AMERICAN EXPRESS NGEN FELLOWS
Convened by Independent Sector

2009-2010 | FELLOWS PROJECT FINAL REPORT

INDEPENDENT SECTOR
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AMERICAN EXPRESS

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Professionals under 40 feel that collaboration across sectors is necessary to solve society's problems and agree on the most important issues to address, but don't know how to connect with people in other sectors working to solve these problems.

This report highlights the potential power of an emerging group and an important approach for improving lives across the country and around the world.

The group is **NGen**—people under 40 who are America's next generation of leaders. The approach is **collaboration**—the ability to work across sectors in order to combine the resources and skills of the nonprofit, for-profit, and government sectors,

Both have already made substantial contributions to enriching lives and solving problems in communities everywhere. But this report—based on a survey that asked more than 2,000 NGeners for their perspectives on leadership development, cross-sector collaboration and how to solve society's most pressing problems—suggests that with more opportunities for leadership training and further engagement across sectors, that impact can be much greater.

This study was designed, conducted, and reported by the 2009-10 American Express NGen Fellows. This group of 12 nonprofit professionals was convened by Independent Sector, a nonpartisan, nonprofit leadership network committed to advancing the common good. Independent Sector created this six-month fellowship with the American Express Foundation, a partner similarly committed to leadership development. This program enhances IS's NGen: Moving Leaders from Next to Now initiative, which expand and improve the nonprofit talent pool by developing the leadership skills and professional networks of emerging leaders.

The study that follows reflects the views of the NGen Fellows, not those of Independent Sector or American Express. The survey does not claim scientific rigor, and the analysis and recommendations are not final conclusions. Instead, this study is designed to provoke discussions, even disagreements, in order to accelerate progress towards advancing the common good.

LEADERSHIP FOR COLLABORATION

We asked 'NGeners' – Americans under forty years old representing the nonprofit, for-profit, and government sectors - for their perspectives on leadership development, cross-sector collaboration and how to solve society's most pressing problems.

Who are we to pose such questions and undertake this research? We are 12 American Express NGen Fellows, young nonprofit leaders convened by Independent Sector from across the country, who work on a wide variety of social issues. While we are all in the nonprofit sector now, we have experience in the for-profit, government and nonprofit sectors of the United States and around the world. We do not claim to speak for all Americans under forty or that our research should serve as the final word on the issues it addresses. However, we believe that our survey of over 2,000 young professionals raises important questions deserving of attention and further analysis.

Some survey results directly aligned with our assumptions, as when most respondents agreed on the necessity of cross-sector collaboration. Others surprised us, such as the inability of most respondents to point to a single personal opportunity for formal leadership development. Equally deserving of further exploration is the question of why over half of NGeners cannot name a single leader under forty addressing social issues.

Whether the data confirmed our assumptions or provided new insight, all of it underscored a fundamental premise: **The challenges our world faces are too great, the work done by generations before us is too important, and the needs of our country are too urgent, to wait for another generation to come along. We need leaders now, especially young leaders, working together across sectors, to address society's most pressing problems.**

TOP FIVE FINDINGS

There are five main findings from the research that we believe are statistically significant and worthy of further study. For the sake of this report, "NGeners" are the population of people who responded to the survey, Americans under the age of 40 working in the nonprofit, government and private sectors.
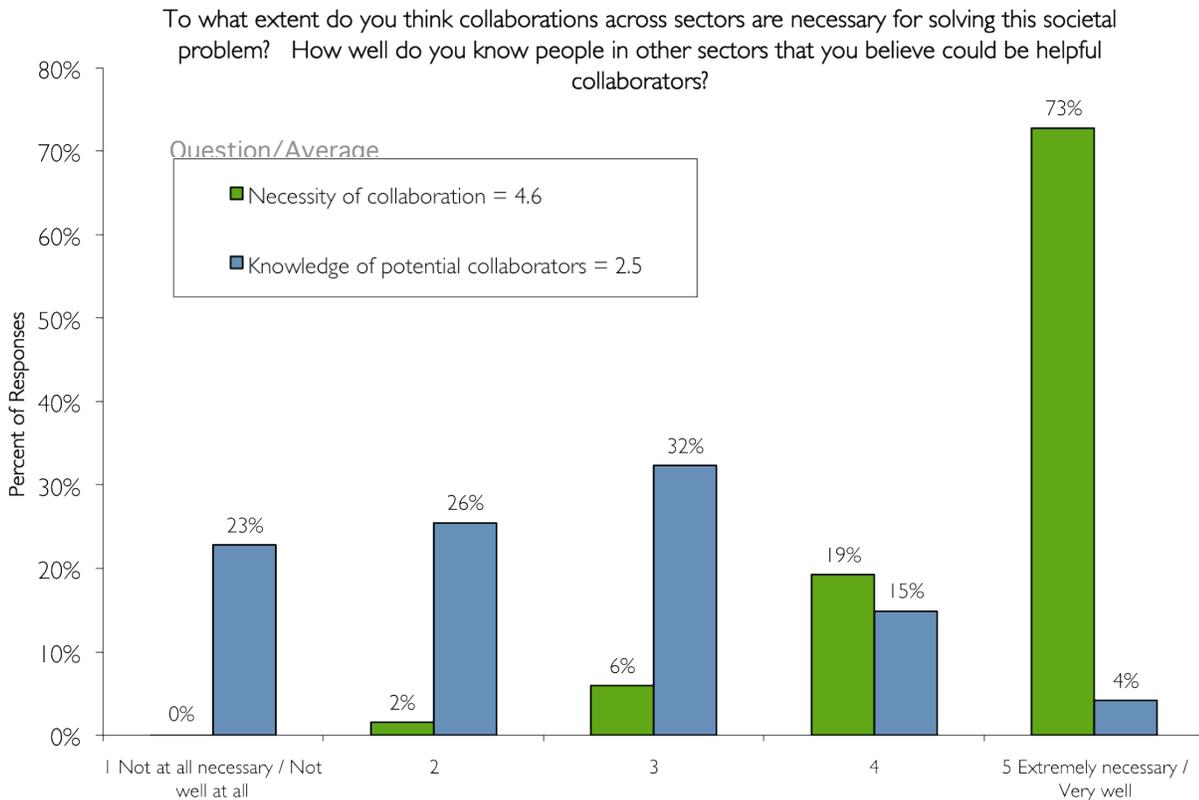
1) NGeners Mostly Agree on the Top Issues Facing Communities, the Nation, and the World

This survey revealed a surprising consensus among emerging leaders on the top areas of societal concern. At the start of the survey, respondents were asked to identify the issue most important to them personally, and that issue became the basis for their responses to later questions about collaboration and leadership. Educational attainment was rated the top societal issue for respondents from each sector – overall, one in five respondents rated this as their top concern. Poverty and access to health care rated second (16 percent) and third (10 percent), respectively.

Please indicate which societal problem or category of problems is most important to you personally.		
Issue or Concern for Society	**Total Reponses**	**Percent of Reponses**
Education	**434**	**21%**
Educational Attainment	434	21%
Poverty	**399**	**19%**
Poverty	323	16%
Homelessness	40	2%
Hunger	36	2%
Health	**355**	**17%**
Access to Healthcare	202	10%
Health and Wellness	153	7%
Environment	**213**	**10%**
Environmental (not Climate Change)	121	6%
Global Climate Change	67	3%
Energy	25	1%
Other Areas	**680**	**33%**
Community Development	189	9%
Diversity/Inclusion/Discrimination	136	7%
Economic Development	106	5%
Int'l Conflict Resolution	52	2%
Arts & Culture	44	2%
Other	153	7%

2) NGeners Feel Collaboration Across Sectors Is Very Important but Do Not Know the People, the Leaders or the Methods to Facilitate Collaboration

Regardless of race, gender, or sector, the vast majority of NGeners saw collaboration as necessary for solving the social problem they identified as most important. There is a strong desire to work with people in other sectors, but ignorance of the methods or even of the people to facilitate that cooperation. Respondents didn't feel confident in their ability to collaborate with their counterparts in other sectors and there was little specificity in their answers about what they think makes for a successful collaboration.

To what extent do you think collaborations across sectors are necessary for solving this societal problem? How well do you know people in other sectors that you believe could be helpful collaborators?

Question/Average

- ■ Necessity of collaboration = 4.6
- ■ Knowledge of potential collaborators = 2.5

Percent of Responses

	1 Not at all necessary / Not well at all	2	3	4	5 Extremely necessary / Very well
Necessity (green)	0%	2%	6%	19%	73%
Knowledge (blue)	23%	26%	32%	15%	4%

3) The Majority of NGeners Could Not Identify a Single Leader Under the Age of 40 who is Effectively Solving a Societal Problem
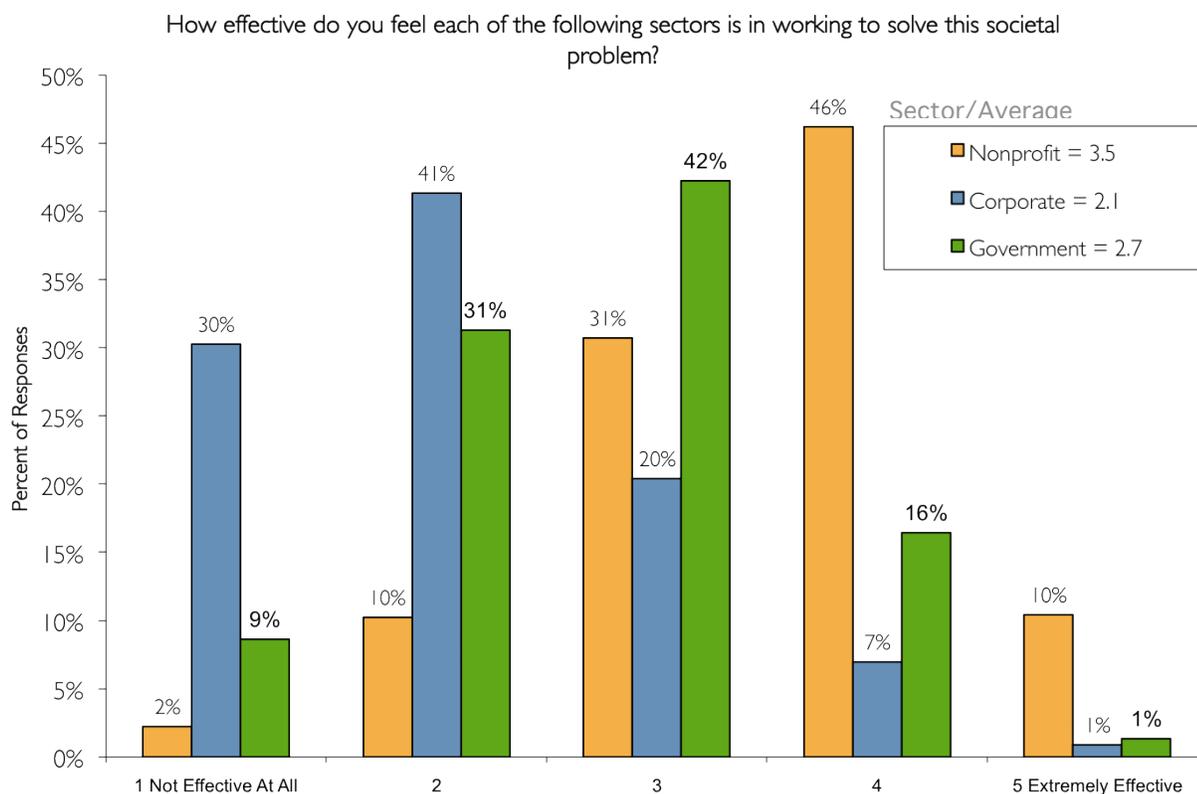
Nearly two-thirds of our respondents do not know peers they consider to be leaders in responding to pressing societal challenges. Only one leader under the age of 40 was mentioned 10 or more times: Larry Page of Google. This may suggest a lack of opportunities for younger leaders to showcase their skills in ways that are broadly recognized, or potentially a lack of recognition on the part of respondents that leadership styles may differ from traditional, visible forms taught to young leaders. This surprising finding is discussed further in our analysis and recommendations.

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Which two leaders, under the age of forty, do you think are the most effective in solving societal problems?[1]	
Category of Response	Percent of Respondents
Provided no names of leaders under 40	64%
Named at least one leader under 40	28%
Named only general groups of people (e.g. teachers)	8%
Of the just over 1,000 responses provided, the following are all leaders under the age of 40 who received 4 or more mentions.	

Larry Page – Google – 10
Sergey Brin – Google – 8
Matt Flannery – Kiva – 5

Ben Jealous – NAACP – 4
Kirsten Lodal – LIFT – 4
Mark Zuckerberg – Facebook – 4
Blake Mycoskie – TOMS Shoes – 4

[1] 1,300 respondents skipped this question. Only respondents who wrote in a name, a category or some form of "Don't know" are counted in this analysis. 7 Leaders under the age of 40 received 3 mentions each; 16 received 2 mentions; 250 received 1 mention.

4) NGeners Believe the Nonprofit Sector is Best Positioned to Take the Lead in Engaging Other Sectors to Solve Problems

Respondents agreed across sectors that the nonprofit sector is most effective in solving society's most pressing social issues. All sectors rated nonprofits significantly higher for their problem-solving on these issues than they did government or the for-profit sector. This suggests that leadership from the nonprofit sector could play a key role in catalyzing cross-sector engagement.

How effective do you feel each of the following sectors is in working to solve this societal problem?

Sector/Average
- Nonprofit = 3.5
- Corporate = 2.1
- Government = 2.7

	1 Not Effective At All	2	3	4	5 Extremely Effective
Nonprofit	2%	10%	31%	46%	10%
Corporate	30%	41%	20%	7%	1%
Government	9%	31%	42%	16%	1%

5) NGeners Believe They Need More, Organized Leadership Development Opportunities

Very few NGeners who responded to our survey have had organized leadership development opportunities, even though these were widely seen by respondents as important for their career and their ability to affect social issues. Only 35 percent of people under 40 said they participated in organized leadership development, 40 percent listed non-formal activities, and 25 percent could not list a single opportunity. Surprisingly, fewer respondents in the for-profit sector could identify a specific leadership development opportunity than their peers in the nonprofit and government sectors, suggesting that lack of opportunity in the nonprofit sector is not simply the result of limited funding, as is often assumed.

What was your most recent leadership development opportunity?				
Type of Opportunity	% of All Respondents	% of Nonprofit Respondents	% of Corporate Respondents	% of Government Respondents
General training program (in sector or university)	20%	24%	8%	18%
Leadership specific training program (in sector or university)	9%	9%	6%	13%
AmeriCorps	7%	6%	6%	11%
Opportunity in office or community volunteering	38%	37%	41%	37%
Created own training	3%	2%	8%	5%
None	24%	22%	31%	16%

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We offer the following assertions and recommendations based on analysis of our primary findings:

First, we believe that there is a "visibility vacuum" with regard to the young leaders who work to solve society's most pressing concerns.

One recent publication on generational leadership points to how powerful dominant mental models can be in shaping our view of leadership.[1] That is to say, if we are consistently presented with "leaders" of a particular age, gender, race, and style of leadership, it would be difficult for even the savviest thinkers to recognize leaders who do not fit this dominant mold. The inability of half of the NGeners who completed our survey to identify an under-40 leader they viewed as effective in solving societal problems, we believe, likely points less to a shortage of leaders and more to a lack of visibility of existing under-40 leaders.

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[1] Frances Kunreuther, Helen Kim and Robby Rodriquez, Working Across Generations (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 11-13.

When the pending "leadership vacuum" at nonprofits and foundations became a more common topic ten years ago,[2] many in the sector responded admirably by focusing on building a stronger pipeline of young leaders to assume senior positions. Unfortunately, our survey results suggest that many of these newly-developed leaders, who reflect both the cultural diversity and the diversity of approach prevalent among the younger generations at work in the sector, remain waiting in the wings and oftentimes working in the shadows, widely unrecognized by their peers. So what we are now faced with is a "visibility vacuum" where opportunities for young leadership to be highlighted are too few and far between.

Until we create more opportunities for visibility, the mental models that focus us on leadership in the forms demonstrated by those currently running the sector, however worthwhile, will persist. In order to address this visibility gap and make the most of the investment that many have made in younger leaders in recent years, there need to be more opportunities to share leadership responsibilities among generations and better mechanisms for highlighting the work of under-40 leaders.

Recommendations for Filling the Visibility Vacuum

- NGeners need to be proactive in pursuing and assuming leadership roles at all levels. Young professional networks throughout the country can play a valuable role by providing encouragement and opportunities for NGeners to do so.

- All three sectors should elevate the profiles of younger professionals who work toward a better world. This gives the next generation of potential leaders a chance to demonstrate that leadership is more than just fame and hierarchy. An annual cross-sector list of 40 leaders under 40 making a difference in the world would be an excellent start toward addressing the "visibility vacuum."

Second, everyone interested in social change must help establish clearer opportunities for cross-sector engagement and formal collaboration.

Our survey data documents a consensus among young people across sectors about the most pressing issues facing society, and most NGeners agree that collaboration is essential for solving those problems. Unfortunately, the data also suggests that NGeners are unfamiliar with viable models for developing collaborations and do not feel that they have clear access to potential collaborators across sectors.

Many best practices begin as intentional, sometimes initially-awkward practices which are eventually inculcated as part of the sector's mode of operation and approach for getting things done. Similarly, the same sort of initial intentionality must be applied in order to embed cross-sector collaboration as an intuitive approach to problem-solving.

The diverse careers of the Fellows administering this survey and the ease with which the survey reached significant numbers of people in each of the three sectors serves as one piece of evidence that younger generations may have more access to potential collaborators than they realize. But there remains great opportunity - through cross-sector convenings and leadership development programs that include collaboration as a focus - for these partnerships to move beyond incidental or personal relationships and become customs central not only to the culture of the nonprofit sector but to anyone interested in working for social change. As the survey data suggests, the nonprofit sector is well-positioned to take the lead in institutionalizing this approach among the sectors, as it is already highly-regarded by corporate and government professionals alike for its ability to address society's most pressing issues.

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[2] http://www.compasspoint.org/assets/5_daring.pdf

CONCLUSION

There is no question that developing a generation of truly collaborative leaders will be a challenge. The younger generations must look inward as much as outward for solutions. NGeners for the most part could not identify other under-40 leaders, and when we did, they were most often individuals who have gained some prominence in the media.

Expanding the definition of "leader" will be a crucial part of strengthening leadership and building powerful collaborations. NGeners did not name the person who called for a brainstorming meeting. We did not name the person who succinctly captured our ramblings and turned them into an action plan. We named the person whose name is at the top of the letterhead.

We need leadership training - but we would argue that the most important part of that training is skills to identify and foster leadership in others and collaboration among groups. We need training so that we see, appreciate, and emulate the skills in our colleagues in the other sectors. Only then, when we realize that it's not always the "famous" leader who should be involved in the collaboration, will we make the call to effective people in other sectors and invite them to collaborate with us. In order to solve society's greatest challenges, we want (and need!) to break down the artificial barriers that separate the nonprofit, for-profit, and government spheres. The talent and passion to do so exists across sectors, and we believe that cultivating collaborative leadership among younger generations will ultimately unlock this potential.

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

The online survey was distributed through a "snowball" sampling method, and we make no claims about the representativeness of these responses to any specific population. The 12 NGen fellows distributed the online survey link through emails to contacts, Facebook status updates, and Twitter postings. We know that Independent Sector and AmeriCorps also distributed the survey links through their listservs. The survey asked respondents to share the survey link with a friend or colleague under the age of 40. After three weeks, the survey received 2,680 responses. A final dataset of 2,078 responses was generated by excluding respondents who identified their age as forty or older, did not complete the survey beyond question 9 (of 22), or who wrote in nonsensical responses. Quantitative results were analyzed through descriptive statistics and basic inferential statistical tests. A sample of 20 percent of all qualitative results was thematically coded for use in analysis and reporting.

1,218 respondents identified themselves as part of the nonprofit sector, 268 as part of the corporate/for-profit sector, 276 as government, and 320 as "Other", including students.

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This diverse cohort brings tremendous experience to their fellowship, which included opportunities to collaborate with other talented emerging leaders, interact with seasoned leaders, and contribute to addressing the critical challenges facing the nonprofit and philanthropic community. These talented fellows are joint authors of this final report.

- Bridget Clark Whitney, executive director, Kids' Food Basket

- David McKinney, vice president of programs, Public Allies

- Kevin Bolduc, vice president of assessment tools, The Center for Effective Philanthropy

- Larry Smith, director, Third Millennium Initiative, Indiana University Center on Philanthropy (now Senior Vice President of Advancement and Strategic Planning, YMCA of Greater Indianapolis)

- Maya Enista, chief executive officer, Mobilize.org

- Monica Maggiano, director, Campaign to Reduce Poverty in America, Catholic Charities USA

- Neel Hajra, president and CEO, Nonprofit Enterprise at Work (NEW)

- Rahsaan Harris, program executive, The Atlantic Philanthropies

- Roopal Saran, director of client services, KaBOOM!

- Scott Beale, CEO and founder, Atlas Service Corps

- Toby Chalberg, chief strategy officer and VP of public policy, Points of Light Institute (now Founder and Director, New South Ventures)

- Trish Tchume, director of civic engagement, The Building Movement Project (Demos)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact Independent Sector at ngenfellows@indepedentsector.org or (202)-467-6100 to learn more about the NGen Fellows Program, this study, or to request the raw data of this survey.

APPENDIX

Sector of Respondent							
	Overall Avg.	Nonprofit	Corporate	Government	Student	I'm not sure	Other
# of Responses	2082	1218	268	276	73	32	215
% of Responses	100%	59%	13%	13%	4%	2%	10%
To what extent is it important to your self-identity that you work in this sector? (1=not at all, 5=a great deal)	3.6	4.0	2.2	3.3	3.6	2.7	3.6
Is your job primarily focused on the societal problem you chose earlier in this survey? (% yes)	44%	50%	16%	46%	56%	44%	40%
To what extent do you feel you are working to solve this societal problem as part of your job? (1=not at all, 5=a great deal)	3.0	3.2	1.9	3.1	2.9	2.7	2.8
To what extent do you feel you are personally working to solve this societal problem outside of your job? (1=not at all, 5=a great deal)	2.9	3.0	2.6	2.9	2.9	2.8	2.7
How effective do you feel the Nonprofit Sector is in working to solve this societal problem? (1=not effective at all, 5=extremely effective)	3.5	3.6	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.7	3.4
How effective do you feel the Corporate Sector is in working to solve this societal problem? (1=not effective at all, 5=extremely effective)	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.0	2.1	2.0	1.9
How effective do you feel the Government is in working to solve this societal problem? (1=not effective at all, 5=extremely effective)	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.9	2.9	2.8	2.6
To what extent do you think collaborations across sectors are necessary for solving this societal problem? (1=not at all necessary, 5=extremely necessary)	4.6	4.7	4.5	4.7	4.5	4.6	4.5
How well do you know people in other sectors that you believe could be helpful collaborators in solving this societal problem? (1=not well at all, 5=extremely well)	2.5	2.6	2.4	2.7	2.2	2.1	2.3
How do you think others perceive your current level of leadership within your organization? Note different scale. (1=Most people think of me as a leader, 2=Some people, 3=Few people, 4=Most people do not think of me as a leader)	2.0	1.9	2.2	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.1
How useful was this opportunity in improving your ability to advance in your job? (1=not at all useful, 5=extremely useful)	3.3	3.4	3.0	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.1
How useful was this opportunity in improving your ability to solve the social issue you selected? (1=not effective at all, 5=extremely effective)	2.8	2.9	2.4	2.9	3.1	2.9	2.5
DEMOGRAPHICS	Overall Avg.	Nonprofit	Corporate	Government	Student	I'm not sure	Other
Age (Average)	28	28	29	29	26	25	29
% Women	77%	82%	61%	74%	78%	84%	70%
% Indicated only Caucasian race/ethnicity	78%	78%	78%	76%	80%	78%	75%