

WHAT'S NEXT?

**Baby Boom-Age Leaders in
Social Change Nonprofits**

Building Movement Project

The Building Movement Project advocates for US nonprofit organizations to build a strong social justice ethos into their vision and activities and to strengthen the role of nonprofit groups as sites of democratic practice. The project was developed to look closely at the role of US-based nonprofits in building democracy by offering weight, voice and scale to marginalized and disenfranchised populations through social change organizations.

BMP engages four strategies to accomplish its goals. These include:

- Changing the discourse and practice within the nonprofit sector to endorse values of justice, fairness, equity, and sustainability.
- Identifying and working with social service organizations as neglected sites for social change/justice activities where staff and constituencies can be engaged as participants in democratic practices for social change.
- Supporting young leaders who bring new ideas and energy to social change work and the promise of developing new forms of movement building.
- Listening to and engaging people working in social change organizations – especially grassroots and community-based groups – to strengthen their ability to connect their vision and mission to practice.

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What's Next?

Baby Boom-Age Leaders in Social Change Nonprofits

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With its enormous size, the baby boom generation has and continues to make an important impact on U.S. society and history. Like many others, nonprofit sector leaders have begun to pay attention to the aging of this large cohort, who began turning sixty this year. Researchers and other observers have raised concerns about a looming leadership “crisis,” noting the number of organizations headed by baby-boom age directors. This has led to rising concern about nonprofit executive transitions and new leadership development.

In this paper, we report on how twenty-seven social change nonprofit leaders in the baby boom generation view their work and the contributions they have made during the past 30 years. The leaders we talked with come from diverse backgrounds and are involved in a wide range of issues. All have helped to build strong nonprofit organizations that have made major contributions to social change. Our goal was first to hear what these leaders thought of the future of their work, their organizations, and their own lives. We also wanted to listen to their perspectives about the future of nonprofit sector leadership.

Several key issues emerged in our interviews and small group discussions. Baby boom-generation leaders were extremely proud of what their generation had accomplished through the

various social movements of the 1960s and '70s—including the Civil Rights, anti-war, and women's movements and various identity-based mobilizations. They were less enthusiastic about their work in the '80s and '90s when, in the face of government cutbacks and the rise of the conservative right, they turned to creating and working in nonprofit organizations. There they made long-term commitments to social change work and built institutions anchored in communities. Despite their lack of management experience, these leaders learned on the job how to grow and sustain complex, effective organizations. Ironically, the more successful they were in building their organizations, the more they had to work to keep pace with the growing demands from the community and the increasing need to identify sources of funding.

As these baby boom-generation leaders edge towards traditional retirement age, they have several reasons to be anxious about their own future and the future of their agencies. On a personal level, they worry about whether they have the financial means to retire. Some talked about being tired of their role as organizational leader. They said they are interested in trying something new, but unclear about their options and worried about making enough income to sustain themselves and dependent family members.

Older leaders agreed that in order to remain vital and to contribute to progressive social change, they need to communicate with and engage younger leaders. At the same time, they have mixed feelings about the next generation. They are impressed by younger leaders' capacity, but unsure of their long-term commitment to the work. When it came to transitioning leadership, many older leaders admit that they did not know how to transfer the skills and experience they had gained during the past three decades to new leadership.

Looking Ahead: Four Recommendations

Based on these conversations with baby boom leaders, and drawing from our past conversations with younger social change activists, we have identified four areas that could assist the leadership transition from older to younger generation leaders.

- **Support the Baby Boom Generation's Leadership and Life Transition Planning**

There is a clear need to address the baby boom-generation leaders' anxiety about their prospective life transitions. Succession planning sessions have begun to confront this need, but there is little that looks at structural, rather than individual solutions to this challenge.

- **Look for Opportunities for Continuing Contributions by Baby Boomers**

Baby boomers who do not want to stay in their current work positions will have many years ahead of them to contribute to movement

building and social change work. While there has been support for volunteering in the civic sector, there have been few convenings of older social change leaders to discuss their futures and how they see their next contributions.

- **Promote Cross-Generational Dialogue and Learning to Transfer Information and Share Experience**

Baby boom-generation leaders want to provide information to and learn from younger leaders. The wisdom, energy, and skills of both generations will be needed for making future social change possible.

- **Explore Different Models of Organizational Leadership that Promote Mutual Learning and Shared Leadership**

Baby boom-generation leaders have made significant contributions to social movements by founding and guiding the growth of many successful nonprofit organizations. However, the growth in size of these organizations and the sector—has sometimes been accompanied by bureaucratization. Many, including younger leaders, note that this growth may also have compromised the sector's vision and commitment to progressive social change. For baby boomers to remain vital and for the next generations to expand their leadership, all thoughtful leaders need to think more strategically *together* about the future of the movement.

INTRODUCTION

The Baby Boom Generation and Social Activism

The birth, growth, and aging of the baby boom generation has captured headlines in the U.S. for five decades. As the Boomer generation shifted from activists to breadwinners, they had a particularly strong influence on the development and enormous growth of the nonprofit sector. It was in nonprofit groups where those who continued to be committed to the social movements of their youth dedicated themselves full-time to work for social change. Now the baby boom generation that has headed social change nonprofits for more than three decades are nearing the traditional retirement age. It is a period of transition and opportunity—for both the baby boom generation and the generations that follow. Many in the nonprofit sector recognize the significance of this transition, but there is much to be done to examine its impact and seize this opportunity as a positive force in movement building.

During the past five years, there has been a flurry of activities related to what is frequently referred to as the pending crisis in leadership. A host of national, regional and local studies of nonprofit leaders have found that most (more than 50 percent and often closer to 75 percent) report that they were planning to leave their jobs within the next five years. Whether or not they actually do leave in this time period is yet to be

seen, but the reports stress that the nonprofit sector is simply not prepared to cope with the mass exodus that will result when the aging baby boom generation (born between 1946 and 1964) retires.¹

To complement these findings, several reports have examined younger leaders' perspectives, especially those working for social change, about nonprofit leadership. These next generations – Generation X (born 1965 to 1980) and the first of the Generation Y cohort (born between 1980 and 2000) – often express views contrary to the prevailing crisis scenario. They see a new generation of leaders who are committed, effective and able to take the helm. And, they see leadership in ways that differ from their older counterparts.²

This discussion of generational changes in leadership takes place against a backdrop of major political, economic, technological, and social transformations in the United States and across the globe. Movement building in the US often refers to the mobilizations of the 1960s, starting with Civil Rights and including other movements ranging from the women's movement to the identity-based movements based in Black, Chicano, and Asian communities as well as gay liberation (now the

¹ For example, Bell, Jeanne, Richard Meyers, and Timothy Wolfred. *Daring to Lead 2006: A National Study of Nonprofit Executive Leadership*. San Francisco: CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, 2006. Teegarden, Paige. "Nonprofit Executive Leadership and Transitions Survey 2004: The Annie E. Casey Foundation Grantees." Baltimore, MD: The Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2005. Birdsell, David and Douglas Muzzio. *The Next Leaders: UWNYP Grantee Leadership Development and Succession Management Needs*. New York City: United Way, 2003.

² Kunreuther, Frances. *Generational Changes and Leadership: Implications for Social Change Organizations*, 2002. http://www.buildingmovement.org/artman/uploads/generational_change_and_leadership.pdf; Kunreuther, Frances, Ludovic Blain and Kim Fellner, *Generational Leadership Listening Sessions*, 2004. http://www.buildingmovement.org/artman/uploads/glls_report.pdf

LGBT movement).³ These were touchstones of the older generation and have taken on almost mythic proportions both for those who participated in them and for US-based social change activists who have followed.

In this paper, we report on how social change nonprofit leaders in the baby boom generation view their work and organizations over the past thirty years and what they see as they look to the future. As they enter the next stage of their professional lives, in a time where people are living longer and healthier, baby boom-age leaders are assessing the contributions they have made and also the roles they want to play during their next thirty years.

In the spring of 2006, we talked with twenty-seven executive directors and organizational leaders between age 50 and 66 across the country. Many of the interviews took place one-on-one. We also held a few small group discussions. (For a list of those interviewed, see Appendix I) Several of the interviewees are founding directors of their organization; all have helped pioneer their respective fields. They come from diverse backgrounds and are involved in a wide range of issues. Some are directors of large, multi-service organizations that have been in existence 100 years or more, while others lead more recently established major advocacy and community-building organizations on such issues as LGBT rights and housing. Still others work on immigrant rights and environmental justice issues, leading smaller grassroots organizations established in the last couple of decades. We also talked with directors of several progressive foundations. One constant among these directors and their organizations is that all are committed to social change values and see themselves as a

part of a larger social movement in the U.S.

Our goal was to hear what these leaders thought of the future of their work, their organizations, and leadership in the nonprofit sector. Many of them have been thinking about or have begun to implement their own leadership transition. Our questions ranged over several topics: organizational needs (their organizational needs currently and in the future); personal experience and perspective (how leaders became involved in social change issues, what they want to learn and do next, and what barriers they face); and generational issues (what they feel their generation has accomplished, the role of age or generation in leadership transition, what they want to know about the younger generation, and how they approach generational change). Depending on the format of our conversation, not everyone was asked all of the same questions (see Appendix II for interview questions).

We hope this report will add to our understanding of baby boom-generation leaders in social change organizations and their role in future movement building—as organizational leaders, as experienced activists in the field, and as mentors and partners to the next generation of leaders.

³ LGBT refers to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender

KEY ISSUES

The Baby Boom Generation and Social Activism

It comes as no surprise that the mass movements of the 1960s and 1970s—the Civil Rights Movement, anti-war movement, women’s movement, and identity-based movements such as the Black, Chicano, LGBT, and Asian American movements—had an enormous influence on baby boom-age leaders. What we did not expect was how many people we interviewed credited other, more formative experiences for their careers in social change. Some cited religious institutions, especially during teenage years, playing an important role in instilling values that led them to become interested in community service and social justice issues.

I felt I got grounding out of the Catholic Church where I was taught about faith, hope, love, and charity; but also about justice and responsibility.

Others pointed to family and class backgrounds as major influences, such as growing up in an activist household (“red-diaper baby”) or having working-class, union-member parents. Others offered personal experiences, such as witnessing the first school integration or going to Mississippi during the Civil Rights movement, as life-directing events. Several leaders described how growing up working class and facing overt racism led them naturally to youth activism and beyond.

I got to see a lot of injustices. I saw how we were treated as second-class citizens

because we spoke Spanish...seeing my classmates have their mouths washed out with soap for speaking Spanish.

All I knew was I couldn’t face rotating shifts at a factory....I had this fixation on meaningful work because I grew up in a world where people didn’t have meaningful work.

Several leaders pointed out that although much of the work of the social change movements of the ’60s had begun earlier, the sheer size of their generation and their ability to mobilize in large numbers made a decisive difference in pushing through major changes. The backdrop of the mass social movements of the times gave these leaders the opportunity and motivation to engage in sustained activism. Their shared identity sprang from movement building work of the ’60s and beyond. They worked hard, driven by political values that allowed them to envision a new, more just world. The ethos of their generation was “change,” and they took many risks to achieve it. Most important, the spirit of the times solidified their belief that important social change was possible.

The image then was we can change the world; we can have impact to change society.

We all thought that change was permanent. It was so obvious, revolution was coming.

I think many of us didn’t really think about leadership per se in those days. We were just doing it. And because we viewed ourselves as part of a collective movement, we really didn’t focus on individual leadership.

There was great generational pride among baby boom leaders as they discussed the accomplishments of the Civil Rights, anti-war, and women's and other identity-based movements. One spoke of the fight against Jim Crow as a great achievement of his young years. They pointed out that these social movements had expanded opportunities for a large number of people, forced governments to move resources to underserved populations, and legitimized the rights of many who had been marginalized. Beyond establishing legal rights, these social movements also brought dignity and respect to those who had been discriminated against.

Rise of the Right and Building the Nonprofit Infrastructure

However, when asked, "What has your generation accomplished?" the leaders rarely referred to events after 1980. When pressed about what happened during the past two decades, many commented on the gap they felt between their youthful expectations of achieving major change and the world they saw today. There were a few notable exceptions, such as the LGBT movement, which gained much ground during the '80s and '90s on issues such as AIDS and LGBT civil rights.

Interviewees pointed to the political changes of the '80s and '90s, as Reagan's presidency ushered in the end of the focus on social welfare, and the Eastern Bloc collapsed. The characteristics of social change work were altered. The rise of the political right in the US over the past thirty years resulted in many cuts in social services. In response, nonprofit organizations whose work had been to advocate for change on a mass national level turned to

providing local services to fill the needs left by the government's increasing abdication of responsibility to the people.

Community-based organizations became service providers and got government contracts, and they were no longer...[in] the streets. And so that is a great personal disappointment to me, a kind of loss of soul....I thought it would be different.

Many baby boom leaders commented that they did not foresee how strong and lasting the forces of global capitalism would be economically, politically, and culturally. This influence, combined with the continued consolidation of power by the conservative right in the US, led one respondent to comment, "Sometimes it feels like we've changed the world; other times, [it seems] the world hasn't changed at all."

One way the boomer leaders solidified the movement was by choosing to make long-term commitment to social change a central value of their lives. Since there was no blueprint for turning their activism into long-term, full-time jobs, they were not prepared for managing and developing strong nonprofit organizations. Learning-by-doing was their modus operandi, as baby boom leaders built the structure of the current nonprofit and philanthropic sectors to reflect their values.

We lived our politics. I think that we put a lot of time into founding organizations and building organizations that reflect our politics.

I was never prepared to take on the leadership roles I did.... None of us had a clue what we were getting ourselves into.

The Personal Costs

Their success proved to be a double-edged sword. Several of the leaders recognized, though not always directly, that they had created jobs with overly demanding or unsustainable workloads, little division between work and home life, and (for some) low compensation. As nonprofits proliferated and relatively easy funding receded, fundraising for many became increasingly challenging. Today, these leaders are working harder and harder to sustain their organizations.

The more successful we are, the more paperwork [we have], and its killing me.

Over the years, their jobs have grown with their organization's successes, making their own lives difficult and creating multifaceted executive director positions that would be hard to fill when they left. Several of those we interviewed talked about how their current responsibilities were not sustainable, and some had begun to modify their jobs and decrease their work hours to make the job more doable and more attractive to a potential successor. Many pointed to the irony that their particular contributions might also have created barriers to the leadership transitions needed to sustain their organizations and movements.

On a personal level, a number of those we talked with were tired. Most wished for more time to focus on their own interests, whether at the job or elsewhere. It was not uncommon to hear how these leaders were ready to cut back on their work hours if they could find a way to make doing so financially viable. After decades of frontline organizing, one leader said, *"There comes a time when your nerves can't take it anymore."* We heard how leaders were particularly worn down by the need to raise funds, the constant changes in funders' reporting requirements, the demands of supervising staff, and overall the long hours of the job.

To tell you the truth I'm tired, and I find myself having to work harder. I go in to work earlier and earlier.... I'm more and more frustrated.... The problem is that our jobs have grown with us, but I have a hard time teaching others how to do it because I know how to do it; I just get it done somehow.

What's Next for the Baby Boom Generation Leaders?

These leaders were thoughtful about the future. They reflected on the challenges they currently face as individuals, discussed what might happen to their organizations, and talked about their role in movement building over the next decades. It struck us how many of the baby boom-age leaders were looking to the future with anxiety on a number of fronts. With their identity closely linked to their organizations, some are worried that they will not know what to do when they retire. Financial insecurity made envisioning moving to new, perhaps less demanding, positions more difficult. Ageism, especially among women, was noted as a particularly under-attended issue.

Cutting back on the job or leaving altogether raised the issue of financial viability. Interestingly, regardless of their income – from those who make just above living wage to those with six-figure salaries – most were worried about their financial future. Some of those we interviewed had pensions, savings, or other means of supporting their future; but others did not, especially those who worked in smaller, more grassroots organizations. Many told us that they would have to keep working for a long time to be able, as one put it, "to continue to pay my bills and live decently."

We were also struck by a lack of sharing on these issues. Respondents noted that they talked about the personal issues facing them

with friends and family, but rarely in other venues. These anxieties remained in private conversations, to be solved individually and with limited means to alleviate anxiety. Participants in one of the discussion groups we held said they would like to keep meeting. Some said they felt an urgent need to address issues for their generation in a more collective, structural way.

[We] don't know how to negotiate for ourselves. We're never going to retire. How are we ever going to get support?

Although most respondents were not really sure what was next for them and, as one pointed out, “there are no clear post-ED avenues,” they were aware of the danger that staying “too long” could have a negative impact on their organization and themselves. Most did not want another full-time job and many, as one said, “did not want to be a consultant forever.” They were clear that they still have much to contribute to progressive social change and wanted to find ways to stay involved. Many said they were ready to learn new things, go deeper in their understanding of particular issues, and write about their experiences.

A number of us talked about needing to get together people 60 and older, and begin to talk about our relationship to the movement....That is our common desire. I really want to do some writing – autobiography – and continue to help develop a mass-based movement.

Leaders talked about their interest in finding a more unified strategy for social change that would consolidate resources in creative, but not forced, collaborations. Others felt a need to return to the basics of organizing and be committed to building a large base of leaders to be able, as one said, “to seize the movement moment.”

Movement-oriented leaders in smaller organizations were more likely to talk about staying on but creating different configurations. A couple of groups have started a sister organization to the one they founded and led for many years so as to be physically separate from the first organization and able to focus on issues that complement the work, such as incorporating more cultural aspects to organizing or working on issues that particularly affect the elderly constituency. One leader who was in this process commented:

How do we stay active, like close enough... but not too close. You want to be in the movement, but you don't want to be deciding things. You want to be in a supportive role now, or in a lead role but in a different area.

The Transition: How Baby Boom Generation Leaders View the Next Generation

All those we interviewed agreed that it is important to think about leadership transition and focus on the next generation of leaders. However, their perceptions of what was needed during this transition and their experience with younger leaders varied widely.

At one extreme, some doubted whether a generation gap exists or if it is even an important consideration. But more common was the attitude expressed by a respondent who was clear that there needs to be more discussion about generational change: “If you are not thinking and talking about it, you are not developing the next generation of leaders.”

Many of the baby boom leaders we talked with felt that the younger leaders have tremendous breadth and depth in their leadership, commitment to social justice, and an expansive outlook unlimited by—and perhaps as yet untested by—the kind of experience that tends to limit older leaders’ vision and strategies. They see younger leaders as much more adept at using technology to frame and move the issues. Some see that the nonprofit institutions need to change, structurally and operationally, in order to resonate with younger leaders.

Although they see how changes will be made by younger leaders, several felt, as one commented, that “it’s hard to take that leap of faith” to believe that the younger leaders could fill the role. At the same time, there were several positive comments about the younger generation having a healthier approach to doing long-term, sustainable movement work and recognizing that working long hours can be a path to burnout.

They (younger leaders and staff) are not thinking of working 24/7 in their jobs like I did.... I think there is a chance of people coming out healthier, more whole and having a more holistic relationship with the world around them. I think there’s a little resentment that gets played out on both sides. I sometimes feel it; like people in my office don’t want to work as hard.

Some baby boom-generation leaders rejected that their generation was more collectively oriented than the younger generation, and instead described their own generation as the “me” generation, one that supported charismatic leaders. There were several comments on how the next generation of leaders seemed less ego-oriented and more able to work across traditional organizational and political divides.

So they don’t bring like this ego-centered leadership, “I am the leader and you’re disrespecting me.”... I don’t know how to explain it, but that’s not one of their avenues for solving that. It’s more like consensus building in that sense.

Others expressed a concern that, once they have reached a certain level of leadership or leave their current organization, the younger generation leaders will have few options for similar or increased leadership opportunities in the field. Such dim future prospects, they fear, may result in losing these talented young leaders to a different field or sector.

There was also a fear expressed by baby boom leaders that members of the next generation’s leadership do not have the interest or spirit needed for these jobs. A few felt strongly that, partly because they—the baby boomers—worked hard to provide adequately for their children, the younger generation is materialistic and wants everything “now” rather than “paying their dues.” Some felt that the younger generation needs to decide whether they are committed enough to stay in the movement, while others felt that some of the younger leaders’ class aspirations will make them leave the nonprofit sector or abandon smaller nonprofit organizations. Others cautioned, however, that the older generation must not be dogmatic in its views about what it means to work for social justice. It was also noted that developing lay leaders, not just those who will become executive directors or board members, needed to be a priority in social change work.

Need for Intergenerational Dialogue

Baby boom leaders wanted to know more about the younger generation’s worldview and

vision for the future. At the same time, they argued that the younger generation needs to learn what has come before them to have a better understanding of current conditions. There was also a desire that both baby boomers and the younger generation approach one another with genuine mutual appreciation.

Baby boom leaders agreed on the importance of transferring information to the younger generation for movement building and organization building. They want to pass on movement perspectives, decisions, and mistakes made in a useful way, not dwelling condescendingly on the past but engaging in honest storytelling.

I've learned that when we talk story, we should not do it in a way that implies that we did it better or that we were that great. And we talk as much about the mistakes we made, about the regrets we have as we do the successes.

It's always a challenge talking about the past in a way that's not glorifying the past. It doesn't mean that we did everything right or that we know exactly what we were doing. It just means that we went through this and we can tell the story and let people judge for themselves...[what they can use....I've tried to do that in a way that's not preaching or paternalistic. I've heard so many people in my generation talk down to the younger people: "Oh, back in the 60s, blah, blah, blah."

Baby boom leaders believe that the next generation could learn from the past even if they will do things in a new way. While some leaders were using staff meetings to create space for intergenerational dialogue, others saw this conversation taking place outside organizational settings in more informal social settings.

Most baby boom-generation leaders we talked with have had mixed results in trying to prepare the next generation for organizational leadership. Perhaps one reason is the baby boomers reported that these discussions centered primarily around what older leaders could provide, a little around what the generations could exchange, and very little on the new generation of leadership.

In addition, there were older leaders who had decided to move on to other positions – such as in policy and politics – that realized that there was no one “behind” them to take on their work. The lesson they learned, often belatedly, is to be constantly on the lookout for the next generation of leaders. To address this need, a few of the baby boom leaders had detailed plans and structures for leadership transfer to future generations. One leader talked about a five-year plan to transition leadership of his organization. Another talked about a youth-led strategic planning process to transfer the leadership from one generation to another. Both mentioned that these processes took more time than anticipated and that patience was an important factor for success.

We thought we could [make the transition] in a year or two, change the organization. But we learned a lot of lessons from that; it can't happen that fast. Just like when you have children, it takes years of work with them to teach them things. Spend time with them, nurture them. There are a lot of things that have to take place.

Older generation leaders have another reason to want to work with younger leaders: many are looking for ways to continue to be a part of the larger social movement, even after they leave their current organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The baby boom generation is distinguished by its involvement and leadership in many of the key movements that mark US history, including the Civil Rights, anti-war, and women's movements. They have also built an important movement infrastructure by founding and developing successful nonprofit organizations—both large and small—through the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. Their rich experience as activists and organization builders is a valuable asset to the next generation of leaders.

Three major questions loom for these baby boom-generation leaders, the nonprofit organizations they founded, and the movement as a whole:

- **WHAT RESOURCES ARE NEEDED** to help the baby boom-generation leaders deal with the financial challenges of the next phase of their lives?
- **WHAT ARE THE BEST WAYS** to transfer the knowledge and experience of the baby boom-generation leaders to a new generation of leadership in their organizations?
- **HOW CAN THE OLDER GENERATION LEADERS** who want to continue their social change contributions after they leave their positions as executive directors and organizational leaders?

At the moment, baby boom-generation leaders have been facing all of these questions in an isolated and individual way. Much more needs to be done to address these concerns from a structural perspective.

Based on our conversations with these leaders, as well as drawing from our past conversations with younger social change

leaders,⁴ we present four recommendations that we believe can be instrumental in assisting the baby boom-generation leaders prepare for their life and work transitions as well as bring the younger and older leaders closer together to work for social change in the future:

- 1 CREATE** collective resources and options for the baby boom generation's leadership and life transition planning
- 2 IDENTIFY** and develop opportunities for baby boom generations to continue their contributions
- 3 PROMOTE** cross-generational dialogue and learning to facilitate information transfer and share experience
- 4 EXPLORE** different models of organizational leadership that promote mutual learning and shared leadership

Each of these recommendations is discussed in detail below.

Recommendation #1: Create Collective Resources and Options for the Baby Boom Generation's Leadership and Life Transition Planning

There is a clear need to address the baby boom-generation leaders' anxiety about their

⁴ Kunreuther, Frances. *Up Next: Generation Change and the Leadership of Nonprofit Organizations*. Baltimore: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005. http://www.buildingmovement.org/artman/uploads/up_next.pdf

professional and life transitions. Many have major concerns about the financial viability of leaving their current job. There is also a need for emotional support as older leaders leave jobs that have become closely linked to their identity. For many older leaders, their job and their movement work have become their calling. Others talked about needing time to think about their leadership and life transition in a more systematic way, particularly in collaboration with their peers.

Actions

- **CREATE OPPORTUNITIES**—through convenings, trainings, and dialogues—for baby boom-generation leaders to come together to explore how to make their transition out of leadership positions. Findings from these discussions should be documented and shared widely with colleagues and funders.
- **PROVIDE FINANCIAL LITERACY TRAINING** and planning and explore collective solutions to the need for long-term financial viability such as pensions and joint health care ventures.
- **WORK WITH BOARDS AND FUNDERS** to continue support for individual transitions at specific organizations, such as succession planning.
- **DEVELOP PATHWAYS** for older leaders as they leave their jobs to help with their leadership and life transitions, including emotional and spiritual support.

Recommendation #2: **Identify and Develop Opportunities for Baby Boom Generation Leaders to Continue Their Contributions**

Most baby boomers will not stay in their current work positions forever. However, because

people are living longer and healthier, and because many older leaders want to continue to make a contribution, they need to think seriously about the next phase of their careers. Increasingly, there is more public attention focused on how baby boom-age leaders can stay engaged civically. However, there have only been a few convenings of older social change leaders to discuss their futures and how they see the next phase of their professional lives.

Actions

- **CONVENE MEETINGS** of baby boom leaders to think creatively about their future roles in social change activities, organizations and movements, how those roles will change, and what venues exist or could be developed for their continued involvement.
- **COLLECT INFORMATION** from these convenings and existing resources to produce a guide that recommends opportunities for baby boom leaders who leave their positions such as taking on interim executive director positions, teaching new leaders, convening movement building strategy sessions, or consulting on a variety of issues related to social change. This guide should also include the role of boards and funders in this process.

Recommendation #3: **Promote Cross-Generational Dialogue and Learning to Facilitate Information Transfer and Share Experience**

Baby boom-generation leaders are thinking about leadership transition and how to transfer what they know to younger leaders. They want to learn what younger leaders think about social change and movement-building as well as to pass on their successes and mistakes.

Because baby boom-generation leaders have had mixed results to date in transferring their knowledge and experience to the next generation, they may need new skills to communicate and engage with younger leaders effectively. Identifying facilitators or “bridge builders” for this process among both older and younger leaders also may be necessary to promote learning across generations.

Actions

- **IDENTIFY AND PROMOTE** existing spaces, activities, and social networks where learning and sharing across generations can be implemented intentionally.
- **DEVELOP AND PROVIDE** training on how baby boom-generation leaders can pass on their knowledge and effectively communicate and engage younger leaders within and/or outside of their own organizations.
- **PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION** to how race, gender, class, and culture can support intergenerational dialogue and sharing.
- **BRING BABY BOOM AND YOUNGER LEADERS** together to envision the future of progressive social change, and to think creatively about building organizations and networks to support movement building.

Recommendation #4:

Explore Different Models of Organizational Leadership that Promote Mutual Learning and Shared Leadership

Baby boom-generation leaders have made significant contributions to social movements by founding and guiding the growth of many successful nonprofit organizations. These organizations helped to safeguard some of the successes of the earlier movements. However,

the growth in size of the organizations and the sector—and its response to external circumstances—were sometimes accompanied by bureaucratization. In addition, many older executive directors realize that they have created untenable job responsibilities for themselves, making the prospect of hiring their successor more challenging.

For baby boomers to remain vital and for the next generations to step up their leadership role in social change, we need to think more strategically *together* about the future of the movement. Just as it was important that baby boomers had an opportunity to build organizations that reflected their politics and reality, it is important that they now encourage younger leaders to explore different structures that best serve the present and future needs of the movement. One leader commented, “*Our institutions have to be different to be able to resonate with younger people.*”

Actions

- **EXAMINE WAYS** to make current executive director jobs more sustainable for the next generation.
- **LOOK FOR MODELS** of shared organizational leadership that continue to utilize the baby boom-generation while promoting increasing leadership opportunities for the younger generation.
- **ENCOURAGE** baby boom-generation leaders to lend support for younger leaders’ experimentation in organization and movement building. Younger leaders need space to discuss what motivates and animates them to build the future movement, in partnership with older generation leaders.

IN CLOSING

We now face a period of much change and opportunity—for both the baby boom generation and generation X—as the baby boomers reach traditional retirement age. Many in the nonprofit sector recognize the significance of this transition, but there is much to be done not only to understand its impact, but to seize this opportunity as a positive force in movement building. In our discussions, many baby boom-generation leaders expressed the desire to continue this conversation among their peers and in their organizations. It will be important to find ways to encourage honest and creative crossing-the-divide conversations that can result in re-invigorating the state of the movement at this important juncture.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to all who participated, supported, and generously gave their time and comments to this report. We look forward to engaging with many more baby boom and younger generation leaders—all of whom have so much more to contribute—in building strong intergenerational movement.

APPENDIX I:

Names of Participants and Organizations

Katherine Acey – executive director, Astraea Foundation, New York

Susana Almanza – founding co-director, People Organized in Defense of Earth and Her Resources (PODER), Texas

Robin Bernstein – president and CEO, Educational Alliance, New York

Don Bluestone – executive director, Mosholu Montefiore Community Center, New York

David Chen – executive director, Chinese-American Planning Council, New York

Gordon Chin – executive director, Chinatown Community Development Corporation, California

Gary Delgado – former founding director, Applied Research Center (ARC), California

Denise Glover – project director, the Family Place, and Child Care Coordinating Council of Detroit/Wayne County, Michigan

Ellen Gurzinsky – former director, Funding Exchange, New York

Mary Haviland – former co-founding executive director, CONNECT, New York

Barbara Hill – president and CEO, Michigan Women’s Foundation, Michigan

Kevin Cathcart – executive director, Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, New York

Annie Ellman – former founding director, Center for Anti-Violence Education, New York

Denise McCarthy – former director, Telegraph Hill Neighborhood Center, California

Deanne McGraw – president, Detroit Executive Services Corps (DESC), Michigan

Jacqueline Morrison – associate state director, American Association of Retired People (AARP), Michigan

Anita Nager – program officer, Beldon Foundation, New York

Irma Rodriguez – associate director, Forest Hills Community House, New York

Margarita Rosa – executive director, Grand Street Settlement, New York

Jerome Scott – founding director, Project South, Georgia

Young Shin – founding director, Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA), California

Anne Shkuda – associate director, United Neighborhood Houses, New York

Ruben Solis – co-director, Centro por la Justicia; former founding co-director of Southwest Workers Union (SWU), Texas

Nancy Wackstein – executive director, United Neighborhood Houses, New York

Ken Walters – director of member services, United Neighborhood Houses, New York

Judy Zangwill – Sunnyside Community Services, New York

APPENDIX II:

Interview and Focus Group Questions

The following list of questions guided the interviews and small group discussions. Not all questions were used in each interview/discussion.

1. How did you get into this work?
2. What has your generation accomplished?
3. What have you learned about your own leadership? How can some of these qualities help or hinder you from working with the younger generation leadership?
4. How do you see the field changing in 10-20 years? What do you think the field will need?
5. Where do you see your organization and your field moving toward in the future?
6. When you think of younger leaders (under 40), what do you think about their ability to lead social change work?
 - What do you think they need to learn?
 - What are the ways that they can learn these things?
 - What role do you think the older leaders can play in this?
7. What do you think would help in bringing the two generations together? Have you seen this happen successfully? Examples?
8. Have you seen any models of how to bring the two different generations together to think, strategize, and work together?
9. Do you think about what you might want to do next, and have you talked to your peers about your future?
 - What do you still want to learn and contribute to social change?
 - What are some barriers and what do you think will happen?

About the Authors

Helen S. Kim is an independent consultant, providing consulting and training assistance to community-based organizations in strategic planning, constituency development, community organizing, and fundraising. Prior to her consulting work, Helen worked with Asian Immigrant Women Advocates and Applied Research Center in Oakland, CA.

Frances Kunreuther is the Director of the Building Movement Project, which was founded at the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations at Harvard University where Kunreuther was a senior fellow for five years. Kunreuther was also a Children and Family Fellow at the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 1997. Prior to the fellowship, she spent seven years as the Executive Director of the Hetrick-Martin Institute.

Building Movement Project Team

The Building Movement Project operates with a small core staff in New York, and depends upon the support of a national Project Team, which currently includes:

- Linda Campbell (consultant in Detroit with a background in public health)
- Helen Kim (consultant in Bay Area with a background in immigrant women's organizing)
- Kim Klein (author and fundraising trainer)
- Robby Rodriguez (SouthWest Organizing Project in Albuquerque)
- Emery Wright (Project South in Atlanta)

Selected Publications by the Building Movement Project

Up Next: Generation Change and the Leadership of Nonprofit Organizations
Social Service and Social Change: A Process Guide

For copies of these and additional papers, please visit www.buildingmovement.org

Selected Publications by the Annie E. Casey Foundation on Executive Transitions

Founder Transitions: Creating Good Endings and New Beginnings
Change Ahead, Nonprofit Executive Leadership and Transitions Survey 2004

For copies of these and additional papers, please visit <http://www.aecf.org/publications/browse.php?filter=20>

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