

FINDING LEADERS, FINDING SOLUTIONS

This exercise can be used at a staff meeting or board retreat or in workshops for nonprofit leaders. We recommend using a facilitator to help keep the group on track and encourage people to move beyond their comfort zone. The exercise starts with a large group brainstorm, and then divides participants into small groups for discussion. The large group reconvenes for a report back and synthesis and ends with a discussion of next steps. This exercise can take up to 2 hours, so you may want to break it up or plan for more time.

PURPOSE OF THIS EXERCISE:

To begin a discussion and brainstorm about multi-generational issues in non-profit organizations, in service of identifying initial solutions to impending or current challenges.

HOPED-FOR OUTCOMES:

- Open a dialogue about multigenerational issues and challenges
- Help each individual to identify and assess their own observations about multigenerational leadership
- Begin to brainstorm possible solutions to these challenges and steps that individuals can take immediately

STEP 1: BRAINSTORM

- Start the exercise by asking, “What do you think are some of the problems facing the nonprofit sector in finding leaders?”
- Have participants list responses on post-it notes.

STEP 2: CLUSTER RESPONSES

Have people post their post-it's on flipcharts and ask them to share some of their answers while you organize the problems raised into clusters of similar issue areas. Transfer each cluster of problems on to separate sheets of flip chart paper, and post the clusters side by side.

STEP 3: SMALL GROUP ASSIGNMENT

Break into small groups by asking the participants to gather around the topics that they feel most drawn to. If there is a big imbalance among groups, ask some people to move to another issue they are also interested in.

Have the small groups take their list of problems and place them in different corners of the room. Provide flip chart paper and markers, and ask each group to choose a facilitator to keep time and a recorder.

STEP 4: SMALL GROUP BRAINSTORM

- Ask the participants in the small groups to brainstorm solutions to the problems posed. Push them to think creatively. Allow fifteen minutes, but extend the time if the groups are large. The recorder should write brainstorm suggestions on the flip chart paper for all to see.
- After brainstorming solutions, each group reviews the responses.
- Ask the group whether there is any variation in their responses by generation. Then ask them to categorize each solution:
 - Personal
 - Organizational
 - Structural

Some solutions may fall into more than one category.

STEP 5: RECONVENE LARGE GROUP

Come back together as a large group, and ask each small group to report back on any generational differences. Then have them report on the personal, organizational, and structural solutions to the problems they were addressing. Have a recorder note their answers on separate flip chart sheets with these headings: personal, organizational, and structural solutions.

Have the facilitator ask the group to think about what steps are needed to implement these solutions on personal, organizational, and structural levels. This can be done first as an individual writing exercise or in small groups (with people from the same organization) with a report back to the larger group. Or it can be held as a large-group discussion.

HELPFUL HINT:

If the problem is that new potential leaders don't have enough training or skills to be executives, a personal solution would be for new potential leaders to seek out ways to build their leadership capacity. An organizational solution would be for the organization to start a training program for new potential leaders. A structural or sector-wide solution would be to make low- cost and effective training programs are made widely available.

STEP 6: REPORT BACK AND CLOSE

Report back to the full group the solutions that people came up with and see if there are personal and organizational commitments participants want to make before they leave.

HELPFUL HINT:

It might help participants if you structured the conversation by asking:

- What can people [or people in my organization] do to make these personal solutions to the problem of finding leaders possible?
- What can organizations [or my organization] do to implement these organizational solutions to finding leaders?
- What changes are needed in the nonprofit sector to implement these structural solutions to finding leaders?

