



GENDER EQUITY IN THE CHARITABLE SECTOR

A learning guide for next generation charitable sector leaders

2015 American Express NGen Fellows convened by Independent Sector



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About Independent Sector

Independent Sector is the leadership network for nonprofits, foundations, and corporations committed to advancing the common good. Our nonpartisan coalition's networks collectively represent tens of thousands of organizations and individuals locally, nationally, and globally.

Our Vision & Purpose

We envision a world of engaged individuals, robust institutions, and vibrant communities working together to improve lives and the natural world, and strengthen democratic societies. To help create this future, we lead and catalyze the charitable community, partnering with government, business, and individuals to advance the common good.

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INDEPENDENT SECTOR



About American Express: Developing New Leaders for Tomorrow

One of American Express' three philanthropic platforms is Developing New Leaders for Tomorrow. Under this giving initiative, which recognizes the significance of strong leadership in the nonprofit and social purpose sectors, American Express makes grants focused on training high potential emerging leaders to tackle important issues in the 21st century. More than 16,000 emerging nonprofit and social sector leaders worldwide have benefitted from American Express leadership programs, including the American Express Leadership Academy among others. Launched in 2008, the American Express Leadership Academy addresses the growing deficit of leadership talent in the nonprofit sector by bringing together emerging leaders from a diverse set of nonprofit, social sector and non-governmental organizations. For leadership journey stories and additional resources, visit <http://leaderstories.org>.

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About the American Express NGen Fellows

Independent Sector's American Express NGen Fellows program elevates, cultivates, and advances charitable sector leaders, age 40 and under, to have an impact on society's most pressing challenges.

Every year since 2009, 12 diverse next generation leaders from Independent Sector member organizations participate in this 9-12 month, intensive network building and leadership development program, centered on teaching the practice of adaptive leadership. Adaptive leadership is a framework that helps individuals and organizations adapt and thrive in challenging environments. Each Fellows cohort works on a collaborative project that highlights an issue of importance to the sector and leverages the talents and expertise of the Fellows.

The 2015 American Express NGen Fellows focused on gender equity for their collaborative project.

The 2015 cohort are:

Janet Arias-Martinez, Associate Director of Alumni Relations, Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute

Gretchen Beesing, CEO, Catalyst Miami

Maggie Dunne, Founder and President, Lakota Children's Enrichment, Inc.

Cecilia Fong, Program Officer, Hawai'i Community Foundation

Raymond Foxworth, Vice President of Grantmaking, Development and Communications, First Nations Development Institute

Michele Frix, Chief of Staff, Seattle Foundation

Christopher Johnson, Director of Programs & Learning, Florida Philanthropic Network

John Kern, Vice President, Community Wealth Partners

Ellen Liu, Director of Women's Health, Ms. Foundation for Women

Lindsay Louie, Program Officer, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Rishi Moudgil, Managing Director, University of Michigan Center for Social Impact

Brett Weisel, Associate Director of Capacity Building and Training, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

Learn more about the program and project at independentsector.org/2015ngenfellows

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Executive Summary

Gender Equity in the Charitable Sector makes the case for why gender equity is one of the most critical issues facing our sector and outlines how next generation charitable sector leaders and charitable organizations can champion gender equity.

This guide, created by the 2015 American Express NGen Fellows as part of their collaborative project, is designed to be used to understand the issue of gender equity in the charitable sector, reflect on what gender equity means for the future of the sector, and act from a personal, organizational, and sector-wide level to support and promote gender equity.

Through a collection of essays, blog posts, videos, and infographics, this document offers insights and recommendations for how individuals, organizations, and next generation leaders can increase the number of women in CEO and leadership roles in the charitable sector, close the gender pay gap, and empower women leaders from diverse communities. This content was created by next generation leaders after a year-long exploration of gender equity in the charitable sector that included an extensive literature review, interviews with sector leaders, and hours of reflection and discussion.

In an effort to help next generation charitable sector leaders use this document, we have divided it into three sections:

- Understand
- Reflect
- Act

Supporting and promoting gender equity is a complex undertaking, and while we hope this document serves as a primer for next generation leaders to explore gender equity, we also recognize that it does not cover every aspect of gender equity in the charitable sector.

We encourage next generation leaders to continue to explore gender equity as well as their role in making it a reality in the charitable sector. To that end, we have included a list of additional resources in the appendix of this document.

We are particularly pleased to be able to provide this learning guide and look forward to working with others to understand, reflect, and act to support and promote gender equity.

UNDERSTANDING

UNDERSTAND

A Case for Gender Equity in the Charitable Sector

by John Kern, Vice President, Community Wealth Partners

Last year, I attended a panel discussion that included Bob Schieffer, Paul Begala, and Neera Tanden at City Year’s annual summit in Washington, DC. I was struck by Begala’s comment that the increasingly partisan nature of our political system and short-term focus of financial markets have forced the social sector to assume a role once embraced by government, that of innovator for social change. The perceived political and financial consequences of making a mistake have dramatically lowered our tolerance for taking the risks (and accepting the failures) that inevitably accompany large-scale social innovation. The social sector (nonprofits and foundations) has begun to serve as a de facto “R&D” function for the broader ecosystem of government and private sector organizations that provide services to our most vulnerable people and communities. While the panelists debated the potential for government to change, they agreed on one thing: in order for our sector to fully step into this role as the incubator for large-scale social innovation, we must get serious about the area we most often ignore – our own talent.

Active readers of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* or members of groups like Independent Sector and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations will recognize the growing movement to find “transformational” solutions to our most complex social problems. Much of the recent research and debate has centered on new delivery models and scaling strategies, the need for new and different sources of capital, and the emerging clarity on the adaptive leadership skills our organizations will need to be successful.^{1 2 3} However, comparatively little research has been conducted on how our sector can build the types of teams and organizations needed to develop bold, sustainable solutions to our most challenging social problems. When our 2015 American Express NGen Fellows cohort identified gender equity as the leadership issue we wanted to use our unique platform to influence, I became

curious about the connection between increased gender diversity and the pursuit of transformational change, something I spend countless hours on with my clients every month.⁴

Will talent diversity (and gender diversity in particular) really affect our success?

Leading nonprofits and foundations must begin taking intentional action to cultivate the diversity of our leadership with the same focus and discipline as we put into funding models and program strategy. As a professional consultant who works closely with leaders of foundations and nonprofits, I’ve experienced the impact that diverse leadership teams can have on an organization’s ability to move from “incrementalism” to “transformational thinking.” More diverse teams – particularly those with gender balance – are better able to reflect what their constituents and stakeholders need. They are more willing to challenge assumptions about how the organization can or should operate. They are also more willing to take risks and set public goals that will require them to work across sector and organizational boundaries in order to succeed.

Recent research findings from private industries have begun making a strong case for focusing on gender diversity as a driver of innovation and high performance within teams and organizations. A 2007 study conducted by the global consulting firm McKinsey & Company found that increasing the gender diversity of management and leadership teams resulted in improved corporate performance. McKinsey evaluated data from 101 public, private, and nonprofit organizations. They found that executive teams outperformed other organizations on all dimensions of performance: leadership, direction, accountability, coordination and control,

external orientation, capability, work environment and values.⁵ Take a moment to consider those factors – even though the study was not unique to the social sector, these qualities align well with the *Performance Imperative* framework for social sector excellence, recently developed by Mario Morino’s Leap of Reason community.⁶

Emerging corporate data indicates that achieving gender equity is essential at the manager level as well. Data released in 2015 by hospitality giant Sodexo built a compelling correlation between gender-balanced management teams and key performance indicators like employee engagement, brand awareness, client retention, and financial performance.⁷ Sodexo executives analyzed data from over 50,000 managers globally and found the results of balanced gender teams to be more sustained and predictable than those of unbalanced teams (either all male or all female). Impressively, Sodexo didn’t stop with this analysis. Corporate leaders believed so strongly that gender equity was critical to the corporation’s future success that they created an internal organization, the Sodexo Women’s International Forum. The forum is comprised of 25 senior female leaders who are charged with identifying and executing actions the corporation can take to improve the advancement of women across its business.⁸ While we lack good data on the relationship between gender diversity and performance in the social sector, these studies and outcomes offer glimpses into what we can be doing differently to cultivate the sector’s future successes.

Ok, so gender diversity is important, but do we really have a problem?

When looked at in aggregate, the social sector seems to be a bastion of opportunity for women compared to other industries, and in some ways it may be. While there is no definitive data set on the sector’s workforce, recent analysis of 2011 GuideStar data by the Women’s College of the University of Denver found that women comprise roughly three-quarters of the social sector’s total workforce.⁹ (My own organization mirrors this broad trend: I’m one of four males among our 25 employees.) This dwarfs the gender diversity seen in most commercial industry sectors. A recent McKinsey study found healthcare and hospitality to be the only industries that come close, with roughly 60 percent of entry-level healthcare and hospitality jobs being filled by women.¹⁰

That means we’re succeeding, right? Wrong.

When we factor in organizational budgets and look more closely at the topmost leadership positions – those that have ultimate authority over organizational strategy and budget decisions – the problem becomes clearer. According to the same benchmark report by the Women’s College of the University of Denver, approximately 43 percent of the membership of nonprofit boards and roughly 40 percent of all nonprofit CEO positions are held by women. Furthermore, those numbers drop precipitously as budget size grows. Women fill only 33 percent of nonprofit board roles and approximately 24 percent of CEO roles in organizations with budgets over \$25 million. For organizations over \$50 million, the number of female CEOs drops to just over 16 percent.¹¹ At the highest levels of leadership in the sector theoretically committed to equitable outcomes, women continue to be drastically underrepresented.

This data suggests that the social sector is adept at attracting women into lower-level positions, but that we struggle to help women advance into our most senior leadership positions. Findings from a recent NYU/*Chronicle of Philanthropy* survey suggest that the social sector’s challenge in increasing gender diversity is not a lack of qualified, inspired talent. The *Chronicle’s* survey of 644 women working full-time in nonprofit organizations uncovered an essential disparity: 72 percent of all women under age 34 said they wanted to be a leader, but 44 percent of female nonprofit workers “think their organization favors men over equally qualified women for chief leadership positions.”¹²

This data suggests that we do not have a “talent pipeline problem.” We have a problem with institutional bias. While some recent initiatives, like the D5 Coalition and the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Social Sector Talent Pipelines Strategy & Learning Lab have begun to address the problem head-on, the general dearth of published information likely indicates that most nonprofits and foundations have been unwilling to do the type of introspective self-assessment that will significantly move the needle.¹³

Rethinking the status quo

For most organizations, taking steps to intentionally address gender diversity (and diversity more broadly) can feel intimidating. A new article on addressing the gender challenge by McKinsey offered a terrific analogy: “Gender parity is a huge undertaking, with many decisions – a challenge akin to urban planning – in which executives must re-imagine their ‘city’ and culture, put in place multi-year building plans, add infrastructure, and improve services.”¹⁴ Following the old adage “less is more,” here are three actions that any leader or organization can take – without significant cost or burden – to significantly advance gender equity in the sector at large.

1. Get the data out there!

As we all know, the culture and strategy of most organizations can be heavily influenced by what they track and report, especially what they report publicly and what boards request. Leading organizations in the private sector have taken it upon themselves to be more transparent in an effort to create self-accountability for their diversity goals. Tech giants like Google, Facebook, and Amazon have begun to release data on the diversity of their workforce because they realize a critical fact: disclosure is the first step in changing how we operate, and top-down targets make a difference.¹⁵ McKinsey, a vocal advocate for increasing gender equity, experienced a five percent increase in the number of female consultants in its ranks within one year of setting explicit gender goals for hiring and advancement.¹⁶

The social sector has a huge asset in the fight for gender equity that our private sector counterparts lack: funders. Foundations have immense power to rapidly change organizational behavior sector-wide by requiring grantees to report data on staff and board diversity. While taking this action may force funders to confront their own diversity and willingness to self-report, private sector data also shows us that such requirements can provoke institutional change and that top-down targets tend to work. Luckily the social sector already has the tools to take action. As I mentioned above, GuideStar launched a new platform in 2014 in partnership with the D5 Coalition that allows nonprofits and foundations to publicly report diversity data.¹⁷ We have the infrastructure—now we have to build the collective will and courage to act.

2. Educate board members and staff about implicit bias, and explore organizational solutions to challenge it.

In 2013, the Harvard Business Review published *Women Rising: The Unseen Barriers*, in which the authors argue that we have largely moved past an era where women are intentionally excluded from leadership roles, but that “second-generation gender bias” pervades most workplaces. They describe the powerful but invisible barriers that arise from unspoken cultural norms, workplace structures, and practices of interaction that inadvertently create disadvantages for women to advance into senior or executive leadership roles. Second-generation bias is derived from subtle factors such as the lack of female leaders to serve as role models, gendered career paths, and lack of access to networks and sponsors.¹⁸ Think gendered career paths don’t exist in US nonprofits? The data suggests otherwise: women hold between 55 and 65 percent of top roles in development, human resources, marketing/public relations, and programs but far less in technology, finance, and operations.¹⁹

Emerging research on the role bias plays in workplace decision-making suggests that education alone is not enough to reduce the effects of gender bias in our organizations. Because bias is often unconscious, de-biasing ourselves is far more challenging than creating institutional structures or behaviors that help combat the bias we all bring to our work. We must find solutions that combine changing individual mindsets (like training programs) with institutional practices intentionally designed to address the structural foundations of second-generation gender bias.

My organization recently took a step forward in combating individual bias in our interviewing

process. We instituted practices advocated by behavioral economist Iris Bohnet that have been relatively easy and inexpensive to implement.²⁰ First, anytime we recruit for a new position, we assign one person on our recruiting team – someone who will not be assessing candidates – to redact names and references to gender and race or cultural identity from resumes before they are passed along to reviewers. Second, we have developed structured interview templates and interview teams are asked to score applicants against a standardized set of questions. This is by no means a comprehensive or foolproof system. As a hiring manager, I still find myself drawn to applicants with professional or lived experience that mirrors my own, but at least now I routinely question the bias I bring to hiring decisions. It's a small step, but one I strongly believe has been worth taking.

3. Become a sponsor.

Recent research from the Center for Talent Innovation and Catalyst points to a solution being adopted by leaders at top global companies to fight the barriers created by second-generation bias encouraging and empowering sponsorship.²¹ Sponsorship is like mentorship on steroids, and it has the potential to tackle gender equity head-on. As Ilene Lang, president and CEO of Catalyst, states, “Good sponsors can supercharge a woman’s career by providing her with access to essential networks, bringing her achievements to the attention of senior-level executives, and

recommending her for key assignments.”²² Most importantly, sponsorship represents an individual action that current leaders can take immediately, without waiting for their organizations to create a special program or offer “permission.”

Sponsorship is not risk-free. Catalyst’s research shows that actively advocating for a colleague to take on a new assignment or role forces both sponsor and protégé to put their reputations on the line.²³ For women executives who may already feel a heightened sense of visibility or scrutiny, taking such an action can feel especially daunting. This tension creates an opportunity for men to step up. For me, embracing the role of sponsor feels like a risk worth taking. I recognize, however, that my belief is significantly influenced by the privilege I am afforded as a white man. This privilege compels me to wear two hats in encouraging sponsorship within my organization – both serving as a sponsor myself *and* actively and vocally helping to create a safe space for my female peers to feel empowered to act as sponsors. The path to equity requires not just institutions to challenge barriers created by prevailing organizational practices or cultural norms; it requires individuals to do the same.

Social sector leaders are coming to grips with the fact that traditional approaches to creating social change – those that rely on incrementally expanding proven interventions – will not suffice to address our most complex problems at scale. This growing movement to seek “transformational” solutions to our largest, most complex problems will not be successful unless we intentionally build the capacity of our leaders and organizations. Continued research on the power of gender equity will help build the case for change, but we can each take responsibility for creating a better system now.

UNDERSTAND

How Charitable Sector Organizations Can Help Women Leaders Reach the Top

by Cecilia Fong, Program Officer, Hawai'i Community Foundation

Janet Arias Martinez, Associate Director of Alumni Relations, Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute

THE PROBLEM

Marching Toward Equity

Women's presence in the charitable sector is resounding, but there is a huge discrepancy in their representation at the leadership level especially for the largest organizations

66%

of nonprofit staff is female²⁴

45%

of top leadership roles across all nonprofits were women in 2009-2011²⁵

21%

of top leadership of the largest organizations with budgets in excess of **\$25 million** were women²⁶

When it comes to compensation of female leaders in the charitable sector there also exists a gender pay gap

Female CEOs earned up to

23% less

than their male counterparts in 2013²⁷



THE SOLUTION

So, what can nonprofits and foundations do to increase the number of women leaders and promote gender equity?

Step 1: Acknowledge the Problem

- Get your chief executive/C-Suite to commit to ensuring gender diversity is a priority
- Monitor the gender pay gap; share the statistics with the sector

Step 2: Set Organizational Goals

- Increase the number of women in leadership roles; reduce their attrition rate to below that of men;
- Measure and work to improve women's satisfaction levels in the workplace
- Have your executive level membership be role models and model the way

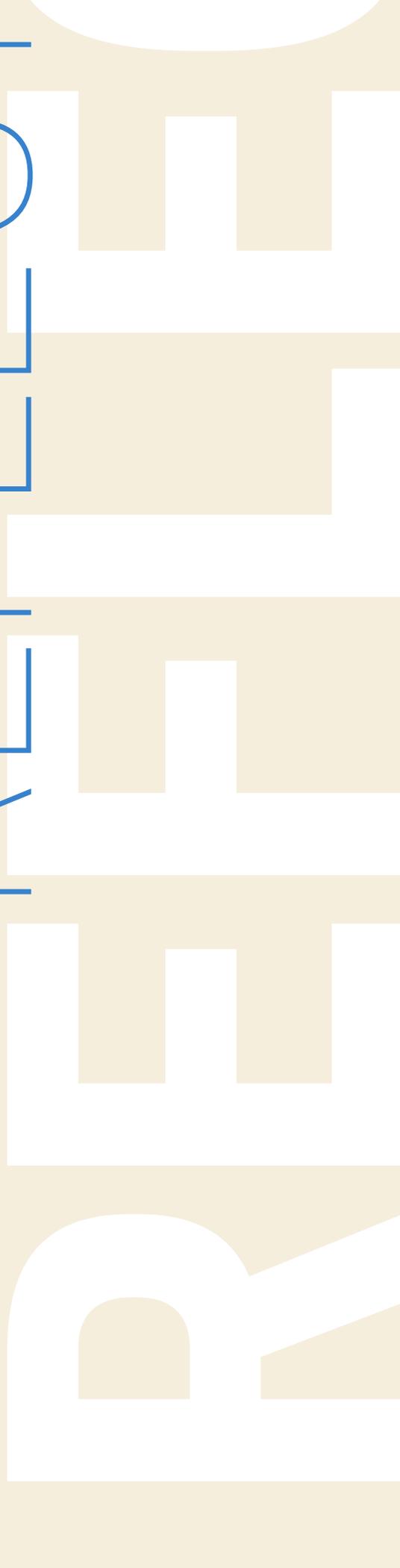
Step 3: Invest in the Careers of Women Leaders

- Ensure diverse slates of candidates and interviewers for all open leadership positions
- Create and support career development plans for top-talent women at every level, and work with leadership and human resources to ensure follow-through
- Monitor the diversity of your talent promotion pipelines to ensure fair representation and access
- Create an organization-wide mentorship/sponsorship program
- Task each vice president to help develop top-talent women

Step 4: Make the Workplace More Women-friendly

- Provide flex scheduling, telework, maternity leave, childcare, etc.
- Incorporate diversity/cultural sensitivity training into human resource strategy
- Review your hiring policies for gender discrimination (institutional and cultural)

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REFLECT

Getting Women of Color Leaders to the Top: Paving the Way for Philanthropy

by Ellen Liu, Director of Women's Health, Ms. Foundation for Women

"How can you give away someone else's money?"

As first-generation immigrants from Taiwan, my parents didn't really understand my new job in social justice philanthropy.

"Whose money is it?"

"A billionaire's. His name is George Soros," I responded.

"Well, why don't you make your own money? Like George. That'd be better," they said.

A career path in philanthropy has always been a tough sell to immigrant parents who sacrificed everything to achieve the "American Dream." There's the familiar hierarchy of professions that second-generation children should aspire to: doctor, lawyer, engineer. For my parents, a career in philanthropy was too insecure. Even my college mentor advised me, "Ellen, stay away from the pink ghetto!" using that derogatory term for jobs dominated by women, low wages, high stress, and dead-end career paths.

Modern philanthropy's roots are only a century and a half old, having emerged in early 20th century with the famed Gilded Age names: Rockefeller, Carnegie, Ford. Merriam Webster's definition of philanthropy is: "the practice of giving money and time to help make life better for other people." The word actually comes from early 17th century via the Greek word *philanthrōpos*, or "mankind-loving." Simply said, philanthropy is the love of humanity.

Yet philanthropy is not simple.

It is a field rife with contradictions. While philanthropy seeks to promote the welfare of those in need through generous support and funding, this very wealth was often built upon systems that exploited the poor and working class. In the mid-1900s, tax and legal codes were institutionalized,

enabling an already wealthy, established, elite class to reap additional tax benefits through the modern foundation structure.

Philanthropy is both a result of and an expression in itself of wealth, power, and privilege. While its influence on social issues can be an incredible opportunity, it also calls into question elitism, power dynamics, and whether it keeps people chronically dependent and disempowered.

With the recognition of these contradictions growing over the past two decades, a distinct arm of philanthropy emerged. Social justice philanthropy seeks to address systemic root causes of social issues and create a more equitable distribution of power. It has generally given way to positive shifts within foundations to engage a diversity of people who are most impacted by social issues and injustices as decision-makers and stakeholders themselves. By centering efforts on those with the least voice and power, creating opportunities for marginalized communities to be experts and participate in policymaking – the actions of social justice philanthropies have more concretely enabled a "love of humanity" by creating a more equitable and democratic society.

However, it is quite interesting to note when looking at the actual composition of *leadership* within this field – senior executives, CEOs, presidents, and board members – something is starkly amiss. Women and people of color, all too often the communities targeted by social justice funding efforts, are vastly underrepresented.

According to the Council on Foundations, when looking at the biggest foundations (over \$1 billion in assets), only 28 percent of CEO positions are filled by women, and only 38 percent of board members are women.²⁸ Meanwhile, women comprise approximately 75 percent of foundations' workforce

and 73 percent of the larger nonprofit sector workforce.

Many argue that there aren't enough women for top leadership roles because they don't want the top jobs. Yet this is a sector where three-quarters of foundation staff are women, many of whom are well qualified but often passed over. Unfortunately, just as it was a century ago in the age of Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Ford, leadership is still mainly modeled in white and male presence.

While cutting edge, impactful work has been led by the D5 Coalition to advance philanthropy's overall diversity, equity, and inclusion, there has never been a large scale, concerted effort within philanthropy focused on the gender leadership gap with the goal of catalyzing women talent into top positions at major foundations across the United States.²⁹

Such a shift would be social change in itself. What would such an effort look like? What would it take to also couple that effort with an equally vigorous commitment toward racially diverse women in philanthropy?

One compelling way for foundations to move the needle would be very simple – track the data. Foundations should track and publish their own internal data on women and people of color.

The means for doing this recently has been facilitated by GuideStar Exchange.³⁰ In the same way that Green 2.0's State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations study was a pivotal wake up call for the environmental field, similar efforts at the foundation level can also build momentum and catalyze the philanthropic field to prioritize diverse women in top leadership roles.³¹ The simple commitment to track internal demographic data is a huge win and serves to make visible what is invisible.

Secondly, telling the story of how foundations prioritize closing the gender leadership gap – successes *and failures* – serves to humbly encourage others and provides important lessons learned. Recent reflections³² from Arabella Associates on their diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are a stand-out case study, in particular, the lessons learned in uncovering implicit biases in its recruiting and hiring practices.

It is only by continually paving the road to gender equity through awareness, action, and advocacy that we can one day reach a point where our parents and mentors do not fret about their daughter's career choices.

As eminent anthropologist, Margaret Mead, once stated, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Indeed, it's on us.

REFLECT

Who, Me? How I'm Inadvertently Contributing to Gender Inequity in the Workplace

by Brett Weisel, Associate Director of Capacity Building and Training, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

I've worked in the social sector for nearly 10 years. My career in advocacy and policy has given me an opportunity to work with both domestic and international organizations on a variety of policy issues. I'm an advocate by trade—my job is to promote policies that, at least in my opinion, advance the common good.

And yet until I became an American Express NGen Fellow and started working on this project, I never really spent much time or brainpower thinking about either gender equity in the workplace or broader issues of diversity and inclusion. It really wasn't something that was on my radar, so I didn't engage with my colleagues, friends, and family with the same interest and passion I did on other issues. I'm also a white male. And I've come to realize that by not engaging, I'm actively reinforcing barriers that contribute to gender inequality in the workplace. Particularly *because* I'm a white male. In other words, I've come to understand that my lack of awareness and silence is a big part of the problem.

I certainly don't mean to internalize this important issue and make it about me. But as part of this learning guide, I wanted to share what I've learned—particularly through the lens of a white, middle-class male. It was an eye-opening and somewhat embarrassing realization to accept the fact that my ignorance and silence on the matter is a contributing factor to the problem. Alas, my belief that I was an enlightened, socially responsible 21st century man was shattered. So I thought I'd share my experience. Who knows, maybe I can do the same for others. If I can connect to at least one other equally privileged individual, I'll call this article a success. We'll start with that and build from there.

What I learned about gender and the workplace

Why should other white males working in the social sector (or anyone else for that matter), care about gender equity in the workplace?

First, let me tell you a little about what I learned doing some basic research on the issue. Please allow me to emphasize *basic*. I fully admit I've only scratched the surface, and there is much I have not touched on.

Women outnumber men across the nonprofit sector. According to a study by the Women's College of the University of Denver, women make up 75 percent of the workforce at nonprofits. Yet the ratio suddenly flips when you look at CEOs of large nonprofits.³³ Of those with \$25 million in assets or larger, only 21 percent of the CEOs are women. According to a report by Guidestar, the ratio dips even further for the very largest nonprofits (\$50 million in assets) to a mere 17 percent.³⁴

So, there's a gender gap in leadership positions amongst nonprofits that corresponds with the private sector. While there are many reasons for this gap, it's important to acknowledge its existence. But why does it matter?

The research is pretty clear—diverse leadership improves organizational performance.

For one, diverse teams tend to be more innovative. The ability for teams to pull from a variety of skills, experiences, and perspectives and anticipate differing points of view improves problem solving and drives innovation.³⁵ In fact, a study from

Harvard Business School notes that women in particular yield smarter teams.³⁶

Specifically for nonprofits, a lack of diverse leadership at the executive and board levels likely results in missed fundraising opportunities.³⁷

And for you fundraisers out there, businesses are more socially responsible with women at the helm.³⁸

I could go on and on, but the research is pretty well documented: you have higher performing teams, higher performing organizations, and potentially more money to advance our collective missions when you have women in leadership positions.

What am I doing wrong?

Ok, so the gender gap exists, it's not just a problem in the private sector, and it has far reaching negative implications for the performance and sustainability of nonprofits. I was generally aware of these issues, but I tended to view them through a moral lens. Based on the research, that's obviously a very limited perspective. When we shift the narrative from the moral imperative to the business case, it suddenly becomes a much bigger and complex problem—one that can't be compartmentalized as solely a "women's issue."

Even still, I could go on my way without ever really thinking about gender disparity in the workplace and have a happy life and successful career, right? After all, it's so very easy to ignore a problem when you think it doesn't directly affect you. As a white male, it's a particularly easy problem to ignore. But I have learned that by ignoring the problem, I'm actively contributing to it.

So what specifically am I doing wrong?

I was not terribly surprised to learn that most people tend to view leadership through a male lens.³⁹ When we think of leadership, adjectives like assertive, confident, and independent come to mind. There are a host of psychological, social, and anthropological reasons why this is the case. We have been hard wired to think this way.⁴⁰

However, when those same traits are applied to women, they are perceived as negative. Whereas men are praised for exhibiting qualities like assertiveness and confidence, women are penalized

in their performance reviews.⁴¹ There is a good deal of research that says the same thing—women are judged differently and unfairly in the workplace.⁴²

I'm sure you've noticed this phenomenon in your own office at some point in your career. I know I have. The social sector is certainly not immune to this double standard.

To compound the situation, when women and people of color actively promote diversity and gender and racially balanced work environments, their competence and performance is consistently rated lower than employees who remain quiet on the subject.⁴³

In other words, women are penalized for exhibiting the same qualities that male leaders are applauded for, and then penalized again for promoting a gender and racial neutral workplace to level the playing field.

And so my lack of awareness and general silence on the matter forces women to carry the water on this issue, thus further marginalizing them and opening them up to negative perceptions of their leadership. If, ultimately this is not just a women's issue or moral issue but also about organizational performance, then it should not just be women who are taking the lead promoting gender equity. In fact, as a white man, it's doubly important that I play an active role in contributing to a more balanced workplace because it's typically white men that are erecting the barriers.

If I am talking about gender bias, I'm doing it all wrong

Unfortunately, it gets even more complicated. Just being aware of the problem and opening a dialogue doesn't solve anything. In fact, it could make matters worse.

As Facebook CFO Sheryl Sandberg and Wharton School of Business Professor Adam Grant point out, recent research shows that simply making people aware of gender stereotypes and bias actually *increases* discriminatory behavior.⁴⁴

Why? Because reinforcing the fact that gender stereotypes exist and are widespread subtly normalizes the behavior. If we know gender bias is common and prevalent in the workplace, it provides cover to continue as usual and reduces any incentive

to proactively change. Or it provides justification to ignore the problem entirely because it's just too big, too common, and too complicated.

I can see this scenario playing out in my past. Whether it was with my work colleagues, at a conference, or just chatting with friends or

family, I've certainly engaged in a dialogue about gender, but by simply recognizing that gender bias exists without reinforcing that these biases are unacceptable and need to be overcome, I've unwittingly contributed to the problem.

So what do we do about it?

It's pretty clear there's a big problem in front of us. And it's not just happening in corporate America. The same trends and barriers exist in the social sector.

Bias doesn't have to be overt or purposeful. But just because it's not blatant doesn't make it less harmful. This was an important lesson for me—particularly as a white male. I didn't realize how complicated and extensive the problem really was within the social sector; the positive impact addressing it could have on my job, my team, and my organization; and how my ignorance was contributing to gender inequity in the workplace. Basically, I was content with the status quo. That is unacceptable.

Since I'm part of the problem, telling others what to do seems disingenuous. So I'm not going to make a call to action, urge everyone to take a stand, or provide a laundry list of things you can do to put women on a level playing field at your organization. Instead of telling you what to do, I'm going to tell you what I aspire to do.

First, I'm going to learn more. This project was a good start, but I can't let myself fall into the same trap of ignoring the problem. The good news is there are plenty of organizations out there leading the charge—groups like HeforShe and the D5 Coalition are doing terrific work mobilizing the public around gender equity, providing simple ways to get involved, and offering solutions. Leaders ranging from Sheryl Sandberg to Emma Watson (I recognize there are many, many more) are leveraging their social influence to challenge conventional thinking and drive change.

But as I now know, it's not just about being aware of the fact that biases exist and they are negatively impacting the talent pipeline at nonprofits. It's about rejecting those biases and doing a better job of empathizing so I can be more emotionally connected to this issue. I think this is a particular area where I can do a better job.

Second, I'm going to challenge my organization to share our demographic data. One of the underlying problems we found as part of this project is the need for nonprofits and foundations to share the demographic data of their staff, executive teams, and boards. In short, data will create transparency and accountability and

inform policies to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Guidestar has an ongoing campaign urging nonprofits to share their demographic data, and I'm going to encourage my employer to do so.⁴⁵ Our sector needs to wake up and recognize we are not immune to gender disparity. Hopefully getting the data out there will generate some urgency.

Third, I'm going to start a dialogue. It doesn't have to be something formal—it could be as simple as a lunch and learn with my team to start. At the very least, I can share what I've learned and remind my colleagues that gender equity at the office has much further reaching implications than they may realize. Perhaps I can reach some of my fellow white male colleagues.

Finally, I'm not going to repeat the same behavior. It would be easy for me to do nothing, but I can't fall into that trap again. I'm not going to let women carry the load of this issue. When I hear a gender stereotype, I'm not just going to recognize it exists; I'm going to challenge the underlying beliefs and biases. When I have an opportunity to add staff, I'm going to make sure I don't default to hiring someone that looks like me. I may not be able to change the behavior of others, but I can change mine.

My aim for this article is simply to share my realization that I'm not doing a very good job promoting gender equity in the workplace, and by sitting on the sidelines, I'm actually a pretty big part of the problem. It seems to me that it's particularly important that white males step up and help carry the weight of this issue, which is why it's the focus of this piece. In short, there's more I can do. There's more all of us can do.

I recognize that many individuals and organizations are doing all the right things and are contributing to gender neutral working environments, diverse and representative executive teams and boards, and have adopted hiring and promotion policies that eliminate or reduce bias and effectively advance women through the talent pipeline. As a sector, we need to do a better job highlighting leaders and promising practices, sharing data, breaking down and rejecting stereotypes and biases, and generating more urgency. Organizations like Independent Sector can, and must, help start and maintain that dialogue.

In the meantime, I've got my work cut out for me.

REFLECT

Native American Women, Leadership and the Native Nonprofit Sector

by Raymond Foxworth, Vice President of Grantmaking, Development and Communications, First Nations Development Institute

A report released by First Nations Development Institute examines gender and leadership within the Native American nonprofit sector. This report is one of a few that attempts to examine leadership trends within a specific nonprofit sub-sector, namely leadership by gender within mostly rural and remote reservation-based nonprofits that primarily serve Native American populations. Overall, the report finds that leadership within the Native American nonprofit sector looks very different than the national nonprofit sector, as the Native American nonprofit sector is one that is largely led by women.

A number of recent reports have documented the gender disparity in leadership within the national nonprofit sector, finding that while roughly 75 percent of nonprofit organizations are staffed by women, about 55 percent of CEO leadership positions are held by men.¹ Many who have examined gender and leadership nationally have been surprised by the persistent female leadership gap within the sector, largely because the predominantly female workforce does not seem to translate into CEO positions for women in the sector.

While national trends may point to some disturbing gendered leadership trends, we really know much less about the extent to which gendered leadership gaps exist within different segments of the nonprofit sector, especially as it relates to the sector within different communities of color.

In this new report, First Nations examines the relationship between gender and CEO positions within the Native American nonprofit sector. It found that the majority of reservation-based nonprofits are led by women – 61 percent of Native nonprofit organizations have female CEOs compared to 45 percent nationally. It also finds that at almost every budget level, women outnumber men in terms of leadership positions within the Native American nonprofit sector. The one exception to female leadership is at very large Native nonprofit organizations with budgets greater than \$10 million, where men tend to be in top leadership positions.

The nonprofit sector in Native American communities is fairly young and still maturing. Previous First Nations research has documented that a majority of nonprofits in Native American communities were created in the 1970s. The rise and expansion of the nonprofit sector in Native American communities is directly correlated with the rise of Native American empowerment and self-governance movements of the 1970s — movements that fought to increase Native American control and governance of Native American assets. These movements sought to eliminate government, religious, and corporate control over local community development efforts and place Native American people and nations themselves in the driver’s seat when it came to local development, decision-making, and service delivery.

Only recently have we begun to see more literature illuminating the diverse roles and contributions of Native American women to these various movements. Historically, Native American women have been viewed on a spectrum from “Pocahontas

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Percentage of Nonprofit Female CEOs

Budget Size	National Nonprofit Sector		Native American Nonprofit Sector
	2003	2013	2015
<\$250K	55%	55%	58%
\$250K-\$5000K	57%	52%	65%
\$500K-\$1M	52%	49%	68%
\$1M-\$2.5M	45%	44%	67%
\$2.5M-\$5M	40%	37%	68%
\$5M-\$10M	32%	32%	56%
\$10M-\$25M	26%	29%	40%

Notes: National nonprofit sector data comes from the 2015 Guidestar Nonprofit Compensation Report. Native American Nonprofit Sector data comes from First Nations grantmaking data, pooled from 2012-2015.

princess” to “sexualized drudge”.² Rarely are Native American women portrayed as community leaders and activists who have historically sustained Native traditions, practices, and communities. But there has been a recent rise in biographical and other empirical works unpacking Native American women’s historic and contemporary role in politics and policy change, education, and community activism. This research has only started to document the leadership contributions of women to Native American social movements and their work in the creation of new organizations, increasing access to higher education, community organizing, and more.

In this report, First Nations contributes to expanding the view of Native American women as critical leaders of social change, service delivery, community, and economic development in Native communities. First Nations also interviews several Native American female leaders to explore the reason for the prevalence of women in leadership within the Native American nonprofit sector, the challenges they face as leaders, and practices they think can be implemented within other segments of the nonprofit sector to grow female nonprofit CEOs.

To access the full report, visit www.firstnations.org/NativeLeadership

2. Fryberg, S. A. et al. (2008). Of Warrior Chiefs and Indian Princesses: The Psychological Consequences of American Indian Mascots. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 30, no. 3: 208–18

ACT
ACT

Catalyst: Next Generation Women Speak out on Leadership and Equity

| by Gretchen Beesing, CEO, Catalyst Miami

Supporting gender equity in the charitable sector by helping women assume leadership roles is essential to the future health of the sector and our communities.

Catalyst Miami interviewed a diverse group of next generation women leaders for a conversation about what they need to succeed in the charitable sector. They shared some big ideas and several concrete strategies for how fellow next generation women leaders can invest in their futures.

Their conversation yielded four powerful insights:

1. Learn the clear pathways to leadership.

Sometimes we know we want to lead but we aren't sure about what steps to take. Asking questions about the role you want to fill one day is a good idea; there may be implicit rules that you're unfamiliar with that come with leadership positions. And don't forget to share what you learn, as others likely want to learn the same ideas!

Key strategies:

- Participate in trainings/conferences
- Share what you learn
- Learn what is expected of leadership positions
- Get involved outside your organization

2. Find strong role models & mentors.

Mentors – whether formal or informal – are excellent resources for women with leadership ambitions. Be sure to find mentors you can relate to...and stretch your experience by finding mentorship from other organizations or industries to expand your horizons.

Key strategies:

- Expose yourself to women leaders
- Seek informal mentorship
- Look for women to whom you can relate

3. Invest in personal development & soft skills.

A new leadership role can be intimidating when you don't know what is expected of you. Hard skills might get you the job, but taking time to grow as a person and work on your soft skills will help you be a good team member and leader.

Key strategies:

- Take initiative
- Learn to be assertive

4. Take advantage of internal mentorship opportunities.

Executive leadership should establish a process for identifying and developing leaders within their organization within the context of succession planning. Just as a "leadership pipeline" is important for the sector as a whole, each organization ensures its sustainability by investing in its own leaders.

Key strategies:

- Identify and develop leaders
- Build a succession plan

Becoming a leader in a nonprofit requires intention and practice. Imagine your dream leadership role and work towards that every day.

Watch the full video at independentsector.org/2015ngenfellows.

ACT

The Role of Boards of Directors, CEOs, and the C-Suite in Promoting Gender Equity

by Christopher Johnson, Director of Programs & Learning, Florida Philanthropic Network

Boards of directors, CEOs, and the C-Suite play an important role in achieving gender equity in the charitable sector.

In an interview, Sarah Owen, president and CEO of the Southwest Florida Community Foundation, provided a few key insights on how charitable sector organizations can support and promote gender equity.

Key insights on promoting gender equity:

1. The lack of gender diversity amongst C-Suite leadership is not unique to the social sector.

Women have been instrumental to the innovation and growth of the social sector. Though efforts are being made to address the lack of gender diversity among social sector organizations, the nonprofit sector seems to be behind the curve in comparison to broader society. The social sector has the ability to be a leader in effectively addressing this issue and encouraging the cultivation of a diverse pipeline of nonprofit leadership.

2. Boards of directors are key in influencing gender diversity.

In both the private and social sectors boards of directors are the primary leaders who are tasked with hiring presidents and CEOs. Nationally, not only in the social sector, these governing bodies tend to be comprised of mostly men. Consequently, trends have shown these boards hire men in top leadership positions. Though these decisions do not seem to be malicious, board education, board diversity, and intentionality amongst board members must be undertaken to encourage CEO gender equity. Ultimately, the male leadership of organizations must display a commitment to encouraging gender equity for change to occur.

3. Vision 2020 is a national effort committed to addressing gender inequality.

Vision 2020 is a national coalition of individuals and organizations in all 50 states working together for women's economic, political, and social equality in the United States. Organizations such as Vision 2020 provide opportunities for the governing leadership of nonprofit organizations to embody the ideals, implications, and considerations of gender equity to promote diversity within their organizations and the broader nonprofit sector.

Watch the full video at independentsector.org/2015ngenfellows.

Higher Education's Role in Women's Leadership for the Charitable Sector

by Rishi Moudgil, Managing Director, University of Michigan Center for Social Impact

At the University of Michigan Ross School of Business, the Center for Social Impact runs a suite of programs for graduate students to be immersed in real-world leadership roles that tackle social issues. Among those opportunities is a board fellowship placement, where students from various majors including education, public policy, and business serve on leading nonprofit boards annually.

Students lead a strategic high-level project and contribute to other significant activities alongside senior board members. Women's participation exceeds men's and many continue their social sector leadership throughout their lives. We interviewed two of these students as well as a local nonprofit executive director who participated in the program.

Takeaways from the conversations fell into these three categories:

1. Barriers and challenges in the social sector talent pipeline for women are real.

A host of issues remain, including wage gap, leadership and training deficits, access, unclear paths to key roles, and a shared awareness amongst all people on gender bias and stereotypes within organizations.

2. The social sector should be a leader in addressing gender gaps.

Nonprofit organizations already focus on social impact and can take a leadership position on tackling gender issues within the sector. As an example, formal mentorship or informal role models are very helpful to expose emerging leaders to navigating future responsibilities.

3. Higher education plays a key role for emerging leaders of all genders.

Whether through more holistic learning, applied programming, exposure to outstanding leaders and organizations, learning shared responsibility, or simply being more deliberate about investing in young women leaders, educators can move the needle on the gender gap.

As higher education institutions create more practical learning experiences partnering with the social sector can expand opportunities such as access to leadership and formal mentorship for young leaders.

Creating an impact early in women's careers and being exposed to future possibilities can continue to improve the social sector talent pipeline.

Watch the full video at independentsector.org/2015ngenfellows.

ACT

The Compounding Effects of Salary Negotiations: Combating the Gender-Wage Gap in the Nonprofit Sector

by Lindsay Louie, Program Officer, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Women make up the majority of nonprofit sector jobs at 69 percent.⁴⁶ Yet per GuideStar's 2016 Compensation Report, salaries for women trail those of men in comparable positions at nonprofits of all sizes.⁴⁷ The gap is widest – 23 percent – for female CEOs at nonprofits with \$2.5 million to \$5 million budgets. In fact, the gender-wage gap persists across industries. The Pew Research Center found that in 2015, women across industries earned 83 percent as much as men.⁴⁸

Many who work at nonprofits do so to try and combat inequality in our world, so it's essential that we walk our walk and combat the gender-wage gap in our sector. Importantly, there is also a race-wage gap that is real and needs to be addressed, though my focus here is on gender.⁴⁹ There are many factors involved in the gender-wage gap, and thus need to be addressed to close it. One key step is improved salary negotiations – so that everyone, but especially women, are being compensated appropriately for the role they're in and experience they bring. Indeed, it is one of the key pieces of advice cited by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) in their 2016 report, "The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap."⁵⁰

Research by Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever, authors of *Women Don't Ask*, found that 46 percent of men always negotiate a salary following a job offer whereas only 30 percent of women do.^{51, 52} On the plus side, a salary.com survey found that the older people are, the more comfortable they are negotiating salary.⁵³ This finding makes sense—over time people have more experience and confidence with which to negotiate. But by waiting to negotiate, employees likely cost themselves substantially in lifetime earnings AND further perpetuate the

gender-wage gap.

Many employers – and in my experience many nonprofits – ask candidates for their salary history and then base what they are willing to offer (and pay) a candidate on that number. Thus each time you don't negotiate, you're actually causing a compounding effect downstream.

Massachusetts took an important step forward on this issue on August 1, 2016, signing into law a bill that requires employers to state their compensation offer to a candidate *before* they are allowed to ask for salary history. In covering this historic event, Journalist Stacy Cowley of *The New York Times* wrote, "By barring companies from asking prospective employees how much they earned at their last jobs, Massachusetts will ensure that the historically lower wages and salaries assigned to women and minorities do not follow them for their entire careers. Companies tend to set salaries for new hires using their previous pay as a base line."⁵⁴

This is exciting to see. However, regardless of state policy, everyone should still feel comfortable and empowered to negotiate for themselves when they think it's necessary – men and women alike. So why aren't they?

In a blog post, "Overworked and Underpaid? That Stops Here," Cathie Ericson cites some common fears that keep people from negotiating including:

1. It won't work;
2. My (future) employer and I will get off on the wrong foot; and/or
3. I'm not comfortable and don't know what to say.⁵⁵

Indeed, another salary.com survey found the following when they asked people why they didn't negotiate: "Fear of being told no topped the list with 43 percent of respondents saying they're scared of being rejected and feeling like they're not good enough."⁵⁶

In my experience, these fears may be exacerbated in the nonprofit context, where budgets are often tight and there may be the (unfair and unrealistic) expectation that the work is "mission driven" and people should be willing to "work for less." And the situation is almost surely exacerbated for women. Babcock and Laschever note "Many women are so grateful to be offered a job that they accept what they are offered and don't negotiate their salaries."⁵⁷

In reality, people really should not be afraid to negotiate. Salary.com also found that, "The vast majority – 80 percent – of the employers we surveyed said they are not upset or offended when jobseekers negotiate during the interview process, and 57 percent of HR personnel expect people to ask for more when presented with a job offer."⁵⁸ Furthermore, 48 percent expect their employees to ask for a raise at least once a year."

As women advance in their nonprofit careers and become leaders in organizations, they will undoubtedly be offering people jobs and many – including hopefully more and more women – will negotiate. Negotiating for oneself is also a key step in leadership development.

If you are reading this and you are working in the nonprofit sector—and especially if you're a woman: Advocate for yourself, either during a hiring process, upon receiving a job offer, in your annual review, or at any other appropriate time. In doing so, you are not only increasing your own salary today (as well as your future earning potential), but you are also being part of changing the culture and dynamics of the gender-wage gap.

A few helpful resources and guides:

1. Neale, M. A., & Lys, T. Z. (2015, 06 29). *More Reasons Women Need to Negotiate Their Salaries*. Retrieved 10 18, 2016, from Harvard Business Review: <https://hbr.org/2015/06/more-reasons-women-need-to-negotiate-their-salaries>
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What about the role of nonprofit boards?

BoardSource's 2015 *Leading with Intent* survey found that women account for 48 percent of nonprofit board members and 46 percent of board chairs, which is a strong signal that we might see improvement in wage equality between men and women.⁵⁹ That said, they may not be evenly distributed across nonprofits and some boards may have underrepresentation of course. Further, while it seems reasonable to think that more women on boards will help close the gender-wage gap, I haven't seen any data yet that proves this.

If you are a nonprofit staff leader or board member reading this: Please be aware of the gender disparities in compensation, address them in your executive compensation, and be sure staff are trained and supported to address them in your hiring processes. Yes, there is often a tension in trying to "make the budget" and the incentive could be to hire people at the low end of market rate or be happy if/when they don't negotiate for more money. But if you aren't working to combat the disparity, then you're perpetuating it. Further, research has shown that when there is no explicit statement that wages are negotiable, men are more likely to negotiate than women, but when it is explicitly stated that wages are negotiable, then the difference between men and women disappears.⁶⁰

I have worked in the nonprofit sector for nearly my

entire career, and today I feel well informed both as someone being hired and someone doing the hiring – but I wish that I had seen a summary like this earlier in my career. When I was being hired, it would really have helped me to understand earlier than I did all of the reasons to negotiate, the huge costs (literally and figuratively) that can come from not negotiating, and links to some practical tools, guides, and resources. In my experiences hiring others and setting salaries, I would have been aware of the dynamics at work and how my framing could either help or hinder the broader gender-wage gap.

From every vantage point in the sector – whatever side of the negotiating table you sit on – the choice you make can either sustain, compound, or improve the gender-wage gap. Use compensation negotiations as one tool and vehicle to improve it.

ACT

In Pursuit of Change, Outside the Echo Chamber

by Michele Frix, Chief of Staff, Seattle Foundation

My work in the social sector began in Guatemala, as a wide-eyed, green, recent college graduate. For several months, I shadowed a group of *maquila* (factory or sweatshop) workers in the garment industry. This group of tenacious and fearless women organized the first labor union in the *maquila* sector in the country. The union invited a former professor and mentor of mine to support them in their struggle against poor working conditions, egregious labor rights violations, and acts of intimidation. At the time I arrived in 2007, literally days after collecting my diploma, it was not perfectly clear to me what role I would play in their fight for justice. I now use the term ‘shadowed’ very intentionally. This group of women taught me much more than I could ever offer them, beyond simply my friendship. What they taught me was the power of unity, tenacity, and the ultimate demonstration of servant leadership. I left Guatemala a changed person, both in terms of my career path, but also in terms of how I decided I was going to approach my role as a white, middle-class, educated woman in the global development and philanthropic sectors.

Fast forward not too many years, and at 25 years old (still wide-eyed and green may I add) I began my work with Seattle International Foundation (SIF). A foundation formed just months before I stepped into the office, I found myself as part of a mighty team of two – working alongside the CEO to establish a grantmaking program focused on the part of the world I cared deeply about (Central America) on a topic I was simply on fire about after my time in Guatemala - women’s leadership in the social sector. SIF started a fellowship program for Central American women leaders, not too dissimilar from the Independent Sector NGen program, in partnership with a local Seattle-based nonprofit iLEAP. Our goal was to identify, support and connect women leaders working in the nonprofit sector throughout the region.

The magic behind the program was not what we could offer them as a Seattle-based foundation, but more what they could offer each other as peers and colleagues committed to the same urgent issues in their home countries: human rights, climate change, access to financial services, reproductive health and rights, and more. I was once again introduced to a tenacious group of women leaders. They reminded me of the union leaders I had met years before in Guatemala. As Fellows, they had taken time out of their busy lives and careers to focus on something they usually did not have the bandwidth for: their own personal journeys as social impact leaders.

As I approached five years in my role with SIF and nearly 30 years of age, I began to wonder if I was in need of a leadership program like the one we had supported for Central American leaders. Up until that point in my career, and still to this day actually, I have only had male supervisors. They have been tremendous, supportive teachers and mentors to me, but I began to realize that I was emulating their leadership styles without contextualizing them for my own set of experiences and personal approach to leading. It was beginning to feel like I was wearing someone else’s clothes. I began to realize I needed to spend some time reflecting on my own personal leadership style – informed, of course, by all those I had worked for and learned from. My pursuit for a genuine leadership style was the catalyst for applying for the Independent Sector NGen program. In that pursuit, I also decided I needed to surround myself with other leaders who could understand some of the difficult questions I was grappling with: how do you react when you walk into a meeting and realize you are the only woman in the room, not to mention twenty years junior everyone else? There are so many women employed in the nonprofit sector, but why are there so few in the C-Suite or at the CEO level?

Do I need to embrace a more masculine style of leadership in order to be accepted and respected by others in society? Those questions inherently led me to seeking out friendships and mentoring relationships with other women in the social impact sector. We would discuss these questions together, offer each other solutions and support, and brainstorm how we might address the ever-widening gender gap in the sector. How could we reverse this negative trend line? What was the solution? The answer is – there are many solutions, and you likely have heard of at least a few already. Teaching women how to successfully negotiate pay early, so they start off their careers with a higher earning potential. Supporting and investing in paid parental or family leave so that women (and men) can take time off to care for a child or family member without setting back their career permanently. Addressing implicit bias in the interview and performance review process. Creating workplaces where a variety of leadership styles are appreciated and respected, rather than just the conventional styles. The list goes on.

But one solution that no one was talking about in my circle was how to bring along male allies in this struggle for gender equity. One evening, I looked around the room at a women’s networking event I was attending. It was seething with interesting and thought-provoking conversations around how to challenge gender bias in the workplace, the urgency to recognize how intersectionality plays into the gender gap, and how to navigate unknown waters when you’re the only woman in the room. It was reaffirming and helpful to know that I was not alone, but I wondered: were we leaving out a tremendously important player in this conversation, our male colleagues? Did they have the tools, and perhaps more importantly, the invitation to engage with us in this discussion in a productive way? I feared we had entered an echo chamber that we would never escape. In 25 to 30 years, would we still look around the sector and see fewer women, as well as people of color and other historically marginalized groups, at the top, leading nonprofits and foundations?

I cherish safe spaces for women, like the one mentioned above, and find them to be incredibly helpful in discovering solutions to complex problems. I am still a part of such groups and will continue to be throughout my career. But the refrain of how to build male allyship in order to promote gender equity kept echoing in my mind. How could we invite men into this discussion in a way that felt both respectful of the space we had created as women, but also inclusive?

Not just inclusive of male voices, but other voices, outside of the cisgender, white, middle-class perspectives. As we have learned acutely during this election season, sitting in your own echo chamber can, at times, be dangerous and actually set back your cause.

I’ve come to realize this pursuit of gender equity is more of a journey than a destination, and more of a process of storytelling than a set of boxes to check. I am committed to working with others to build bridges and dialogue across genders (in all senses of the term) in order to advance gender equity, especially in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. This group project is testament to the importance of building this dialogue.

As a part of this effort, we aim to launch a podcast, storytelling component of this learning guide. We hope to lift up the stories (from men and women) of how we can work across genders and perspectives to promote gender equity. We invite you to join us, and tell your own story.

If you are interested in contributing to the dialogue, please visit independentsector.org/2015ngenfellows.

Endnotes

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