes towards a wide range of issues of work within the nonprofit arts sector, based on differing experiences, customs, perspectives, priorities and thinking. How these differences are managed dramatically impacts job satisfaction, performance, loyalty and longer term career commitment of the younger cohorts.

2. From the perspective of the younger cohorts, senior level management is largely unaware of, unsympathetic to, and unimpressed with the reality of generational differences, the challenges those differences pose, and the impact of those differences on their organizations. The younger cohort sees a pronounced lack of senior management sensitivity to generational issues within their organizations and this lack is a major cause of younger cohort dissatisfaction, turnover and exodus from the field.
3. Based on both the Focus Group Participant Survey of the younger and older cohorts, and the Focus Group discussions, senior management labors under some erroneous assumptions and perceptions as to what their junior staff's attitudes and beliefs are in a number of important areas. The younger generations in the arts workforce do not necessarily think or believe as the older generation presumes they do. This lack of understanding on the part of senior management may make it more difficult to effectively manage the different generations in the workforce. The act of erroneous presumption may be two way generational street. Cross generational dialogue would help to dispel myths and fallacious assumptions.
4. The nonprofit arts sector has yet to institutionalize the belief that systemic turnover in junior employee ranks is a serious threat to organizational stability, or fully appreciate that it is more cost effective to find ways to keep employees than to constantly fill vacancies with inexperienced and untrained new people.
5. Managing different generations in the workplace is not prohibitively difficult and effective generational management increases employee retention, productivity, and job satisfaction.
6. There are specific problems for younger cohort employees in our sector that need to be addressed, including:

- The lack of a *living* (not necessarily competitive), but *living* wage for entry level arts administrators.
  - Too few opportunities exist within organizations for vertical advancement & promotion.
  - There is a dearth of professional development / skills improvement opportunities for junior level employees, and an insatiable demand for such offerings.
  - The exclusion of younger staff from intra-organizational communications loops, and the lack of delegated decision making authority to younger cohorts.
  - Younger employee's perceived lack of trust and respect by older generations.
  - The fundamental lack (on the part of senior management) of a basic understanding of younger generational thinking in terms of work / life balance and what is and isn't an acceptable work load.
  - The endemic, pervasive failure to appreciate younger cohort attitudes towards the absolute necessity of maintaining current technology.
  - The need for more networking, bonding and "fun" as part of the work experience.
7. It is the nature of the work, the exhilaration of working on creative projects, and the chance to positively impact the community that are the major attractions to working in the field. Other positive aspects of working in the nonprofit arts sector include:
- Flexible scheduling and a relaxed work environment
  - Tolerance of risk-taking.
  - Multi-task juggling and the acquisition of a balance of skills.
  - The opportunity to develop creative links, networks and skills levels, and to incubate personal creative projects.
  - Perks such as free tickets to cultural events.

- The collaborative environment and bonding with quality professionals.

Both the existing literature on generational differences and the results of our Focus Groups suggest that the critical elements that younger generations seem to want from their jobs (in addition to more money and benefits) are:

- MEANING – belief in the Mission of the work and in both the real and potential impact of that work.
- INCLUSION – kept in the information loop, delegated real authority, respected for skills level and potential to make real contributions.
- LIFE / WORK BALANCE – appreciation of generational differences in prioritizing work vs. life, and reasonable work loads.
- APPRECIATION – being made to feel valued; rewarded based on merit.
- LEARNING – expanded opportunities for professional development at all career points.
- CAREER PATH OPTIONS – interest in developing career paths for employees, and for opportunities for regular advancement and promotion.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **GENERAL:**

The keys to effectively managing the “generational divides” that manifest themselves in the workplace include:

- Learning about generational differences, potential collisions and challenges - then actively promoting sensitivity to the issues across the organization.
- Trusting and respecting employee hires. Delegating more real authority.
- Coaching and communicating, not criticizing and excluding.
- Providing as many training / professional development options as is possible.

- Running a meritocracy based advancement system. Providing some alternative to promotion if open spaces are not available (even if only a change in job title.)
- Allowing for a life / work balance; making the workplace experience enjoyable.

**SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:** (see full discussion in the body of the main report)

**FOR INDIVIDUAL ORGANIZATIONS:**

1. CREATE SENSITIVITY TO THE CHALLENGE: Put the issue of generational differences / potential clash points on the organization's agenda. Dispel erroneous assumptions and beliefs. Assess what is working and what is not, by involving both Boards and staffs (and to a lesser extent volunteers, supporters and clients) in an open dialogue between *all* generations within the organization. Identify specific problems and solutions to those problems. Follow-up.
2. IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS: Commit to keeping everyone on staff in the loop so that everyone gains a better understanding of all aspects of the organization and their role in it. Make sure to employ generationally sensitive means of communications to maximize efficiency and employee retention.
3. PROVIDE LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT – to everyone in the organization including senior management and Board members. Include skills training as an annual budget item. Identify sources of cost free training. Explore internal and external mentorship possibilities. Support junior management attendance at conferences and events which can be learning / training experiences for them.

4. DELEGATE REAL DECISION MAKING AUTHORITY to as great an extent as possible. Hire good people and provide them with good training, then trust them to do a good job. If they fail, replace them, but don't squander their potential contributions to the organization by marginalizing their skills set levels, their ideas or their experiences. Demonstrate valuation of employee hires by showing trust and respect. Thank staff for work well done.
5. MODIFY THE ORGANIZATION'S CULTURE to welcome and accommodate all generations. Fight against doing the same things in the same way they have always been done. Allow the organization to take risks in changing and adapting management styles. Respect each generation's experiences, language, and etiquette.
6. INCREASE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR JUNIOR LEVEL EMPLOYEES TO NETWORK with senior supervisory staff and their own peers, both within the organization and within the larger field.
7. ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF ADVANCEMENT, PROMOTION AND CAREER PATH DECISIONS. Provide as much counseling and / or career resources as possible. If vertical advancement opportunities are limited, consider increased authority level, new titles, or other reward / acknowledgement systems. Tolerate, even encourage, lateral movement within the sector as an alternative.
8. HELP IDENTIFY PREFERRED PERKS, then provide them.
9. PROVIDE FREQUENT PERFORMANCE REVIEWS AND FEEDBACK. Make the process a two way street between senior and junior level employees.
10. FACILITATE AND NURTURE EMPLOYEE CREATIVE INTERESTS AND ENTERPRISES wherever possible. Share the positive experience of working

with artists and the creative process with all employees to the extent possible.

11. CONSCIOUSLY WORK AT INTEGRATING “FUN” INTO THE WORKPLACE.
12. BRING STAFF AND BOARD CLOSER TOGETHER. Familiarize the Board of Directors with job descriptions for all management / administrative employees and create access paths by and between board members and staff, including mentoring opportunities.
13. INCLUDE A LINE ITEM IN THE ANNUAL BUDGET FOR UPDATING THE ORGANIZATION’S TECHNOLOGY (hardware and software and training in new applications use).

**FOR FUNDERS:**

1. SUPPORT AND FUND UNDERSTANDING OF, AND SENSITIVITY TO, GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES WITHIN ARTS ORGANIZATIONS through dissemination of educational materials, coupled with personalized training (conferences, workshops, seminars, webinars, podcasts, coaching or other means).
2. CONSIDER MAKING IT A MANDATORY PART OF THE GRANT APPLICATION TO SET FORTH THE APPLICANT ORGANIZATION’S PLAN FOR ADDRESSING GENERATIONAL ISSUES.
3. SUPPORT INCREASED ON-GOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES for *all* arts administrators, including entry level, junior level mid-level, *and* senior managers
4. SUPPORT INCUBATION OF JUNIOR LEVEL ARTS ADMINISTRATOR CREATIVE IMPULSES AND ENTERPRISES.

5. PROVIDE TRAINING AND RESOURCE MATERIALS TO SENIOR LEADERSHIP IN SPECIFIC IDENTIFIED AREAS OF NEED, including:
  - a. How to create an effective system for two-way performance review and feedback.
  - b. Delegation of authority; avoidance of micromanagement.
  - c. Communications
  
6. PROVIDE INCREASED OPPORTUNITIES FOR NETWORKING within and between generations – including crossover for both creative and administrative employees.
  
7. SUPPORT GRANTEE EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN CURRENT TECHNOLOGY CAPACITY (hardware and software).
  
8. CONSIDER MANDATING APPOINTMENT OF YOUNGER COHORT MEMBERS TO BOARDS OF DIRECTORS AS A CONDITION TO RECEIVING FUNDING.
  
9. SUPPORT EFFORTS TO PIGGY-BACK (AND EXPAND) EXISTING K-12 ARTS PROGRAMS TO EDUCATE / INFORM STUDENTS OF THE EXISTENCE OF ARTS ADMINISTRATION AS A CAREER PATH OPTION. Consider support for project based internship programs, arts administration career path websites and expanded job fair / college campus presence as ways to support sector wide recruitment efforts.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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### **O**VERVIEW:

Phase I of the Youth Involvement in the Arts Project mapped existing efforts to involve youth in various aspects of nonprofit arts organizations, identified potential replicable programs and approaches, and encouraged the sector to intensify its efforts to craft strategies to involve more young people.

This Phase of the Project sought to identify and explore the attitudes, thoughts, ideas and impressions of the members of three distinct generational cohorts as to arts administration as a career path choice:

- a. The primary focus was on the first half of the entry level employees in what is termed the **Millennials** – those born between 1983 and 2000, and
- b. The mid level career employees in the second half of **Generation X**, those born between 1963 and 1982.
- c. The secondary focus was on the senior level management of the **Baby Boomers**, born between 1944 and 1962.

We convened eight focus groups. Six of the groups were composed of Millennials and Generation Xers, and two groups were composed of Baby Boomers. Each group met for a total of six hours over a three month period. (see methodology section following).

### **O**BJECTIVES:

Originally the project sought to identify what each cohort thought were the:

- a. Obstacles and barriers to pursuing a career in arts administration.

- b. Attractions, benefits and reasons to enter and remain working in the sector.

Our assumption was that those factors would constitute the core of the challenge of generational succession. We sought to understand the differences between the generations and how those differences impacted younger employee job satisfaction. Our objective was to arrive at specific action steps individual arts organizations might employ as part of a comprehensive strategy to: 1) recruit the best talent to fill coming vacancies in staff ranks, and 2) to retain those individuals over time. We also sought to identify what specific action steps funders might employ as part of their strategy to equip and empower their grantees to effectively compete for, and retain, new talent.

“We’re different than the previous generations. We’ve had different experiences, different frames of reference, and that has led us to different assumptions; different ways of seeing the same things, different ways of doing things, different expectations, even different goals & objectives. And yet we really aren’t so different after all. Give us a chance. That’s all we’re asking for.”

After the initial round of focus group meetings, and based on the conclusions drawn from those initial discussions, the project was revised / expanded to include as an objective of the study, the identification of elements and factors involved in the *management* of the generations within the workforce – including an exploration and

analysis of what constituted potential clashes between the generations, the reasons for such collisions, the impact and effects of those intersections, and, finally, what could be done to: a) minimize the negative impact of generational collisions, b) improve working conditions for all generations within the workforce, and c) better exploit the potential positive aspects of generational differences to the advantage of our arts organizations.

Our final goal was to arrive at a consensus of specific recommendations that arts organizations, and funders, might employ to address the identified challenges of recruiting, retaining, and managing different generational employees in our organizational workforces. We sought recommendations that were do-able in terms

of financial cost, time commitment (launch, oversight, and maintenance of any such initiative) and degree of difficulty in execution for the average arts organization.

Those recommendations (both for individual arts organizations and for the funding community) are contained in this report.

## **METHODOLOGY:**

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### **F**OCUS GROUP COMPOSITION:

We wanted the Focus Groups to represent the diversity of both the arts organizational matrix in Northern California, and the management staffs of those organizations. We wanted a representative sampling within the focus groups of employees from arts & culture organizations based on their: discipline, multicultural diversity, budget size, staff size, and geographic location (over the nine Bay Area Counties). We wanted a representative sampling of the employee base within that cross section of organizations including: entry, mid-level and senior management, and across age, ethnicity, gender, and years of employment within the field and background. We also wanted to include a sampling of employees who were themselves practicing artists.

To achieve our representative sample, we compiled a master list of 1,250 Bay Area arts organizations based on foundation and funder grantee lists, the Master List from Phase I of the Youth Involvement in the Arts Project, and local arts agency client and constituency lists. We then sent out an email request to all organizations on the Master List inviting members of their staffs within all generations to volunteer to participate in the Focus Group phase of the project. To maximize the response, project participants were offered \$225 for their time commitment and the organizations were encouraged to allow the employees to take time off to attend the Focus Group meetings. Volunteers were required to commit to attend three separate Focus Group meetings over a three month period as a pre-condition for participation in the project.

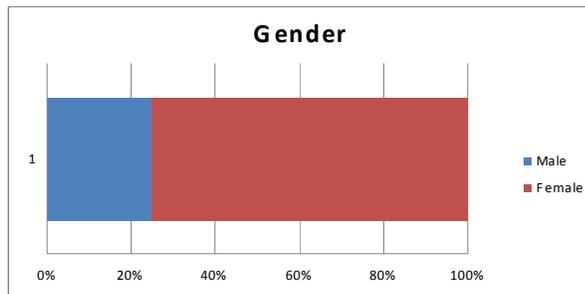
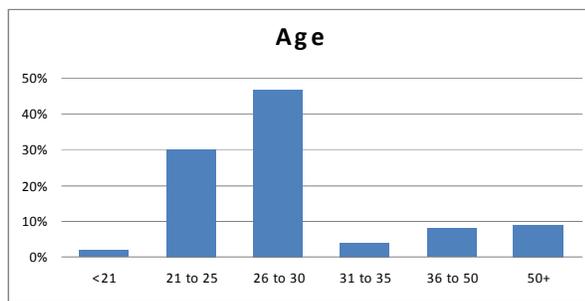
Both the organization and the individual employee(s) volunteering to participate in the Focus Groups were required to complete a brief background survey to insure that

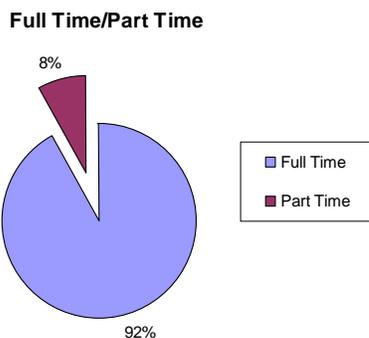
we had adequate current data to insure that the final selections did constitute a representative cross section according to our criteria.

Two hundred seventy five full and part time employees volunteered to participate. That pool was broken down according to our criteria for a balanced representation of employees. Sixty applicants were chosen and invited to join one of eight focus groups.

Six of the Focus Groups were composed of a balance of Millennial and Generation X employees, and two were composed of Baby Boomer senior management. While we debated the integration of all three generations into each group, we concluded that in addition to anonymity, younger generation employees would be more forthcoming and comfortable in discussing what they did and did not like about working within the field, if the groups were composed principally of their generational peers. (NOTE: At the end of the process, there was substantial support for continuing the Focus Group dialogues with full generational integration. Unfortunately, that was beyond the time frame and financial scope of the project).

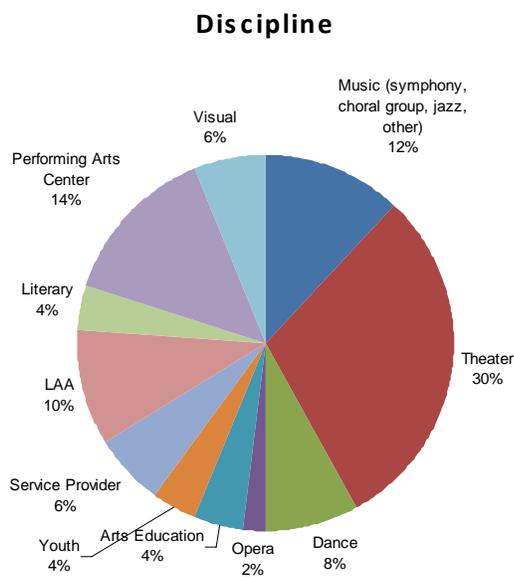
**DEMOGRAPHICS:** Focus Group Participants:



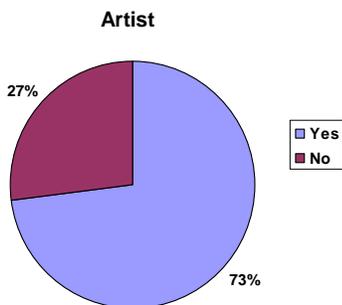
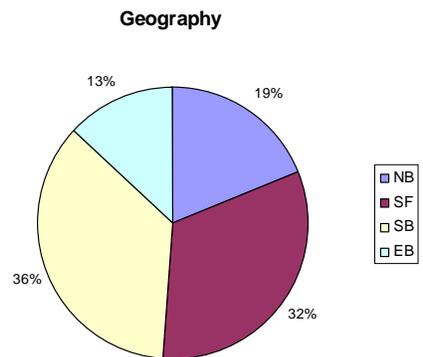


Both Full and Part time employees were represented.

All arts disciplines were represented.

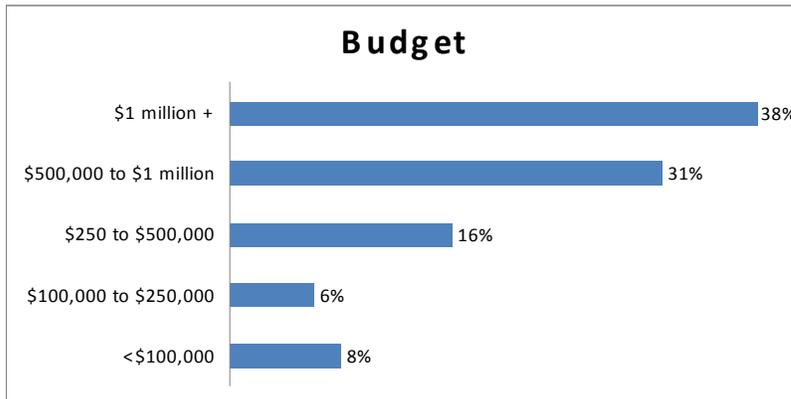


All nine Bay Area Counties were represented (NB = North Bay / Napa, Sonoma, Marin; SF = San Francisco; SB = South Bay / San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz; EB = East Bay / Alameda, Contra Costa).

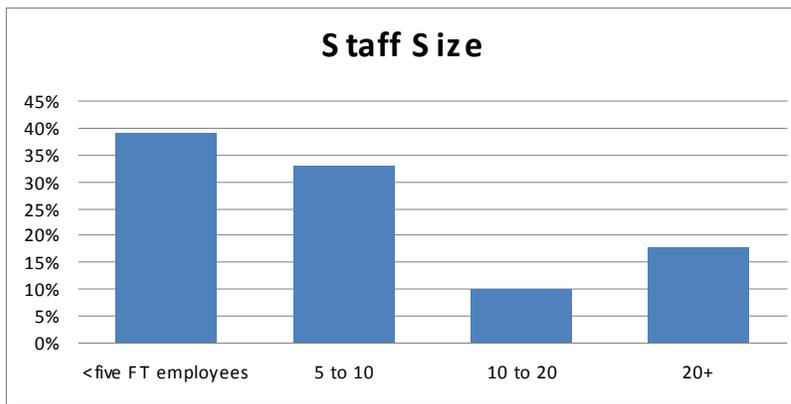


A majority of the Focus Group members self identified themselves as artists.

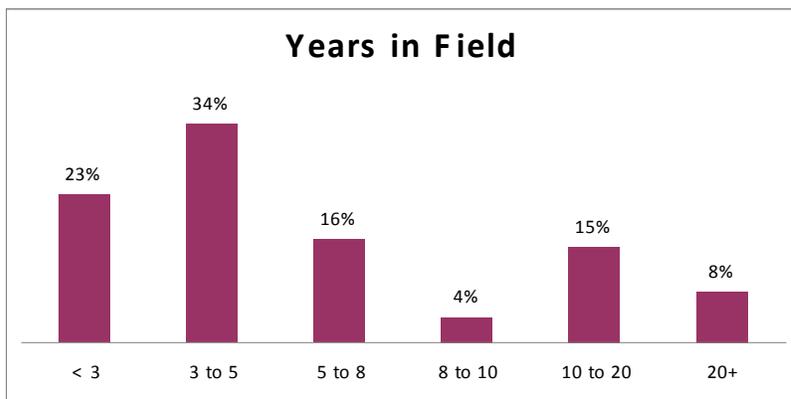
Focus group composition reflected arts organization budget size diversity:



And staff size:



Finally, there was a balance of Focus Group participants across the number of years worked in the sector given the weight to Millennials in the project.

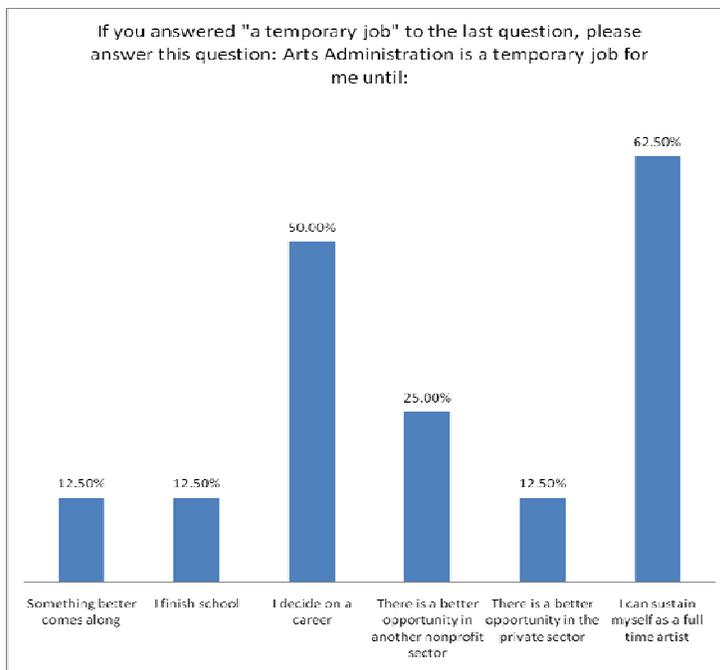


## FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT SURVEY:

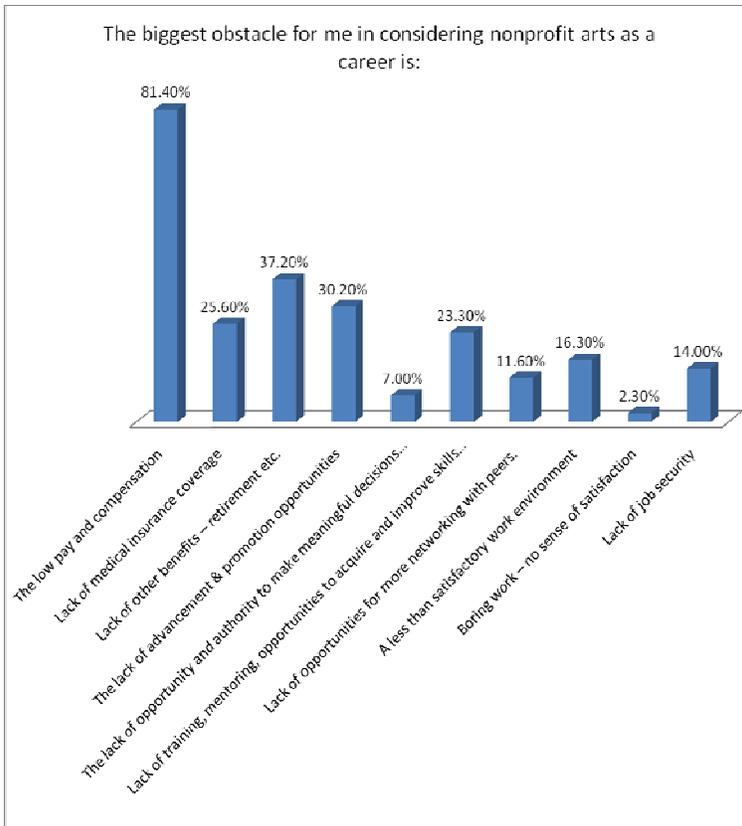
### YOUNGER COHORT:

We asked the Focus Group participants to identify what attracted them to the nonprofit arts sector as a possible career path. Seventy-five percent (75%) responded that they wanted to be involved in the arts itself. Seventy-two percent (72%) stated they had some sort of arts background.

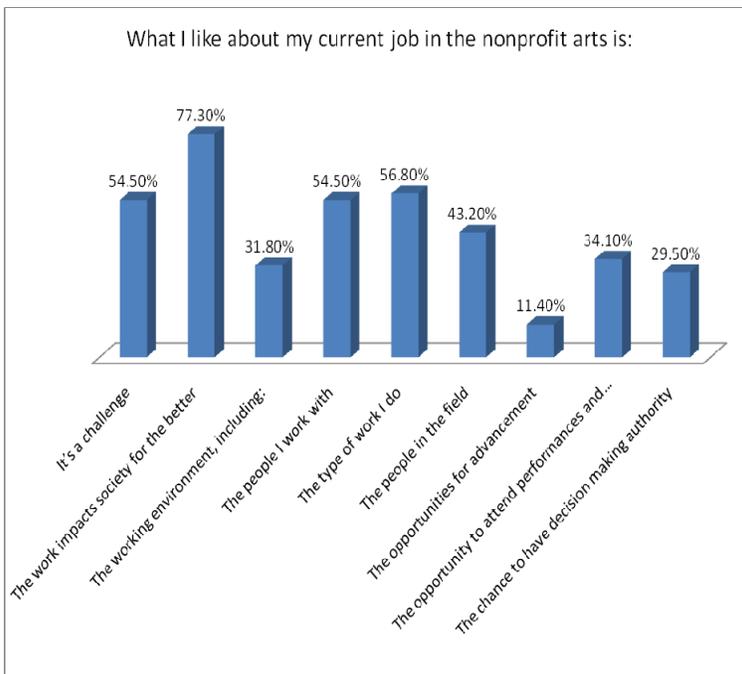
Eighty-eight percent said they considered arts administration as a career and not a temporary job. Of those that did consider it a temporary job, sixty-two percent (62%) said they thought of it as temporary “until they could sustain themselves as a working artist”, or in the alternative, fifty percent (50%), thought of administration as temporary until they “decided on a career”. Twenty-five percent (25%) considered it temporary until there was a “better opportunity in another nonprofit sector”.



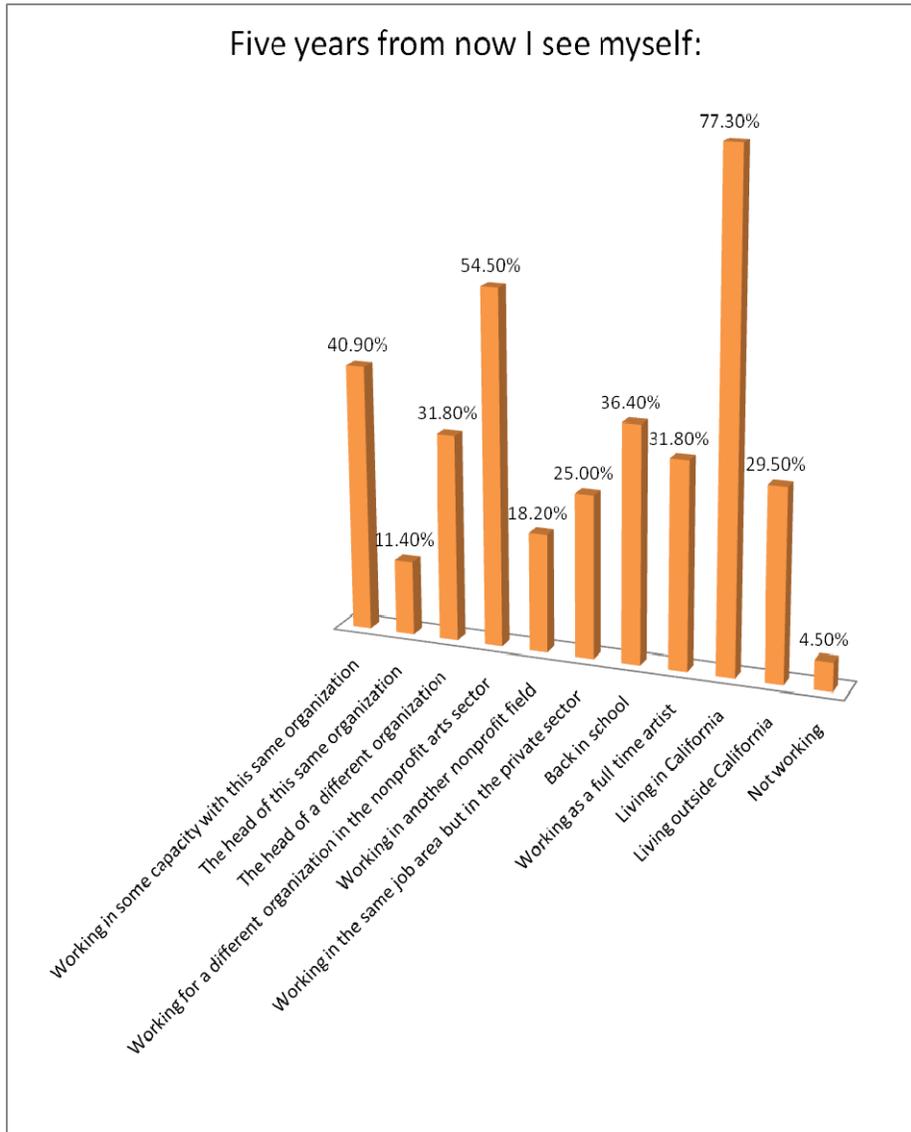
When asked to identify the single biggest obstacle to pursuing a career in arts administration, eight-one percent (81%) pointed to low pay, and thirty-seven percent included lack of benefits (health care, retirement et. al.). Lack of advancement and promotion opportunities was identified by thirty percent (30%) of the respondents, followed by the lack of training and mentoring opportunities that were offered.



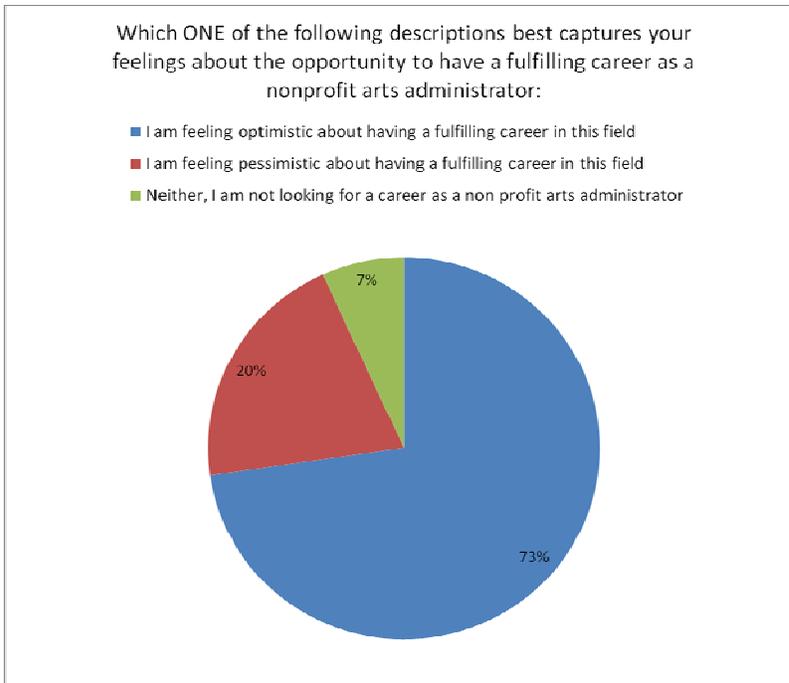
When asked what was the single best aspect of working in the sector, seventy-seven percent (77%) cited that “the work impacts society for the better”. Fifty-four percent said they “liked the people they worked with”, and the same percentage cited “the challenge of the work” as a positive attribute.



When asked “where they thought they might be five years from now”, fifty-four percent (54%) thought they would be working for a “different organization in the nonprofit arts field, forty percent (40%) thought they would be working with the same organization they were currently employed at, twenty-five percent (25%) thought they would be working in the private sector, thirty-six percent thought they might be ‘back in school’, and thirty-one percent (31%) thought they might be working as a full-time artist.



Seventy-seven percent (77%) saw themselves living in California five years from now.



Seventy-two percent (72%) stated they felt “optimistic about having a career in the nonprofit arts field”.

**Please rate the following in their importance to you in your continuing to consider nonprofit arts administration a career path:**

1 = critically important (first box on the left), 5 = not very important (last box on the right)

	1	2	3	4	5
Compensation (salary et. al.)	54.5%	31.8%	11.4%	2.3%	0.0%
Benefits (medical. insurance etc.)	50%	31.8%	13.6%	4.5%	0.0%
Decision making authority	20.9%	65.1%	11.6%	2.3%	0.0%
Chances for advancement & promotion	43.2%	40.9%	11.4%	4.5%	0.0%
Working relationship with peers	54.5%	29.5%	13.6%	2.3%	0.0%
Physical working environment	20.5%	38.6%	31.8%	9.1%	0.0%
Training / Mentoring opportunities	45.5%	34.1%	15.9%	4.5%	0.0%
Ability to make a positive impact on society	88.6%	6.8%	2.3%	2.3%	0.0%

## OLDER COHORT:

When we asked the same questions of the older cohort participants, we found a number of areas where the older cohort perception of what younger employees thought was markedly different than what the younger employees identified as how they viewed things:

- In the older cohort, the percentage of those originally attracted to the field with an arts background rose to eighty-one percent (81%).
- Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the older participants thought that arts administration was a “temporary job” to most of the younger employees in the field, while only forty-two percent (42%) thought younger generations looked at the work as a “career path”. Thus the older cohort sees younger employees far less interested in arts administration as a possible career path than do the younger employees themselves.
- Of those Boomers that thought arts administration was a temporary job to younger employees, sixty-seven percent (67%) thought the younger generations were “waiting for something better to come along” (while only 12% of the younger cohort said that was what they felt). Fifty percent (50%) of the older group thought the job was temporary to younger employees “until they (the younger generations) could sustain themselves as a working artist”, while 62.5% of those younger generations said this was their feeling. Fifty percent of the older cohort thought the junior employees were waiting for something better in the private sector to come along, while only 12.5% of the younger group actually held this view.
- One hundred percent (100%) thought the low pay was a major obstacle in the minds of younger employees following arts administration as a career path, more than the younger employees stated (81%).
- Only twenty-five percent of the older group (vs. 30% of the younger) thought lack of advancement opportunities or the lack of training and professional development offerings was a factor to young people in entering and / or staying in the field, but fifty-eight percent (58%) thought the lack of advancement, and forty-one percent (41%) thought the lack of professional development options were a turn-offs to younger employees working in the sector.
- Seventy-five percent (75%) thought that the positive impact of working in the arts was the major attraction for young people, and forty-one percent (41%) also thought the “challenge” of the work was attractive to them.
- 58% thought young employees would likely be working in the arts field but at a different organization in five years (roughly the same as what the younger group believed); 33% (compared with 25% of the young cohort) thought the younger employees would be working in the private sector, and half (50%) the older group (vs. only 31% of the young people) thought they would be working as full time artists.
- Another area where there was a disconnect between what the older cohort thought younger employees believed, and what they actually believed, was in the area of optimism towards a career as an arts administrator. One third of the older cohort thought

young people were optimistic about having a career in the nonprofit arts field, 16% thought they were pessimistic, and half (50%) thought most young people currently working in the arts did not want a career in the field at all. In fact, 72% of the younger cohort said they felt optimistic about a career in arts administration, and 20% felt pessimistic.

**Please rate the following in their importance to you in your continuing to consider nonprofit arts administration a career path:**

1 = critically important (first box on the left), 5 = not very important (last box on the right)

	1	2	3	4	5
Compensation (salary et. al.)	66.7%	8.3%	16.7%	8.3%	0.0%
Benefits (medical. insurance etc.)	50.0%	41.7%	0.0%	8.3%	0.0%
Decision making authority	8.3%	41.7%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Chances for advancement & promotion	8.3%	66.7%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Working relationship with peers	25.0%	50.0%	16.7%	8.3%	0.0%
Physical working environment	16.7%	41.7%	41.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Training / Mentoring opportunities	16.7%	50.0%	25.0%	8.3%	0.0%
Ability to make a positive impact on society	41.7%	33.3%	16.7%	8.3%	0.0%

## **FOCUS GROUP AGENDA:**

While we did not want to structure or control the discussion and dialogue within each Focus Group too rigidly, we did seek to include the following topic areas into each focus group agenda:

1. Recruitment in a competitive market – both internal and external to the sector.
2. The factors germane to flight risk of current employees, including major pluses and minuses to working in the arts.
3. Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction factors and indices both in individual organizations and the larger field.
4. Decision making authority options and opportunities.
5. Prioritization of self identified employee values associated with work in the sector and at specific organizations.
6. Sought after workplace values and perks.
7. Differing supervisory management styles and policies.
8. External forces (e.g. the economy).
9. Internal senior management transitions and the impact of those major upheavals on the workplace environment.
10. Perceived advantages and disadvantages to working at other organizations, in other nonprofit fields and in the private sector.
11. Opportunities for promotion / advancement and career counseling.
12. Opportunities for professional development and skills enhancement.

## **FOCUS GROUP PROCESS:**

Five of the six younger, and one of the two older cohort Focus Groups, met for three two-hour sessions over a three month period. The three meetings were roughly organized around the following topic schedule:

- First meeting – The barriers, obstacles and challenges to pursuing a career in arts administration.

- Second meeting – The advantages and opportunities in the pursuit of a career in arts administration
- Third meeting – Specific recommendations for arts organizations and funders to improve recruitment of new talent, retention of current employees, and to foster a productive and harmonious workplace environment for all generations.

One of the six younger, and one of the older cohort Focus Groups, met for two three-hour sessions following the completion of the five Focus Groups above. Those two group meetings were roughly organized around the following topics schedule:

- First meeting – Recap and summary of the six Focus Group sessions per above and discussion.
- Second meeting – Review and prioritization of specific recommendations for arts organizations and funders to improve recruitment and retention of new talent, current employees, and to foster a productive and harmonious workplace environment for all generations.

While facilitation and leadership of each Focus Group meeting attempted to follow the topic schedule and include, within the discussion, the agenda items above, the priority was to allow for group participant led dynamics to prevail.

Detailed notes (by independent note takers) were taken at each Focus Group meeting, and those notes were circulated to Focus Group participants within three days following each meeting.

Participants were asked to bring written recommendations for both individual arts organizations and for the funding community to the final meeting of each Focus Group, and those recommendations served as the starting point for a discussion of what the final recommendations were to be.

## ARTS SECTOR GENERATIONAL CHALLENGES – OVERVIEW:

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### **RECRUITMENT:**

At the turn of the century, there had been no dot.com crash, no 9/11 attack; there was no war in Afghanistan or Iraq and the subprime economic global collapse was not on any radar screen. Even up until mid-decade of the new century, the private sector had been gearing up for a highly competitive market for the skills of lateral moving Gen Xers and entry level Millennials. As the beginning of the Baby Boomer cohort neared retirement at the 2010 milestone, with the expectation that perhaps 40 million people in the workforce would exit over the next 12 years, companies scrambled to begin to understand how generations differed in their outlooks and expectations and what it might take to attract and retain talent in a shrinking pool market.

The nonprofit arts sector begin to also appreciate that its senior management would inevitably begin to transition out of the workplace and that the sector would have to ultimately come to grips with the challenges attendant to replacing them, though lack of time and funds certainly kept the field from making the same concrete advances in facing the challenges seen in the private sector. Efforts to facilitate and support *emerging leadership* surfaced, and the topic of generational succession begin to receive much more attention. Many argued convincingly, and with justification, that the arts sector would always attract new talent precisely because of the nature of the work, and the natural gravitation of creative people to creative enterprise, and that thus the issue of recruitment was, itself, somewhat academic.

The recent economic downturn has, of course, dramatically changed the reality of generational succession. The once fertile job market that promised Millennials their pick of employment, largely on terms dictated by them, is now gone. Jobs are now harder to come by for entry level searchers, including new college graduates. Moreover, the failure of the Baby Boomers to adequately save and plan for retirement, coupled with the current need (born out of the economic pressures on declining value in 401k plans and home prices, increased health care costs, possible future inflation and possible future cuts to social security) have given rise to the reality that at least a percentage of boomers will have to continue to work long past retirement age. Similarly, closures, retrenching and downsizing of firms of all sizes and stripes have likewise altered the reality of upward movement for many Gen Xers – not only in private industry, but also within the

nonprofit universe (though the number of organizations that are likely to cease to exist because of dramatically reduced funding and philanthropy isn't yet apparent). It is clear that it is no longer a seller's market for employees, and thus the challenge of recruitment for the arts sector is, short term anyway, far less onerous and difficult. Because of this change in the economy, and because work in the arts and culture sector remains, for a variety of reasons, highly attractive to a relatively large group of job seekers, the nonprofit arts sector is not likely to have a problem in recruiting the talent we need to replace the seasoned veterans we will lose over the next decade.

### **RETENTION:**

The fact that the arts administration field will likely have an ample pool of applicants for its vacant management positions is not to imply that the sector should not take a deeper look at all aspects of how we recruit new and existing talent to our ranks. What is less clear is whether or not we will succeed to attract the *best and brightest* of the pool, whether or not we will be able to retain the talent we do recruit, and how we will manage the different generations in our workforce to our (and their) best advantage.

There are external considerations that transcend all generational differences – including chiefly compensation, work-load and job satisfaction, and perks and rewards, but at the heart of the challenge to retain those we recruit lay the differences in generations in terms of work attitudes, assumptions, expectations, comfort levels and ways of doing things. Our greatest short term challenge will be to understand and appreciate generational differences, and the potential for collisions between generations in our workplaces and how we can manage those differences, and minimize the negative impact of those collisions.

Job security has, over the last two generations, lessened as a priority for people. And while compensation is clearly still a high consideration in where one works, it is not necessarily more important than some other factors. The costs, both financial, and in terms of training time, to replace a worker, continue to be a major expense for all business enterprises. Losing talent is simply not good for business – it negatively impacts productivity and outcomes as well as such intangibles as morale and strategic planning. Thus, it is incumbent on every field to identify what factors are at play in individual decisions to stay working for an organization and within a sector.

## MANAGING GENERATIONS:

Directly related to the outcome of higher retention levels of current staff in organizations within our sector, is how well those organizations recognize and accommodate generational differences, and how we incorporate that recognition and accommodation into the larger dynamic of our management capacity.

The recognition that there are marked differences in how each of the generations view work, the workplace, authority, management, careers, and a host of other factors, is a relatively new development. If we have begun to appreciate that those differences already have an often profound impact, not just on succession issues, but on virtually every aspect of work, we have yet to act to acquire a new skill set to manage that impact. What is increasingly apparent is that the issues of multiple generations working side by side are now here to stay and handling those issues well is the charge for all senior management in the future.

Before we convened the first Focus Group we identified several areas we thought would be points of importance to Generation X and the Millennials that would comprise the majority our groups. We wanted the Focus Group discussions to provide us with a sense of how important these considerations were in job satisfaction and the impact that each played in ongoing decisions as to staying with an organization and within the field. Those areas included:

- Compensation. Historically our organizations have been unable, except at the ‘C’ level (CEO, COO, CFO et. al.) of our largest organizations, to offer compensation competitive at market levels with the private sector.
- Benefits. Our sector remains at a competitive disadvantage overall in terms of the level of benefits offered to mid and entry level employees, particularly in the areas of health coverage and retirement packages.
- Perks & Rewards. Our field offers substantial, though very different, perks and rewards than does other sectors.
- Job security / stability. Due to the often times roller coaster effect of public and philanthropic funding for the arts and culture sector, the level of job security offered has sometimes been problematic.
- Belief in the nature of the work. The single greatest attraction to working in our field is arguably because of the positive impact of what we do.

- Flexibility in the workplace. In terms of work scheduling / and performance measures.
- Workload. A counterpoint to the offered flexibility above?
- Workplace ambiance including co-worker's attitudes.
- Career path – advancement / promotion opportunities and counseling options.
- Senior management trust – inclusion in both information dissemination and decision making authority offered.
- Training and skills enhancement – opportunities for professional development and the acquisition and refinement of management skills.

We discovered that while there was cross generational agreement on some issues, there were sharp differences on many more. Some of those differences gave rise to points of collision between generational thinking, and often those intersections came as a surprise to the other generations.

## GENERATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS:

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Rigidly stereotyping the generations would be both too simplistic and a conceit. Still, the limited research and literature on the subject (most of which is centered on the late 1990's and the early part of the current century) is useful in gaining insight into the shared growing up experiences, common thinking, preferences and priorities of those in each generation. And while those in one generation often share traits common to other generations, and those near the beginning of any one generation may differ from those born near the end of a generational classification, there is an apparent similarity within each generation on a number of key markers, including basic attitudes towards (and priorities attached to):

- Work – it's purpose and role in one's life
- Workload limitations and schedule flexibility
- Productivity – and the means to maximize quality performance
- Workplace communication
- Decision making authority; delegation of power; hierarchical values
- Technology – use, comfort level, and role in the workplace.

The participants in our Focus Groups mirrored very closely the broad descriptions of the generations in the current literature. We currently have four generations within the arts & culture sector workplace:

### **T**RADITIONALISTS:

Born before 1943, many of today's leading arts organizations were founded by Traditionalists. Most of those from this generation have retired now from our ranks, but a number remain involved. Profiling the external events that influenced their attitudes towards work and the workplace is important to our understanding of our sector because these people created the models for our nonprofit businesses - models largely still in use. It was Traditionalist attitudes and experiences that shaped how our organizations initially viewed work, how we structured our time, designed our hierarchies and interacted with each other. They were the principal architects

of our field for decades and only in the 1990's and the current decade have they begun to exit the field in substantial numbers.

Traditionalists grew up during or immediately following the Great Depression or World War II. Numbering 75 million they often experienced scarcity while growing up and they embraced the idea of saving and planning ahead. And because the defining events of their youth were bigger than the individual, they learned early on to work as part of a larger whole. They had faith in institutions with the same level of commitment that their boomer children would dedicate to their suspicion of institutions. The ethic of hard work was always part of their lives. But while sacrifice was the watchword during the depression and war, the period following was one of peace and prosperity in America, and a time when parents wanted their children (the boomers) to enjoy the fruits of this new era.

Though Traditionalists were by and large conservative, those born near the end of the classification were the ones whose actions were the harbingers of the boomer's future – Gloria Steinem, Martin Luther King, Cesar Chavez - and they began the Civil Rights and Women's Movements. Other iconic figures from this generation included Dr. Spock, Joe DiMaggio, Joe McCarthy, Edward R. Murrow, Bob Hope, Betty Crocker, Churchill, FDR, and Ronald Reagan.

Loyalty defined Traditionalists. They cherished family and patriotism. They believed in duty. In the workplace, they were (for decades) the only generation, and thus the intersections that would give rise to the generational misunderstandings and confrontations that were to come, did not yet exist for them. There weren't multiple business models, only one – the hierarchical – seniority based, male dominated, profit driven, single career, area of expertise model. Respect for, and deference to, authority, together with conformity, a sense of duty and discipline, and the expectation that deferred gratification (reward) was the norm defined the worker and the workplace. Family and work were separated, with work obligations coming first at least for the male breadwinner. Traditionalists still had the option of the stay-at-home mom being the homemaker and full time child care provider. Traditionalists were “team” players in virtually every sense and that was the workplace norm. It was less about the individual and more about the organization. Traditionalists grew up in the Golden Age of Radio – a precursor of unification of the country that television would later accomplish in profound ways. FDR and the Fireside Chats were yet another way Traditionalists found themselves part of the larger whole.

Their icons included the introduction of Mickey Mouse, the Lone Ranger, Tarzan, Blondie and Betty Boop. And despite the harsh realities of war and economic hard times, this generation also claims the Roaring Twenties, the Big Band Era, the Jitterbug and the Hollywood Musical. They were the first generation to popularize the city nightlife, and they invented the ideas of the nightclub and the cocktail party.

### **B**ABY BOOMERS:

Born between 1944 and 1965, the Boomers are the most celebrated, and studied generation of our times. 80 million strong, they are the largest generation ever. For decades their tastes and preferences have influenced virtually every part of modern life – from music to movies, consumer products to fashion trends, from attitudes towards workplace behavior to their concept of authority. And no generation has ever been more absorbed in itself than have the boomers – the “Me” Generation often thought by Xers and Millennials as overly self-indulgent, spoiled and egotistical.

Like all generations, those born near one end or the other may have had vastly different experiences. Early boomers, born in the forties and fifties, were part of the celebrated 60’s – the Woodstock generation, while those born in the sixties and seventies were too late to have experienced that celebrated period. Yet virtually all segments of the boomer generation grew up in child centered families, somewhat indulged, where education was widely available, the economy was good and America reigned supreme around the world – both as political and economic power.

Boomers were raised to think for themselves, to enjoy life, and with a new permissiveness that allowed them to even question authority. Textbooks (and television) taught them the ideal of America – a nation of equality and opportunity. But when they begin to grow up they discovered that reality did not match up to the ideal, and that conflict led to the generational challenge between the boomers and their parents that manifested itself in protest over the Vietnam War and the growing support for the Civil Rights Movement. Nourished as idealists, the boomers sought to make the idealism they were taught the reality that they lived.

The iconic events of the Boomers lives were the Vietnam War and three political assassinations – the Kennedys and Martin Luther King. Virtually every first half Boomer knows exactly where

they were when JFK was shot. Other seminal moments for boomers were Elvis and the Beatles on Ed Sullivan, Sputnik and landing on the Moon, Woodstock, Kent State and later Watergate and Nixon's resignation. Television was the single most important influence on the lives of the boomers. There were less than one million sets in 1950, and over fifty million in 1960.

Boomers were always both optimistic and confident about their futures. They never knew deprivation and grew up with a sense of entitlement to the good life. Because there were so many boomers, they became, early on, highly competitive – an ethic reinforced in school, sports, and the reality of the cold war. Boomers believed in expansion and growth and considered both natural phenomenon, and they were raised to be team players. They do not believe, as did their parents, in deferred gratification, wanting, instead, to live the good life now. Boomers have always been about redefining and reinventing themselves and their surroundings, including their organizations and the rules by which to live. Those born in the first half tended to be more idealistic and passionate, and also to be workaholics. They made making money a high priority. Those born in the second half tended to feel left out by the times and the monopoly of their older brothers and sisters on almost everything. They tended to be more laid back, and more cynical.

The messages sent to Boomers were: You're special. You can do anything. Change the world.

In the workplace, boomers tend to be political and territorial, yet they prefer to avoid confrontations. They universally believe their role is as “change agents” and that the workplace needed humanization and democratization. Boomers have always seen themselves as problem solvers and they relish challenges. They also exalt personal growth and have always been obsessed with ‘youth’.

Boomer shared cultural experience includes the birth of rock n roll, hula hoops, the peace sign, drugs, and television staples from Leave It to Beaver to Johnny Carson to the Superbowl.

Over the past two decades, boomers have been responsible for most of the policy and procedural changes that have altered organizational structures of all types. Gone is the exclusivity of the male occupation of executive ranks. Gone too is the one career norm. Increasingly a balance between work and family is preferred, though the workaholic ethic - perhaps muted over the past decade - still reigns for boomers.

## GENERATION X:

Forty six million Generation Xers, born between 1965 and 1980, have forever lived in the shadow of the Boomers. A generation of dramatically increased divorces among their parents, Xers grew up as latch key kids, left largely on their own. Given increased autonomy, they developed a survivor mentality to life itself, and work in particular. Xers learned early on to be self-reliant and independent.

Disillusioned with the workaholic ethic of the Boomers that had left them abandoned, Xers demanded equal time for family and friends outside of and apart from work as nonnegotiable, and earned the designation “slacker” in return. The American economy began to downsize just as the Xers began to enter the workforce – a workforce that didn’t seem to want or need them – certainly not in the sense it had wanted and needed the Boomers.

Xers came to believe early on that social security would likely never be there for them. The job market taught them that work was impermanent and job security a fiction. As they began to mature at the dawn of the information age they naturally gravitated to the developing technology. Xers were the first computer generation; the first generation where technology mushroomed into a whole menu of new products and applications (cable and satellite tv, VCRs, video games, fax machines, microwaves, pagers, then cell phones and palm pilots) and they embraced them all. They came to see their future in terms of their resumes – they believed that the wider and deeper their skills levels, the broader their opportunities to find gainful employment. As Boomers began in the 1990s to move to the most senior management levels, out into more entrepreneurial positions and even into retirement, the potential for more vacancies than Xers to fill them loomed as the new reality.

Xers placed their faith in themselves, not in organizations, systems or teams. They preferred to chart their own workload and believed that as long as they were productive and met timelines, how they organized themselves shouldn’t be of concern to anyone else. They began to distrust bureaucracy, the idea of schmoozing, hyperbole, inefficiency and what they saw as Boomer insincerity.

Their mantra became *work to live, not live to work* (boomers). Scheduling flexibility became critical to them. They had no intention of missing their own lives or the lives of their children, families and friends as they thought the boomers had done.

Xers are results oriented. They prefer informal structures. They want more opportunities to develop their skills. They respect competency and prefer to learn by training and mentoring. They believe loyalty needs to be earned. They abhor micromanagement and prefer results to process. They are task, not relationship oriented. They think job, not career; survival, not change the world. They tend to be blunt, not diplomatic, and want to be judged on merit.

They are, above all, skeptics. The whole promise of everything the Boomers enjoyed was denied to them – the good life, the jobs, family. Boomers rallied around sex, drugs & rock n roll, the Xers grew up in the time of AIDS, and crack cocaine.

The messages sent to Xers were: Don't count on it, Get real, and Count on yourself.

Iconic shared events include: Jonestown, Three Mile Island, the Iranian Hostages, the fall of the Berlin Wall, John Lennon's assassination, the Exxon Valdez oil spill and Operation Desert Storm.

Television families included The Brady Bunch and The Simpsons. Theirs was the time of the Pet Rock. While Traditionalists and Boomers had defining wars – to either support or protest – the Xers did not. The wars they experienced were economic – gas lines and layoffs.

## **MILLENNIALS:**

The Millennials, born between 1980 and 2000, number over 75 million. They've grown up in a time of uncertainty – 911, global terrorism, dishonesty in politics, shifting economic fortunes, Columbine. They are the children of late parenting Boomers, and middle level Xers – with nearly a third born to unwed mothers. Like other generations, they aren't homogeneous; at one end of their group, they are the new privileged elite, at the other end they struggle to make ends meet. As a group they enjoyed early widespread economic prosperity and the dot com boom. More recently though, global economic collapse and the Iraq war have again called the future into

question. Because of this see-saw ride, Millennials are, if nothing else, adaptable and flexible in their outlook.

A large percentage of the Millennials have been told, since their birth, that the world will be their oyster. They have had parental involvement at virtually every stage of their maturity. The disconnect with their parents is far less pronounced than with other generations. They actually like their parents for the most part. Whereas Boomers were workaholics and Xers prioritized life over work, Millennials see work as a part of a balanced life. They also believe work should be fun and that it should mean something. Like Xers they insist on scheduling flexibility.

Millennials have distaste for the cynicism of the Xers. They also don't like sarcasm, inequality or unfairness; they value diversity for its own sake having grown up with it all around them. Their perspective is global. They abhor condescension and not being taken seriously.

If Xers were comfortable with technology, Millennials consider it a basic and natural part of their lives. From iPods and Computers to iPhones and Blue Tooth – each new advance is quickly incorporated into their lives. Their technological expertise and savvy far outstrips that of their parents. They simply cannot conceive of life without it and they are disbelieving when organizations employ outdated systems. If Xers are independent, Millennials enjoy being interdependent. If Xers lack people skills, Millennials seem born with them. If Xers are the lost generation, Millennials are the found one.

Millennials are basically hopeful and ambitious. They respect achievement and authority. They are loyal, team players. They prefer coaching and mentoring, and learning by doing. Civic minded, results oriented, multi-taskers, they are closer to both Boomers and even Traditionalists than they are to Xers, yet, like Xers before them, the reality of their current world is forcing them to re-think their earlier assumptions. And like the Xers before them they depend, to some extent, on their boomer parents to help them financially.

They grew up with X games and Beanie Babies, Oprah, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, In Sync and the Spice Girls. As children they had the busiest schedules of any generation. Bill Gates and Tiger Woods are notable iconic figures. Their world has always had a Bush or Clinton in the White House.

## **CUSPERS:**

Within each of these generational classifications, there are distinctions between those born in the beginning or first half of the generation, and those born in the second half. Differing events, people, trends and realities shaped those within the broader span and influenced their attitudes towards work and the workplace.

Moreover, those born on the cusp at the beginning and end of each broad classification – the “cuspers” are unique in that they are likely an aggregation of the influences from two generations. They may relate to one more than the other on any given issue.

Cuspers are transitional. They are often the ones who first recognize generational changes and movements and who initiate new directions and shifts in attitudes and behavior. They are also the ones who are first impacted by the larger societal shifts, and their reactions to those shifts are the harbinger of new developments. Those born on the cusp often directly experience over their maturation period two distinct sets of values and two very differing sets of changes not only of attitudes, but technology.

As Lynn Lancaster and David Stillman point out in their work *When Generations Collide*: “because Cuspers stand in the gap between two sides, they become naturals at mediating, translating and mentoring.” For that reason, they opine that Cuspers often make the best managers, providing a voice for those whose voice is not heard. Cuspers may hold the key to recruitment of new talent, and perhaps even strategies for more effective management of potential generational collisions, and thus they may impact employee retention as well.

## **POINTS OF GENERATIONAL CONFLICT AND COLLISION:**

Because different generations have pronounced different experiences, they are likely to have different attitudes towards work and the workplace. Those differing approaches are likely to sometimes come into conflict with other generational experiences and attitudes. The differing characteristics of each generation influence and determine their wants and priorities, and their focus in terms of work and the workplace. There are numerous points at which collisions are possible, if not likely, including intersections of:

- Work ethic – how they see the means to be productive, their priorities in balancing work and life and thus how they schedule their time, and their motivation for work and what they want from it.
- Work approach – How they see their co-workers, how they see cooperation, collaboration and independence.
- Career approach – from single career to multiple jobs to multiple careers
- Preferred training style – be it formal or informal, structured or unstructured, observational or perceptive.
- Leadership style – be it control, coordination or consensus based. The way they view authority, their preferred methods of supervision, their approach to structure.
- Larger Outlook – local, regional or global
- Management Style – telling, selling or involving
- Technology – comfort level, knowledge of, and need for
- Attitudes and Preferences in rewards and feedback
- Delegation of authority, trust, inclusion and involvement in decision making.

Given such a divergence, it would be surprising if there weren't points of conflict and collision in the workplace. The challenge is how to minimize the negative impact of such collisions, and maximize the value and contributions of each generation.

The following areas very likely host potential generational collision points, where generational attitudes and priorities may be at odds:

1. Advancement and promotion.
2. Rewards and feedback
3. Respect and authority – management style
4. Career paths and counseling
5. Training and professional development
6. Delegation of decision making authority
7. Communication and information inclusion
8. Technology
9. Retirement
10. Work / Life balance
11. Fun in the workplace

## **MANAGING THE GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES:**

Though such seemingly profound divergences might suggest that attempting to accommodate the generations would only lead to chaos, there are approaches to making the workplace function well for all the generations, thus making the organization itself more productive, harmonious and efficient.

### **1. RECOGNITION / SENSITIVITY:**

The first step in addressing the challenge of managing the generational divide is to acknowledge its existence and learn as much about its dynamics as possible. Sensitivity to the issue needs to happen across all management levels – from the Board to the new hires. Awareness of the identifiable generational differences and internal assessment of how those differences are (or potentially might) impact the workplace is largely a matter of putting the issue on the table, conscientiously identifying the collision points, then vetting the specific root causes. If organizations can talk about the issue, they can address the most obvious and pressing challenges. The mere act of involving all personnel in such an analysis goes a long way to creating the kind of workplace environment and atmosphere of mutual respect that can obviate against small issues mushrooming to become major problems. The process of sensitizing the whole of the organization to the reality of generational differences is itself part of the solution to possible negative impact.

### **2. COMMUNICATION:**

Involving every generation in a dialogue on the issue is essential to inclusion. One of the major issues for younger generations is that they “feel” left out of the loop. And once their perception is one of isolation, they feel less involved in, committed, and loyal to the organization, and their role in it. One of the single biggest senior management mistakes seems to be the failure to be more inclusive in the decision making process; not necessarily the decisions themselves, but communication as to what those decisions are and why they were made.

### **3. THE ACORN APPROACH:**

In their book, *Generations at Work*, Zemke, Raines and Filipcak suggest the acronym ACORN to guide managing the different generations in the workplace:

**A**ccommodate employee differences. “Generationally friendly companies are treating their employees as they do their customers – learning all they can about them, working to meet their specific needs, and serving them according to their unique preferences. Each generation’s icons, language and precepts are acknowledged.”

**C**reate Workplace Choices: The relaxed, informal, adaptive workplace shaped “around the work being done, the customers being served, and the people who work there” is the model for the future.

**O**perate from a sophisticated management style: The watchword is flexibility, and smart organizations are adopting “supervisory styles that are not fixed and are situationally varied. Managers depend less on positional than on personal power. Leaders know how to make policy exceptions without alienating the team; are thoughtful when matching individuals to an assignment or to a team; balance concern for work and for people; and they understand the element of trust and work to gain it from their employees.”

**R**espect competence and initiative: “Management treats every employee as if they have great things to offer the organization”. They trust their people and expect them to succeed.

**N**ourish Retention: “Management believes that keeping good people is paramount and they work on a daily basis to make their organization a magnet for talent. They offer a lot of training and opportunities to advance laterally as well as vertically.”

## FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

### **BARRIERS, OBSTACLES & CHALLENGES:**

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**R**ound I of the Focus Group meetings centered on the participant’s identification of the barriers, obstacles and challenges to a career path in arts administration. We sought to discuss those elements and situations that make it more difficult, and less attractive, to work in the arts field, and are likely to negatively impact the individual’s willingness and ability to stay on an arts administration career track.

Note: There was disagreement within the Focus Groups on some points where some thought something a negative and therefore a barrier or obstacle, and others thought it more of a positive, and thus an asset. Still, there were more points of consensus and agreement, and general unanimity on the principal elements that worked against one having a career in arts administration.

As identified by the Focus Groups, those elements included:

#### **I. BASIC / CAREER CONCERNS:**

- FAILURE OF MANY ARTS ORGANIZATIONS TO PROVIDE EVEN A ‘LIVING WAGE’ FOR MILLENNIAL EMPLOYEES. NONCOMPETITIVE BENEFITS:

Entry level arts administrators, drawn to the field because of a passion for the arts, are often faced with having to work a second job just to survive in the expensive northern California housing market. Numerous focus group participants cited the lack of a ‘living wage’ (enough to pay for just rent, food, utilities and transportation – let alone health care) as a major drawback to staying in the field long term.

The situation was often not that much better for Generation X employees that had been in the field for several years. This lack of the opportunity to earn a *living* wage on entry,

and the likelihood that even with advancement or promotion, compensation was not likely to be competitive with the private sector was the single most cited

"I've been working three years and still have a second job in order to support myself. It is practically impossible to sustain any standard of living on the arts job salary alone."

reason that continuation in the field might not be possible for the employee, despite a desire to follow arts administration as a career path. One person commented that she had observed a majority of either her colleagues or other acquaintances in arts administration eventually migrate to areas such as Los Angeles or New York in order to be able to support themselves. *"You enter at a young age, but then have to reconsider. People tend to stay a couple of years and then switch jobs. For long term you have to move somewhere else,"* she said. Another person laughed as she described herself as "grossly underpaid".

While many arts organizations provide some form of health care (or contribution) many smaller arts organizations do not. Almost none of the organizations provide any retirement benefits or option plans. One older cohort group member saw it this way: *"Younger cohorts are increasingly beginning to think about retirement. As of now, organizations do not have the infrastructure to support the younger generation in this area. If they're not getting any benefits, or a decent salary, how can we lure them? And the problem lies with the fact that administrators are not asking the right questions. We are not asking about pensions, or disability benefits. We are not thinking long-term, financially. A re-training program could help us to begin asking the right questions."*

Another older cohort participant added: *"Just putting the money issue on the table would be very encouraging for the young cohort. Could we fundamentally accomplish change and ask organizations to shift their priorities and where we spend our income? It may happen, it may not, but it never will unless we ask the right questions, and face the problem of inadequate compensation squarely."* Still another member added, *"There is so much emphasis on the capital campaign, as opposed to the human campaign. We are not making people happy enough not to leave by funding programming and not the people who administer the programs."*

## JOB SECURITY:

Though less of an immediate (or short term) concern, there was nonetheless widespread consensus that continuing funding challenges to the sector obviated against even short term job security – which issue likewise had bearing on their career path decisions.

- PRONOUNCED LACK OF UPWARD PROMOTION / ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN INDIVIDUAL ARTS ORGANIZATIONS.

As one younger cohort member asked: “How does one climb the ladder when there is such little room for promotion?”

Cited as second only to compensation issue concerns, was the lack of opportunities for advancement / promotion – particularly within each individual organization. The small size of most arts organizations, and the longevity of those in positions of power, means there are few to no available spots to move into and long periods between vacancies. Even lateral advancement within the arts field was seen to be difficult. The Arts can’t compete with private sector advancement opportunities.

Compounding the problem is: i) a perceived insensitivity to this reality on the part of senior staff, and the failure to address the issues with tools at hand (e.g., promotion to new titles with some reward); and ii) a sometimes perceived (or imagined) threat of the younger cohort by senior management. As one participant complained: *“Most entry-level positions remain at entry level, which is incredibly discouraging,”* Added another: *“When a position does open up, our senior management looks outside of our ranks to fill it.”* And still another offered: *“There was a meeting recently regarding letting staff members move up to manager positions and no staff member was allowed to attend! How does that work?”*

Some Focus Group members thought part of the problem was the absolute priority of spending on programs and not on the people needed to administer the programs. *“They really tend to prioritize programming. Most directors would never be okay with losing programming, regardless of the fact that it would be to prevent employees from leaving,”*

commented one person, Added another: *“The amount of money being spent on programs far outstrips the amount spent on people or staff to run them.”*

Finally, for those who sought lateral movement to private sector employment, there was a fear that there is a prejudice against an arts background as qualification to be an administrator / manager outside the nonprofit universe. Nonprofit experience seems not to be thought of as commensurate to private business experience.

- COMMONPLACE UNREASONABLE (UNACCEPTABLE) WORK / TIME DEMANDS PLACED BY SENIOR STAFF ON JUNIOR STAFF.

Nearly universally cited as a major complaint and a continuing source of friction is senior management’s assumption that Gen X and Millennials will voluntarily work long overtime hours without exception and that this assumption is acceptable to the younger generations. It is not. Adding to that resentment was the fact that boomer senior management never asks if the increased workload is acceptable to the Millennial or Generation X employee. This was an obvious generational clash point – boomers embraced shouldering

overtime work, Xers (and to a lesser extent, Millennials) thought it a direct conflict with their preference for a

“Our enthusiasm gets drained out of us when the organization not only ceaselessly puts extra demands on us, but then when we come through for them, there is no recognition of our contribution, not even a ‘thank you’.”

life / work balance. *“It’s not a nine-to-five job. There’s no time off”* complained one Millennial. Both Xers and Millennials similarly complained that their overtime work contributions were virtually never acknowledged nor even informally appreciated, causing further resentment. As one of the younger cohort members put it: *“We work eighty-hour weeks with no overtime. They bank on your love of the arts. Furthermore, there is hostility towards those who attempt to report overtime. They don’t even want to hear that word. The fist really comes down.”* Added another young member: *“The work culture of a Baby Boomer states that you basically dedicate your life to your company.”*

- INADEQUATE SUPPORT FOR JUNIOR EMPLOYEES PURSUIT OF ARTS ADMINISTRATION AS A CAREER PATH.

Frequently cited as a glaring omission by the Focus Group participants is the failure of their immediate supervisor, the organization, and the field as a whole to provide any career path counseling, guidance or access to resources so that younger employees might be equipped with a path to carve out their own careers. This failure is made more pronounced when compared to efforts of the private sector.

## **II. THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE:**

- WIDESPREAD LACK OF AWARENESS / SENSITIVITY TO GENERATIONAL ISSUES.

All eight focus groups concluded that there was a lack of familiarity across generational lines as to the dynamics of how differences in backgrounds, experiences, attitudes and approaches of each generation impacted and affected inter-generational expectations, attitudes, work-habits, and communications in the workplace. These intersections often resulted in generational collisions that negatively impacted job satisfaction, productivity, management relations and recruitment and retention of younger cohorts into the organization.

There was also uniform agreement that it would improve the workplace environment were the organization to provide training in generational dynamics. One member summed it up with this: *“Managers need to learn to manage based on each different generation. The sooner administrators learn to manage based on generation, the more successful the organization will be.”*

Even the members in our two older cohort Focus Groups easily recognized the marked difference in the mindset of the young non-profit arts administrative workers from past decades. The new generation has more of an entrepreneurial spirit, a clearer understanding of business matters, wants more specific direction, and more concrete job descriptions. Older cohort members opined that the younger generations still share many of the values that the older cohorts retain -- values which brought them to non-profit work to begin with -- but they are more impatient for increased decision making authority and advancement, and less interested in the job being some kind of 24 / 7 sacrifice.

The administrative entry-level worker of the past had that “24/7 devotion” to work and perceived the numbers of hours *at* work were in direct relation to the passion held *for* the work. There was a sense of righteousness in making the choice to work ‘overtime’ for no pay. The worker of old embraced the fluidity of job description, doing what was needed, irrespective of their expertise or interest, to get the art presented or performed. Work was socialization and family. Today’s young person holds different views. They want a concrete task, they want training, they want faster results, and faster ‘windows of opportunity.’ With their technological expertise, they see more avenues and shortcuts to success and for marketing their own work. In part this difference is due to the fact that previous arts leadership was in the position of inventing the field; the older leadership traces back to the founders of many of our current institutions and organizations. Current generations are arriving as employees – not founders - and thus are looking to “re-invent” the job.

One person summed up the feeling pervasive throughout the younger cohort Focus Groups that *“If upper management had the ability or inclination to restructure the organization so that*

*it was generationally friendlier, people would stay on longer”.*

“Younger workers should learn to exercise more patience. They are constantly getting frustrated about their career path, getting little things done in the perfect amount of time...basically, in regards to everything. I suppose that’s generational as well, but if they just learned patience, things would be a lot easier.”

But the older cohort members had their own litany of complaints and generational prejudices. *“I wish people on my staff would think about the bigger picture, as opposed to focusing on the intensity of smaller actions,”* said one. Added another: *“Younger cohorts need to learn to write more. No one writes anymore, and it’s a bad habit.”* And yet another mentioned, *“They need to learn manners. Basic stuff like phone skills, email etiquette, conversation tactics, language, etc. Also, I would love to see them stop using all the self-limiting speech.”* Another older cohort participant added, *“But, conversely, I would like to tell Boomers to stop expecting the younger generation to do it exactly their way. I would like to see Boomers let the younger generation do things the way they want.”*

- THE ENTRENCHED WAY OF DOING THINGS AS THEY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN DONE AS PART OF THE ORGANIZATION’S CULTURE WORKS AGAINST CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR NEW IDEAS AND NEW APPROACHES.

Arts organizations often reflect the values and ways of doing things of their founders and the long standing senior management, and there exists a ‘culture’ of doing things only one way. Universally deplored among younger cohort members was this perceived ingrained attitude of senior management in an institutionalized “way of doing things”, which seemed to be dispiriting and confounding to younger generations. There was the widespread feeling that the opposition to change was frequently a means to maintain the status quo. Resistance to change was seen as an unappealing management style to younger cohorts. Many found the attitude to be almost ‘insulting’. *“My boss wonders why we don’t have young actors staying in the Bay Area. It’s because we use the same thirty eight-year old actor to play the eighteen-year old part. God forbid we use new, young people.”*

- ACCEPTANCE OF STARVING ARTIST MENTALITY AND ASSUMPTION IT IS ‘OK’ TO TREAT EMPLOYEES ACCORDINGLY.

It is a given that the average arts organization may, from time to time, have both fundraising and cash flow problems. That arts organizations are resigned to forever being underfunded is antithetical to the positive approach of younger generations. Segments of the Focus Groups found this ‘Oliver Twist’ mentality depressing and demoralizing and thought it a factor keeping the sector from success. The attitude manifested itself in certain ways the younger cohort found burdensome and unacceptable. For example, several group members cited common paycheck delays due to organizational cash flow problems. Given the problem of being paid less than a living wage, these delays went beyond being annoyances. Worse, was the management assumption that this was the customary way of doing things, and acceptable to their employees. The assumption that management doesn’t need to explain cash shortfalls that necessitate late salary payments is both insulting and frustrating to younger employees – particularly those juggling inadequate ‘living wage’ compensation to cover necessities. The failure of management to appreciate the harsh realities that some junior employees must cope with spikes resentment. This ‘starving artist’ mentality was frequently accompanied by what was

perceived as a condescending attitude that younger employees should not complain, but be grateful to work in the arts. One person declared: *“One of my colleagues was treated as the ‘new girl’ for thirteen years. She finally got discouraged and left. The management has a very patronizing attitude, and refuses to accept advice. They have the ‘that’s the way we’ve always done it’ mentality. However, ironically, the ‘way’ they’ve ‘always done it’ is often the very reason for the low productivity. They refuse to change their minds, and refuse to accept any advice from the young.”* Another person added, *“There is a sense of ownership present with the ‘old-timer’ mentality they possess; a self-perpetuating culture. They are very hesitant to give responsibility to someone they don’t know.”*

- PERCEIVED DISRESPECTFUL ATTITUDE OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT TO JUNIOR EMPLOYEES

The lack of awareness of, and sensitivity to, generational differences resulted in what younger generations perceived was a disrespectful attitude towards their potential to make meaningful contributions to the organization, particularly in the area of new approaches and ideas. Millennials, and to a lesser extent, Gen Xers, repeatedly cited that senior management was either not interested in their ideas, paid lip-service to the claim of having an “open-door” policy to new ideas, or was simply too busy to want to encourage the younger generation’s desire to suggest changes in operations or policies.

The experience of one young Focus Group member is telling on the issue of trust and what it means: *“Constructive criticism is crucial,”* began this member. *“I once made a flyer for my organization. I presented it at a meeting, and everyone said they liked it. I made multiple efforts to ask if there was anything they wanted me to change about it, or if there was any room for improvement. They all said it was fine. The next thing I knew, I discovered the flyer was vetoed and was being outsourced without anyone saying anything to me. I never even knew what I did wrong. They could have given me the opportunity to learn from my mistakes, but they didn’t. I felt quite betrayed, and the incident negatively impacted my motivation and my trust towards my superiors.”*

(Note: not surprisingly, this person left their current organization within one month following the last Focus Group meeting.)

- LACK OF FEEDBACK

Too few senior managers bothered to thank employees for performing well. One Focus Group member characterized it this way: *“There is a failure to recognize that young people take pride in their work, and also that they are unique individuals whose distinctive personalities help the organization achieve its goals.”* Numerous focus group participants agreed that senior management was frequently stingy with its expression of appreciation for the contributions of the younger employees. *“Whenever I do get ‘positive’ feedback, it’s insulting because it’s not sincere; it’s routine,”* stated one. *“It’s almost as if they are reading from a manual on ‘how to compliment your workers’, and are merely checking it off the list like any other task.”*

- FAILURE TO INVEST IN CURRENT EMPLOYEES FOR RETENTION:

It was widely thought that the arts field fails to realize it is cheaper and more cost effective to retain current employees than to hire and train new ones. The younger cohorts expressed the opinion that this type of thinking put the arts sector (as a business) at a disadvantage to the private sector, and has resulted in a lack of confidence (on the part of the younger cohorts) that the arts leaders are astute business managers.

### **III. INCLUSION / COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES:**

- PERVASIVE PERCEPTION BY MILLENNIALS AND (TO A LESSER EXTENT) GEN XERS THAT THEY ARE EXCLUDED FROM BOTH INFORMATION ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION FOR WHICH THEY WORK, AND THE DECISION MAKING PROCESSES OF THAT ORGANIZATION.

Millennials and Gen Xers cited being excluded from the opportunity to get any sense of a “big picture” of the organization as a major complaint. One participant, in talking about the transfer of institutional memory, put it this way: *“All methods to transfer knowledge are employee-driven. There is little or no attempt made by the managers. There are closed doors on communication for no reason. These ‘doors’ are just there to preserve a certain level of authority.”*

- LACK OF VERTICAL COMMUNICATION WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS.

Younger workers complained that their knowledge of the operations of the whole organization was limited by their exclusion from communication about what was going on outside of their own department or job. They felt senior management saw no benefit to their being kept apprised of the workings and decisions outside of their limited spheres of responsibility and expertise. This excessive compartmentalization of the organization was often seen as confirmation that their ideas were not a valued priority. The younger cohorts saw this as a squandering of potential ideas for solutions to problems. As one younger cohort member stated: *“Show us the bigger picture. Give us the opportunity to get a glimpse into other fields. That would be huge.”*

The desire to contribute to the organization’s health in meaningful ways and to have some role in the decision making process thereto is one of the hallmarks of what younger generations want and expect. Frustration in this area was high. Younger cohort members likewise decried the lack of feedback from their supervisors. Said one participant: *“My generation values two-way communication more than the older generation does. Younger cohorts’ comments are not really welcome. The standard has been set that once you’ve earned your seniority (only then) is it more socially acceptable to comment and provide feedback.”*

- MILLENNIAL & GEN X PERCEPTION OF SEVERE DISCONNECT BETWEEN ORGANIZATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND STAFF DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS.

Our Focus Group participants believe there is a severe disconnect between Boards of Directors and line staff in most arts organizations. Board members have little appreciation for (and often little declared interest in) job descriptions of staff, and of what goes on operationally on a daily basis. Boards are insulated from organization staffs, and junior staffs are rarely given opportunity to interact with Board members. Possible Board to staff mentoring opportunities are squandered. Junior staffs are often excluded from Board meetings.

Focus Group members thought that closed board meetings – young people not invited nor allowed to attend meetings, and the lack of any formalized communications mechanisms

between Boards and Staffs, contributed to the isolation of younger staff members and their characterization as dispensable cogs in the wheels of the organization. They felt assigned a limited role in management, which in turn made younger employees feel undervalued and under challenged. Other complaints in the Board staff relationship were: 1) the failure of Boards to protect the financial health of organization; 2) their abrogation of their fundraising obligations, and 3) the sometimes penchant of Boards to micromanage programs.

- LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN JUNIOR LEVEL EMPLOYEE SKILLS:

Younger cohorts expressed their perception that senior arts organization managers seemed to lack confidence in their analytical skills, and their abilities. There was a feeling that their input wasn't wanted, and that it was often discouraged or ignored. As one participant put it: *"I dislike that I feel that there is such a gap in the organization's hierarchy –you're either an 'entry-level position' or the 'boss', and nothing in-between."* Focus Group members identified a widespread senior management fear of younger cohort employees implementing decisions in their own way – contrary to the way things have always been done – so often authority was not delegated at all. Focus Group members cited senior management as frequently justifying their doing the implementation of some decision themselves as simply a way to save time, ignoring the resulting feeling among younger staff that they were left out of both the decision making and communications loops.

The younger cohort Focus Group members thought senior management either refused to delegate authority,

"It's not so much that they fear you'll do a bad job, as it is that they fear you'll do a different job than they will, which would violate their code of 'the way we've always done it'."

or simply didn't know how to do it. Opined one participant: *"People leave not because they're not learning the skills, but because the management never learned the skills. They do not know how to delegate authority."*

This perceived bias against younger cohort abilities and ideas – even in areas where the young cohort may have superior expertise (e.g., current technology communications preferences of younger market etc.), led those in the younger groups to conclude that their contributions were not important in the organizational scheme, and that conclusion

negatively impacted their level of satisfaction in the job. Younger employees felt excluded, marginalized, patronized, distrusted, and disrespected. The failure of senior management to delegate authority was a major source of job dissatisfaction.

#### **IV. TRAINING / SKILLS ENHANCEMENT NEEDS:**

- THERE IS A HUGE UNMET DEMAND FOR INCREASED ACCESS TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES – INCLUDING TRAINING, MENTORING, JOB SHADOWING

A universally cited complaint was the lack of professional development as an integral part of the workplace. Younger focus group participants noted that there is a large unmet demand for increased training and mentoring in basic business management skills and that there is neither the time, money or inclination at the senior management level to meet this demand (or, in many instances, to even acknowledge its existence). Increased professional skills opportunities as a fundamental and integral part of the job experience is absolutely crucial and essential to both Millennials and Gen Xers - and its absence is a prime source of job dissatisfaction and cause of turnover. Moreover, lack of skills enhancement was thought to negatively impact the competence of younger employees and the level of their job performance. As one member of the younger cohort related: *“I was told to create a budget for the season and had no idea how to go about doing such a thing, and was never shown how it should be done.”*

- MILLENNIAL & GEN X SHARE THE PERCEPTION OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT’S LACK OF BASIC MANAGEMENT SKILLS.

Younger Focus Group participants opined that their senior managers were also in desperate need of professional development skills training in basic business applications, and in key personnel management skills, most notably in: i) how to delegate, and (ii) how not to micromanage. There was widespread agreement among the younger cohort participants that their supervisors (and many Executive Directors) were either unaware, or in denial, that they might lack basic business and people skills. *“They need to learn how to better manage people,”* said one Focus Group member, who then cautioned: *“Good luck convincing an executive director to go to management training. They’ll send*

*you off to training instead!”* Younger cohorts were particularly critical of older manager’s lack of technology skills and their level of comfort with newer technological applications.

## V. NETWORKING:

- THERE IS A PRONOUNCED LACK OF NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR JUNIOR MANAGEMENT EMPLOYEES WITHIN THEIR GENERATIONS.

One of the perks (for younger employees) of working within the arts sector is the potential to network with other young management / creative side employees. Focus Group members complained of a lack of networking opportunities within their own age cohort -- to share knowledge, ideas for problem solving, experiences and just generally expand their base of professional contacts. This bred feelings of isolation, and negatively impacted job satisfaction. There was also a stated need to have more opportunities within the wider arts sector to network and to bond with other generations than one’s own. Supporting peer networking opportunities for younger cohorts was thought be a way to unleash hidden potential talent and contributions to the health of the average arts organization.

## VI. WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT:

- GROSSLY INADEQUATE AND SEVERELY DATED TECHNOLOGY CAPACITY OF ARTS ORGANIZATIONS; LACK OF CURRENT TECHNOLOGY EXPERTISE BY SENIOR STAFF. CAVALIER ATTITUDE TOWARDS MAINTAINING TECHNOLOGY COMPETITIVENESS.

“The computer situation is a nightmare, there’s no connection to the outside world. The young employees at the organization are so much more adapted to technology, yet the management will not listen to us or accept advice on implementing a new system.”

Younger generations take advances in technology and the development of new applications as a ‘given’. The failure of arts organizations to maintain up-to-date and competitive technology (both hardware and software), provide ongoing technological training, and maintain a positive attitude towards being technologically current is

anathema to younger generations. *“We are not speaking the same technological language”* complained one member. Younger cohort Focus Group members were incredulous that arts organizations were so slow to adopt new communications / business technology applications, and too often employed outdated, unreliable equipment

(Computers) and felt strongly that this was a significant impediment to performing

“Their whole belief system is, ‘New technology? You’re kidding! It’s nothing but a luxury. You might as well buy diamond rings for everybody! There is this begging attitude they have as opposed to demanding and expecting, which is the way it should be done. Self-sacrifice doesn’t always balance out.”

productively. The constant “excuse making” by senior management justifying antiquated workplaces was not only unattractive to younger cohorts, but actually offensive. *“The company is totally behind on technology,”* said one person; *“the old guys barely know how to use email.”*

One Millennial noted: *“The directors should look to their own staff (for technology expertise) before looking elsewhere. My organization spent so much money on outside ‘youth info’ to obtain marketing information, completely ignoring the fact that half of their staff is under the age of thirty. All they had to do was ask. I could have told them about Facebook, or something, instead of them wasting thousands of dollars by doing needless outside research.”* Added another: *“The management doesn’t listen to us as far as getting updated computer systems because they’re caught up in this ‘welfare’ culture’ mentality.”*

- INADEQUATE EMPHASIS ON FUN AS PART OF THE WORKPLACE CULTURE.

According to our participants, it isn’t as though working for an arts organization isn’t fun; it’s that there are too few conscious attempts to integrate fun into the workplace environment and to make enjoyment of the work process a systemic priority. It’s as though senior management fails to grasp the role of fun within the organization’s operational matrix. As one Focus Group member observed: *“Once you get in, it’s an office job. It’s not about having fun, it’s about working hard. At least, that’s the message we’re receiving from the top down.”* Another member added, *“You have to like the chaotic, stressful work life, and see it as a challenge you are devoted to.”* Our Focus Group members thought that including “fun” as part of the everyday workplace matrix

was primarily a function of making the conscious decision to do it. *“Fun is not about money. It’s about mentality . Maybe we can’t afford all the pool tables and diet coke machines that Google has, but simply throwing money at people to make them have fun is the easy way out. With a little creativity, the workplace can be very fun,”* was a widely echoed sentiment.

- DISCONNECT FROM THE CREATIVE SIDE OF THE ARTS.

Focus Group members noted that one of the attractions of working in the field was the promise of being connected, even if indirectly, to the creative community, but complained that too often there was a lack of access within their organizations to that creative part of the arts for young administrators.

- DISINGENUOUSNESS OF ‘OPEN DOOR’ POLICY.

“They already have a pre-conceived notion against my opinion because I’m young”.

Millennial participants noted that there was a disconnect between the often stated policy of an open invitation to share new ideas (the “My office door is always open to you” stance) and the reality of the practice that being open to those ideas was really lip-service. Younger cohort members found this patronizing. *“They pretend to have an open-door policy, but when it comes down to it, the door is either closed, or they don’t value your opinion,”* said one person. *“And this is a problem which goes all the way up the chain, not just with immediate supervisors.”*

- ILLUSION OF DIVERSITY:

Diversity is a high priority to Millennials, but those Millennials in our groups thought that the promise of diversity within the arts sector was frequently illusory, and this was a definite turn-off. As one participant observed: *What we have is the appearance of diversity, which means we are employing statistical diversity versus utilizing the democratic practice of real diversity.*

## **VII. RECRUITMENT ISSUES:**

- TOO FEW ATTEMPTS TO RECRUIT NEW GENERATIONS TO ARTS ADMINISTRATION FIELD.

Focus Group participants thought there were inadequate attempts to acquaint high school and college students with arts administration as a viable career path, and that where there are existing intersections between the arts and those students (e.g., performances at schools, university job fairs, etc.) the arts were not taking advantage of those opportunities to tout the field opportunities. There is no long term strategy to make arts administration attractive to the next generation(s).

- LACK OF AWARENESS OF ARTS ADMINISTRATION AS A POSSIBLE CAREER PATH.

Most currently employed young people learned of arts administration indirectly – by volunteering or word of mouth. The Focus Group members strongly thought the Arts sector needs to do a better job informing and educating young people that the *business* of arts needs and wants young people. The existing ties to schools (performances, instruction et. al.) were thought to be under utilized as a means to promote arts administration career awareness.

- NONPROFIT STRUCTURE AS AN OUTDATED BUSINESS MODEL:

A number of participants noted that the basic arts organization business model is not entrepreneurial enough for the younger cohort; that it is too steeped in past assumptions. Senior staff was thought to have a resistance to new ways of organizing business to be competitive, with the consequence of a failure to recognize younger cohort comfort levels with a changing world.

- POORLY DESIGNED INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS:

Our group members thought Internship Programs were excellent tools to recruit new / future talent to the field, but thought current efforts failed to provide interns with meaningful work and were squandering an opportunity to develop a “farm system” of next generation administrators.

## ADVANTAGES, ASSETS & OPPORTUNITIES:

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Round II of the Focus Group meetings centered on the participant cohorts identification of the advantages, assets and opportunities in the sector's favor in terms of recruiting and retaining new talent within the arts administrator ranks. In this session, we asked the participants to delineate those elements and situations that made working in arts administration attractive to them, and to discuss how the field might better exploit those factors to maximize its competitive edge and to better manage the generations within our workforce.

Those positive factors included:

### I. NATURE OF WORK AND POSITIVE IMPACT ON SOCIETY:

Focus Group participants universally cited the high level of satisfaction of working in the arts as positively contributing to the betterment of society. The attraction of being involved with creative people and creative enterprises was touted as compensation for some of the negatives

"The number one thing that keeps people around is not income, but tangible outcome. It's the idea of, 'Wow, I slaved for over a year, but we pulled it off'. The number two thing is our positive impact on civic culture. There is an intrinsic value."

in working in the field.

It is the very nature of the work that is so enormously appealing.

This was true whether or not the individual was also a self-identified practicing artist. The opportunity to work along side creative energy and endeavors and to see tangible results of one's efforts was cited as the principal attraction of the field, and the job satisfaction from the nature of the work was enough to offset a litany of negatives. Unquestionably, younger cohorts see the arts as the attraction.

The camaraderie that exists in arts organizations was thought to be an asset. *"There is a kind of 'us v. the world' feeling in working in the arts, a sense of a collective struggle for something good."*

One of the older cohort Focus Group members summed up their collective view with this observation: *“The main positive we have is creating art. That is the main allure. There is so much negativity surrounding the field as of now, we need to revitalize why we got in this in the first place.”*

## II. FLEXIBILITY IN WORK ENVIRONMENT:

- SCHEDULES – There seems to be across the board flexibility in work schedules available to all arts organization employees. *“We are more flexible than corporate. Nine-to-five was not conducive to my everyday life. I returned to the arts primarily for more flexibility in my work schedule,”* one member said
- CASUAL ATMOSPHERE – Numerous participants pointed to the casual work atmosphere as an attractive aspect of their work. As one younger cohort Focus Group member said: *“Non-profits are fairly flexible in more ways than one. First, there is more of a tolerance for employee uniqueness than there is in the private sector. This is not exactly a shirt-and-tie type of job. Second, it is not exactly a nine-to-five job either. While we do work overtime (and aren’t compensated), they are not strict about the time schedule itself. Sometimes it is better to have random hours.”* Another member added, *“They acknowledge they take up a lot of your weeknights and weekends, so if you decide you want to take time off, they will let you.”*
- SUPPORT FOR ARTISTIC SIDE ENDEAVORS – Focus Group participants expressed appreciation for receiving support from their supervisors, peers and the field for their independent artistic interests and entrepreneurial side activities as an attractive aspect of their working environment.
- COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT – There was widespread appreciation for the collaborative nature of their work, and the openness of people in the arts sector to work together. Our participants appreciated that there were increasing opportunities for collaboration and bonding

*“No one works in non-profit for the big pay check at the end of the week. There is no big pay check, so those extra days off, and all the cool people you work with and the way you trust them really make a difference and make you want to stick around.”*

within their creative fields.

One participant put it this way: *“All our little tribes are part of one bigger tribe, and this is not available in private sector.”* Several group members agreed that the variety and *“never knowing what the day was going to entail”* were positive aspects of working in arts administration, as was working *“with highly educated and intelligent people.”*

### **III. NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES:**

ADMINISTRATIVE: While Focus Group members complained about a lack of institutionalized peer or organizational networking opportunities, it was acknowledged that there were informal opportunities to meet, know, and learn from peers and those with greater experience. As one member noted: *“There are so many things your organization can provide you with that are priceless. They can include you in a database that it would ordinarily take five or ten years to get on. They can introduce you to people with a lot of talent and experience that can mentor you, or help you get started. Generally, the whole idea of community and networking is something money cannot buy that an arts organization can give you.”*

ARTISTIC NETWORKING - Those of our participants, who were engaged in artistic pursuits of their own, appreciated the access to creative resources, facilities and to other artists. For this group, this asset was of primary importance to working in the field. *“I have great networking at my organization, and I love how I can get to meet so many interesting and useful people,”* said one member. Another member said, *“I work at an organization which promotes slam poetry, hip-hop and free speech for youth. We have a recording studio right in our office. Both the staff and the kids have free access to it at all times. Not only can the kids we are working with feel comfortable to record their voice or music whenever they are inspired to, but the organization is also providing that opportunity for staff members, acknowledging that most of them are artists themselves.”* Another added that: *“The exposure to, and the potential for creating personal connections with, established artists is a big deal to me.”*

### **IV. PROMISE OF DIVERSITY:**

A majority of the Focus Group members thought the overall diversity and the potential of diversity was an attractive part of working in the arts.

## V. ARTISTIC LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:

There was widespread recognition of the many opportunities for junior employees to learn skills of the artistic trades (e.g., theater, music, museum curation, et. al) as to technical skills (staging, directing, lighting etc.). These opportunities were particularly important to those employees who wanted to pursue their own artistic development.

## VI. JACK OR JILL OF ALL TRADES:

Almost universally appreciated was the fact that all employees in the arts, of necessity, had to wear many 'hats' in the

course of their employment, and, even if self-taught, the result was grounding in a wide variety of technical and

"You become a jack-of-all-trades in the non-profit world. You have to constantly reinvent yourself. You become more of an independent thinker, you think outside of the box. In the corporate culture, you simply 'butter your way up to the top', whereas independent thinking here will get you far."

general business skills. Our group members thought that the lack of budget, time and support resources and the reality of thus having to juggle multiple tasks virtually necessitated gaining experience in a range of skills, and with that, a larger view of the whole of an organization. One participant summed it up this way: *"As an administrator in my theatre organization, I've learned so many technical skills, such as lighting, staging and more. If I ever wanted to move outside of administration, the organization has taught me the skills to do so."* Another person agreed and added, *"Nearly fifty percent of my income comes from outside the organization. Using all the technical skills I've learned as a music producer and sound engineer in my organization, I was able to set up my own recording studio and start a business on the side."*

## VII: PERKS:

FREE TICKETS – Virtually everyone cited the access to free tickets to performances as a valuable perk of the field. On many 'wish lists' was the hope that somehow access to free tickets could become more organized and centralized as an option, thus allowing for even greater use of this perk.

## **VIII. GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES :**

### **ARTISTIC EXPERIMENTATION:**

Participants cited the relative pervasiveness of an attitude wherein risk taking and experimental failure was not only acceptable, but thought normal. This attitude was thought to center in areas of Artistic experimentation, but also carried over into the business management area and was a major plus in feeling comfortable in their discharging their responsibilities. One participant noted: *“At least in smaller arts organizations there is more room to take risk, if for no other reason that the money is so tight, there is less to lose. Risk taking is just more common and encouraged”*.

## **IX. RECOGNITION WITHIN THE FIELD:**

While not enough recognition existed in doing their jobs as administrators, our group members thought there were opportunities for recognition in their artistic pursuits.

## **X. EASIER TRANSITION FROM COLLEGE THAN PRIVATE SECTOR:**

Our participants thought it was easier to move from college to a job in the arts than it was (or would be) to make the transition to work in the private sector, and that was thought to be an advantage. *“I have never felt that not having a master’s degree held me back in the arts, whereas in the private sector I think it really would,”* one member said. *“A degree is not always the first thing they look at in the arts. I have never felt like less of an employee for not having a master’s degree. If I do decide to go back to school, it will not be for the industry, because they’ve already acknowledged I have the skill and experience. It will be for me.”* Another member agreed by saying, *“I didn’t even finish college, and I’ve had real-life experience in arts administration. There is respect given to you, college or no college.”*

## FOCUS GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS:

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Round III of the Focus Group meetings was centered on identifying specific recommendations from the participants as to changes that would improve the workplace culture for, and the management of, the relationships between the different generations. We sought recommendations to: 1) individual arts organizations, and 2) funders.

Participants were specifically asked prior to this final session to bring with them at least one written recommendation for each of the two categories. It was stipulated that the recommendations to the individual organizations should take into consideration the amount of staff management time each recommendation would take to be implemented, overseen and managed, as well as the financial cost of the design, launch, and ongoing oversight and management that would be involved, and that recommendations to funders should take into consideration reaching the largest number of individuals and / or organizations, in the quickest time frame, and in the most efficient and effective manner. Focus Group participants were asked to also consider the nature, scope and permanence in the change of behaviors of implementation of potential funder recommendations. Finally, the session for each Focus Group was devoted to an exchange of ideas, reactions and thoughts to the proffered recommendations, and to prioritizing the recommendations.

While each arts organization will have different challenges and different circumstances that will govern its individual approach to managing the generations within its workplace, many of the recommendations herein are applicable to all arts organizations.

## **SPECIFIC 'ACTION STEP' RECOMMENDATIONS:**

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### **#1. PROMOTE GENERATIONAL ISSUES AWARENESS / SENSITIVITY:**

#### a. CREATE AND DISTRIBUTE EDUCATIONAL / INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS:

There was widespread Focus Group consensus that there needs to be a systemic effort to educate and inform arts administrators (across *all* generations – focusing particularly on senior management) as to the generational differences at play in the arts workforce and the likely collision points that may arise. The Focus Group participants were near universal in praise of the value of the limited materials outlining generational profiles provided them as part of this project, and for the opportunity the project offered for discussion and consideration of the issues. They strongly recommended that an expanded version of these kinds of materials be widely distributed within the field as a first step in raising the awareness and appreciation of the importance of the generational issues challenges.

#### TOOL KIT:

It was suggested that funders support the design and creation of a Tool Kit that would be able individual arts organizations to understand and appreciate the generational differences in arts organization workplaces, where generational intersections were likely to create collisions, how to address those issues to minimize negative fallout, and to generally improve workplace conditions based on the management of generational interactions. The kit would include methods to hold internal focus group gatherings, involve Board of Directors in the process and enact model solutions customized to individual organization situations. The kit would come in printed form, be downloadable online, and serve as the centerpiece of complimentary training sessions.

The Younger cohort Focus Group members were quick to caution that dissemination of any kind of materials designed to explain and inform arts professionals of the differences between how generations view work and the workplace, no matter how comprehensive or well designed, needed to be accompanied by some sort of in-

person training and interactive involvement, or run the risk that they would never be accessed by the intended audience. There was the widespread belief that the usual time constraints of the profession, coupled with both a pronounced lack of interest in the subject matter and / or a state of denial that generational differences posed any real problems or challenges, would render resource materials (by themselves) ineffective as a means to educate managers as to why they should address the generational challenges.

“If you don’t have some way to compel senior management to learn why generational differences are important and how they might face the challenges, they simply won’t do it. Sending them materials without some kind of other involvement with them wouldn’t work. The materials would likely end up in a box somewhere – never opened.”

Another older cohort participant agreed suggesting that *“It shouldn’t be about ‘one size fitting all’. Getting young people involved in certain things may not work in certain organizations. We have to acknowledge we are working with models, and many of these suggestions may not*

*apply to some of them. If we continue to set models of what organizations should look like, it becomes like a straightjacket. By enforcing one model exclusively, we are limiting the diversity of organizations themselves, albeit unintentionally.”*

The older cohort group thought funders need to be more active in driving organizational behavior changes. As one put it: *“Non-profit organizations have become so desperate for a check that they will say anything to get it. There needs to be greater accountability, and funders should state what they want more clearly. The benefits of that will trickle down to the rest of the organization, because if foundations become more rigid in their criteria, the end results will be more real and long-term.”*

Added another person: *“The funders should also focus on organizational assessments - go in and see what is going on, who is doing what, and ensure that tasks are being properly delegated.”*

♦ **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Funders should be more pro-active in setting minimum standards of action for grantees, and in tracking compliance.
2. Funders should support / fund production of generational understanding materials and training sessions in conjunction therewith.
3. Organizations should educate and inform all segments of their organization about generational differences and should engage them in a dialogue / discussion about the potential impact of those differences.

b. SENSITIVITY TRAINING EVENT(S) OPTIONS:

There were several ideas put forth as to how to best use a tool-kit or other generational materials, in conjunction with some kind of training, to accomplish the goal of creating awareness of, and sensitivity to, generational challenges in the workplace, including:

i. ONE DAY / HALF DAY REGIONAL CONFERENCE:

By far the larger segment of Focus Group participants preferred a one day (or half day) regional conference attended by cross generational arts administrators from all over the Northern California territory. It was thought that to be of value, attending local arts organizations would need to send both senior and junior staff, and, ideally, even Board members. Such a conference would include plenary and breakout sessions on a wide variety of generation issues – from a general profiling / context session, to workshops on such issues as (partial list):

- a. Recognition / Acknowledgment
- b. Rewards / Perks
- c. Fun
- d. Professional Development / Training
- e. Delegation of authority
- f. Mentoring ./ Job Shadowing
- g. Alternatives to monetary compensation

- h. Board relationships & support
- i. Networking
- j. Technology
- k. Communication
- l. Recruitment

Workshops / Seminars / Panels / Presentations / Lectures might include  
(partial list of actual topic suggestions):

- a. Generational vocabulary differences
- b. Generational expectations surprises
- c. Cross generational team-building challenges and benefits
- d. Intra-organizational communications dynamics
- e. Appreciation & Acknowledgment – the politics of saying Thank You
- f. Opportunities for professional growth
- g. Diversity – real v. lip service
- h. The two-way annual performance review deconstructed
- i. Meaningful Rewards Programs that don't cost much.
- j. High employee retention models
- k. Workplace continuity & the dynamics of organizational change
- l. Outmoded organizational structures
- m. Generational collaboration models

Panels would include cross generational participation, as the conference would seek to encourage direct conversation and dialogue as well as to educate and inform.

Focus Group members acknowledged this would be a relatively expensive and, at least for the planning stages, somewhat time consuming alternative. Members also questioned whether or not senior staff would attend absent either the mandate or imprimatur of one the organization's major funders.

- ii. SMALL GROUP SEMINARS / WORKSHOPS / FOCUS GROUP APPROACH:

A number of Focus Group participants actually preferred a smaller convening approach in the belief that smaller seminar / workshops on the topic would be more personal, allow for more interaction and promote a deeper understanding of the issues and their importance than would a larger event. These participants favored holding half day workshop / seminars in each of the nine Bay Area counties.

iii. COACHING:

Another suggestion was for a Coach to be sent to work with small groups of organizations for short periods of time (e.g., half day). Participants recognized that this approach might be too time consuming and costly to be effective in reaching a large number of organizations in a relatively short period of time.

c. CREATE A MINI GRANT PROGRAM FOR CUSTOMIZED GENERATIONAL TRAINING:

A mini-grant program (\$50,000 to \$75,000 total) wherein arts organizations could apply for a small grant (\$1000 to \$4000) to be used to address generational issues facing each organization was suggested as an addendum (and alternative) to the day long regional conference idea for the funding community's consideration. The thinking behind this suggestion was that the challenges of generational management within each organization vary widely, and that each organization would best be served by customizing its approach to addressing those challenges. It was thought that it might be difficult to attract attendees to the day long regional conference, and that if attendance at such a conference (designed to inform and educate organizations about all of the generational challenges and the many ways to address those challenges) was connected to a mini grant opportunity, as a pre-condition for applying for the mini-grant, attendance would be greatly improved.

d. PROVIDE THE SERVICES OF A HUMAN RESOURCES CONSULTANT:

There was the sense that most of the generational challenges were, at their core, H.R. issues. Recognizing that arts organizations typically lacked the size and budget to

employ in-house H.R. expertise, it was suggested that if funders were to engage the services of an independent consultant with expertise in H.R. issues in general, and generational issues specifically, and then make that consultant available to arts organizations as an independent resource, that individual arts organizations could avail themselves on a customized, as needed, basis to help them to address their specific issues.

## **#2. IMPROVE THE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT:**

### a. PROVIDE RESOURCES:

#### i. GENERIC EMPLOYEE / POLICY HANDBOOK:

Several participants suggested that if their organization had an Employee Procedures and Organizational Policy Handbook available, that resource could address questions employees might, from time to time ask, and that the individual employees would then have a resource to which they could turn, on their own time schedule, to address their questions. It was thought that the largest obstacle to their organization creating such a manual was a lack of time to construct such a handbook, and the lack of knowledge as to what it would / should contain. Participants thought that if funders were to provide a generic model for the creation of such a handbook that could be adapted to the needs of each organization, their organization would be much more likely to create one.

#### ii. CAREER PATH ADVICE & COUNSELING RESOURCE MATERIALS & TRAINING:

One of the most common complaints from Millennials and Gen Xers was the lack of any access to advice & counseling as to how to construct a viable career path within the nonprofit arts sector – a service believed to be widely available in most private sector industries. As one group member put it: *“You are looked at as if something is wrong with you if you ask for a one-on-one career path discussion.”* The suggestion was made for funders to create a program that would train senior management how to provide such advice, and create materials available (printed materials, online, seminars / workshops) to junior staff on career paths in arts administration.

◆ **RECOMMENDATION:**

Funders should support training in arts administration career path counseling, and individual organizations should make such counseling available as a matter of course.

b. **RECOGNITION:**

i. **FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM:**

It was suggested by several participants that creation of an Arts Fellowship Program – that would allow selected junior staff the opportunity to participate in a Fellowship Program wherein accomplished junior staff would have the opportunity to learn skills and study other organizations - would be a perk to strive for, a “statement” to the younger generations that they are ‘valued’ and a reward for exemplary young leaders (see Training section below)

ii. **BONUS SUBSIDY GRANT PROGRAM:**

While it was generally recognized by the younger cohorts that substantial increases in entry level employee compensation was likely impossible for most arts organizations in the current funding climate, many participants thought that even small bonuses paid for exemplary work or for milestone longevity at an organization (e.g. one year, five years et. al.) would be highly valued and send a message that the field was aware of the non-competitive nature of their compensatory policies and was trying to, at least, do something to address the issue. It was thought that funders might create a grant program pool of funds to be used (judiciously) for this purpose.

c. **PERKS:**

i. **TICKET EXCHANGE COORDINATION:**

One of the most cited perks of working in the arts sector was the access to free tickets to arts events – including events / performances outside one’s own organization. It was thought this perk could be significantly expanded if there were some organization or person whose charge was to independently coordinate available complimentary tickets for the younger arts administrator cohort and make access to that expanded ticket brokerage available online. It was further suggested that tickets to arts events might be brokered to local community businesses in exchange for goods and / or services (e.g., meals at restaurants, free dry cleaning, and coffee at Starbucks etc.) and that those

exchanged for goods and / or services could be provided as perks to arts organization staff.

ii. ARTIST ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORT:

a. GRANT INCUBATION PROGRAM:

Another oft cited perk of working in the field was the support (at least in word, if not deed) for younger employees' own independent artistic endeavors. It was thought that funders might provide a pool of funds to encourage and nourish those independent, artistic efforts.

b. TRAINING:

In lieu of a direct financial support program for younger employee artistic pursuits, it was thought that a training program (materials – printed or online), workshops / seminars that focused on artistic entrepreneurship would be valuable.

◆ **RECOMMENDATION:**

Individual organizations should use every opportunity to acknowledge, recognize, thank and reward employees for their contributions.

d. COMMUNICATION:

- i. Expand communication to include all employees so as to provide the “bigger picture” of the organization and promote the value of inclusion.
- ii. Use generationally friendly, effective and appropriate means of communication wherever possible.

◆ **RECOMMENDATION:**

Improve vertical communication within the organization to keep all employees informed, in the loop, and aware of the ‘bigger picture’

e. ADVICE FOR SENIOR MANAGERS:

- i. Don't micromanage everything.

- ii. Delegate authority more. As one participant noted: *“Our senior managers are not incapable. They are just overextended. And the reason they are overextended is because they do not delegate. It’s a vicious Catch Twenty-Two. Being a good leader means being a good leader without making yourself do all the work.”* Added another: *This is what a boss in a non-profit organization should be able to do - articulate each person’s purpose, yet be able to delegate authority enough to keep the workplace diverse and functioning.”*
- iii. Trust the skills and competency of the young people you hire.
- iv. Don’t stay wedded to the past. Allow for new ways of doing things by younger workers.

**# 3. PROVIDE MORE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES:**

a. TRAINING:

Second only to promoting an expanded general awareness of the existence of generation issues and the need for sensitivity thereto, was the plea for increased professional development and management / technical skills training. Both Gen Xers and Millennials have an insatiable appetite for professional development; they want to learn more and improve their skills. It is a critical need to them. The preferred method as expressed by our focus groups was personal training via workshops, seminars, presentations, lectures – with frequency and location variable options. Online and ipod accessibility was appreciated, but not the method of choice. As one member put it: *“You lose so much potential with online training.”*

b. MENTORING:

Group participants recognized the prohibitive nature of the cost of personal coaching, yet thought part time mentoring was a viable option.

i. WITHIN THE ARTS SECTOR:

It was thought funders might create a program to engage the services of a consultant to help individual organizations deal with the challenges of heavy workloads, lack of available time and expertise in providing mentors for junior staff. It was also thought junior staff might themselves provide mentoring to senior staff in areas they have expertise (e.g., internet /

computer sophistication). Such a program might transcend single organizations and create PEER Panels.

One older cohort participant agreed: *“The foundations should support mentoring programs and have them be a two-way street, and the funding should be for both the mentor and the mentored.”* Another added: *“There should be a pairing up of mid-size companies and smaller companies for mentoring programs and opportunities.”*

ii. BROKERED WITH PRIVATE SECTOR:

A more expensive program for funders to support would be to broker mentoring relationships between arts administrators (junior and senior) with private sector company executives and other employees.

b. CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE SUBSIDY:

Too few junior staffers are ever invited to attend arts conferences, and the principal cited reason is cost. It was thought that funders might provide scholarship support to junior staff to address the absence of young people at these conferences – thus facilitating their opportunities to learn more about their chosen field, and to network with peers and more senior staff.

c. ANNUAL REVIEW TRAINING SOURCE MATERIALS:

The benefits of an annual performance review as a method of feedback was frequently cited as a real need. While some organizations offered these reviews, many did not. It was felt that senior management at many organizations did not know how important such reviews are, of their value to both the employees and to the organization, and further lacked the knowledge and skill to effectively conduct such reviews. It was thought funders might provide training or materials to empower senior staff to conduct valuable, meaningful employee performance reviews and that provision of such technical assistance would put an imprimatur of importance on the practice, thus creating awareness. Younger cohort participants strongly encouraged such technical assistance to include that such reviews would be two way – senior staff reviewing junior staff and vice versa. As one member put it: *“It would be substantially more beneficial if it was a two-way street, but unfortunately it’s not.”*

Such a system already exists in some organizations, as one participant noted: “We don’t exactly have an annual review, but my executive director sits down and talks to people at the end of each day in what she calls ‘human time’. It is a feedback session which features communication on both ends, a real ‘two-way street’, and it works great.” But another added: “We’re supposed to have annual reviews but we never do.”

◆ **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Funders should support widespread, ongoing availability of professional development / skills enhancement opportunities for all generations of arts administrators. Organizations should include an annual budget line item to support professional development.
2. Funders should support and organizations should institutionalize periodic, two-way supervisor / employee performance reviews and feedback sessions.

**#4. MAINTAIN THE ORGANIZATION’S TECHNOLOGY COMPETENCY (SOFTWARE AND HARDWARE):**

Younger participants universally cited their frustration, disappointment and disbelief at the outdated level of technology and proficiency at their organizations. They cited both the lack of up-to-date equipment in the workplace (computers and software) and the proficiency and comfort level in using current software applications. When compared to the private sector this deficiency was pronounced.

a. **EQUIPMENT UPDATE SUBSIDY:**

It was thought funders might create a program to allow arts organizations to purchase (discounted or over time) current state-of-the-art equipment. Such updated equipment would, it was thought, dramatically increase productivity and job satisfaction levels.

b. **APPLICATIONS TRAINING SUPPORT:**

As important to modern equipment, was having *all* staff (including senior management) trained in all the latest software applications. It was thought many

junior level employees could provide this training to senior staff were they open to such opportunity (which they are largely not). One older cohort Focus Group member suggested that: *“Funders should have joint ventures with hardware and software firms, guaranteeing that their grantees will be constantly updated on new technology. This helps solve one of the aspects of generational conflict, being that the Gen X’s and Millennials are consistently frustrated by the lack of current technology in their organizations.”*

◆ **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Funders should support organizational efforts to maintain up-to-date technology.
2. Organizations should budget for, and implement technology updates on an annual basis.

**#5. EXPAND THE BOARD OF DIRECTOR / STAFF INTERSECTIONS:**

a. TRAINING:

It was suggested funders provide direct training support to arts organization Boards of Directors in generational issues. It was thought such training might be a means to encourage Boards to recruit younger generation members to their ranks.

Commenting on the disconnect between boards and line staff, one person observed: *“The executive director should work with the board to solicit ideas. Everyone is accountable to the board, but who is the board accountable to? There should be a shift in responsibilities at times so things can be mutual.”*

b. COMMUNICATION:

It was suggested that staff be allowed to attend Board Meetings, and that Board discussions and resolutions be widely and timely communicated to staff.

c. MENTORING PROGRAM:

Specifically, it was suggested funders encourage and equip Boards to mentor younger staff in basic management skills one on one. It was also suggested Boards might provide valuable perks to younger cohorts in the form of financial planning counseling or the like.

c. APPOINT YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE BOARD:

It was widely thought that arts organizations should appoint younger people to their Boards. Doubt was expressed that would happen in many cases absent some external pressure to do so (e.g., it being a requirement for a grant). Some group members expressed concern that even if one or two younger people were appointed to Boards, they wouldn't be taken seriously. One person observed: *'There's a difference between getting young people on the board and having people actually listen to them. I can name an instance where the organization lost over fifteen thousand dollars because they wouldn't listen to a younger board member. They were investing all this money in a web program, and they were repeatedly advised not to, until finally they spent fifteen grand on something that they could have gotten for practically free.'*

◆ **RECOMMENDATION:**

1. Funders should mandate appointment of young people to grantee Boards as a condition precedent to funding.
2. Board meetings should (at least sometimes) be open to staff attendance.
3. Board members should be informed of staff job descriptions.

**#6. EXPAND NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES:**

Perhaps the single most desired (as opposed to the most 'needed') support cited by Focus Group participants is help in creating more peer networking opportunities for Millennials and Gen Xers.

a. REGION WIDE ORGANIZATION:

There were several versions of the same general idea: to wit, financial support (principally in the form of a consultant, secondarily in the form of a small first year budget) to help in the creation and launch of a region wide young arts administrator networking organization that would:

- i. Be self-governing, and ultimately self-sustaining (via fundraising events, minimal dues or otherwise).
- ii. Hold regularly scheduled professional development training events (workshops, roundtables, lectures, panel presentations, seminars et. al) as well as regularly scheduled open house and other social events.

- iii. Raise important issues from the Millennial / GEN X perspectives.
- iv. Conduct simple research – surveys, member authored White Papers et. al. on Generational Issues, convene stakeholder and other focus groups.
- v. Create young professionals communications mechanisms (e.g., newsletter, website, listserv, database.)
- vi. Create a next generation mentoring project
- vii. Create career path counseling tools.

[Note: It was suggested this effort might piggyback on existing Emerging Leader efforts – at least in the San Jose venue.]

**◆ RECOMMENDATION:**

Organizations and funders should support networking opportunities within individual organizations, and with the wider field for all generations.

**#7. IMPROVE EFFORTS AT FUTURE RECRUITMENT:**

a. K-12 PERFORMANCE INTERSECTIONS:

There was agreement that the arts are not taking advantage of existing opportunities to inform and educate young people (K-12 and college students) that arts administration exists as a viable career path option. It was thought that inclusion of an explanation of the business side of the nonprofit arts and the role of arts administrators be incorporated into (via funder supported short presentations (video, oral, power point etc. and / or printed materials) every arts organization’s school performance and training program (musical instrument, dance, theater, writing etc.) with follow-up access to an arts administrator career website.

b. COLLEGE / JOB FAIR PRESENCE:

Funders should also underwrite general and specific efforts to maintain an arts administration career path presence at college and other local job fairs. Support should include development of materials to facilitate individual arts organizations taking the initiative to participate in such job fair like events

c. CAREER PATH MATERIALS / WEBSITE:

Creation of a website explaining the world of arts administration and career paths therein, touting the benefits of involvement, and perhaps serving as an internship and job offer site would, it was suggested, be of enormous benefit to recruitment efforts.

d. INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS:

There was substantial discussion on Internship Programs and widespread feeling that such programs were excellent recruitment tools – if intelligently designed and adequately managed. Project Based work was repeatedly suggested to avoid interns spending time exclusively on perfunctory tasks. As one member observed:

*““Organizations need to create a special project for interns so that being an intern is not boring like working at any other corporate company. We should show interns that the work they do has an outcome, a visible value.”* Added another participant: *“Giving interns more important responsibilities that can be generation-specific is one of the first steps in the long-term goal of empowering young people more.”*

Oversight was cited as essential to Internship program success (and currently as an obstacle in that staff oversight time is generally a scarce resource.) One participant said: *“The largest problem with internships in organizations is the lack of staff to mentor and train them.”* It was suggested that Interns be paid, and that internship programs be combined with other efforts as part of a synergistic approach to recruitment. *“Internship programs need to outline what skills the interns are going to be building and which ones will be required. Each employee gets a book from the organization. Everyday, they chronicle what they are learning. At the end of the internship, they review all the skills they sought out to have learned and see if the final experience met their expectations”* suggested one participant. Another suggested that informing young people about the opportunities in arts administration should be in generationally appropriate forms, and offered: *“Funding foundations should release a **comic-book tip-book** on how to run an arts organization. We could put it on the organizations’ websites as well. Rather than boring, seventy-odd page reports, this would be something more generationally friendly, that youth would be more likely to read.”*

There was a consensus that few senior administrators really knew how to manage an internship program effectively. One participant thought this: *“The change of behavior needs to be done on two levels: within the individual organization and on a systemic level, across the sector; we need to both train the staff in how to run an internship program and then train the interns at the same time.”*

◆ **RECOMMENDATION:**

Funders should consider support for project based internship programs, arts administration career path websites and expanded job fair / college campus presence as ways to support sector wide recruitment efforts. Organizations should educate and inform students as to Arts Administration as a viable career as part of their K-12 outreach programs.

## CLOSING ANALYSIS:

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Every sector, every industry is charged with recruiting and retaining superior talent. The nonprofit arts sector has unique challenges and opportunities in this area that must be dealt with systemically if we are to attract new talent, maximize retention of talent, and optimize employee productivity and efficiency.

The impact of generational issues is, by and large, news to our field. The fact that generational differences affect recruitment, retention, and job satisfaction (of all generations, not just younger ones), as well as how well we do, what we do, is widely unknown to our management teams. It simply isn't on their radar screens. To the extent we are failing to capitalize on the skills, ideas, talent and energy younger generations within our ranks potentially bring to our organizations, it behooves us to figure out ways to optimize those assets.

The Focus Group Participant Surveys and the Focus Group discussions noted some marked differences in what senior management thought younger employees believed or wanted, and what those junior staff members actually believed and wanted. Clearly it would be beneficial in managing the generations, if management had a better and more accurate reading on the beliefs and attitudes of the younger generational workforce, and relied less on erroneous assumptions and perceptions.

If we want the nonprofit arts sector to address the challenges of generational differences, and change behavior within our sector –

- So as to improve future recruitment efforts,
- Create a workplace environment that will help to increase job satisfaction, productivity and efficiency, and
- Help us in our efforts to retain good people

then the Focus Group feedback suggests that our first challenge is to educate and make aware the entire field:

- (i) That there are generational differences in our workplaces
- (ii) What those differences are
- (iii) That those differences create unique challenges for us as managers and planners, and
- (iv) That how we manage those differences directly impacts our ability to recruit and retain dedicated, skilled employees, and to optimize their positive contributions.

We know by experience that Reports and Tool Kits often go unread, unheeded and get quickly lost - and with them the issues are buried and forgotten. Any attempt to create awareness of, and sensitivity to, the generational challenges (and opportunities) should include not just the creation of educational / informational resource materials, but, at the least, some minimal support in the form of personal training (or reinforcement) of the issue(s).

Any attempt to squarely face generational differences issues and craft strategic approaches to identified challenges must include considerations of:

- Financial Costs – how much money will it cost to implement specific responses? Over what period of time? What will be the source of that money?
- Time – how much time will it take to do a needs assessment, to do individual organization analysis, to educate staff, board and core constituencies, to design, implement, oversee and evaluate responses / programs to identified challenges?
- Expertise – who on staff is qualified to be the point person within an organization to deal with generational issues and how will that person acquire the background knowledge and expertise to competently deal with the challenges?
- Prioritization – how high on the agenda can individual organizations afford to put this matter? What sacrifices will be necessary to deal with it? What gains will likely be made? Is the cost worth the projected benefit?
- Funder desired outcomes – what do funders hope to achieve by involvement in this kind of initiative? What are the funding priorities? What are the desired outcomes?

At some point the arts sector will need to address the issues of: 1) compensation - so that we provide a “living wage” to entry level employees; 2) opportunities for advancement within organizations and / or the field; and 3) career path counseling. Provision of ongoing professional development and skills training should be of immediate concern, not just to attract and retain new talent, but to increase the efficiency and proficiency of our workforce. Finally, the sector must work to improve inclusion of young workers by better communication and the delegation of more real decision making authority to those younger workers.

One final suggestion the funding community might wish to consider: The Focus Group participants strongly encouraged funders to create small, working younger cohort advisory groups that could continue the kind of dialogue began in this experiment to offer insight, perspective, ideas and informed opinions about the roles and behavior of junior level employees in the arts administration field. These small groups should meet regularly and frequently in an atmosphere of open dialogue and frankness, and funders should tap into the advice and counsel this kind of group might offer (as one of their sources of consultation) in defining and informing their goals and objectives, their program offerings and their grant making protocols.

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