



Our Findings

YNPN tested five popular recommendations for increasing talent retention and strengthening emerging leadership in the nonprofit sector via a national survey and focus groups. *Good in Theory, Problems in Practice* lays out the key findings informed by this research.

Ideas are great but only if they're implemented (effectively)

- For 4 of the 5 sector recommendations we tested, at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of survey respondents believed that the strategy could have a positive impact on the sector.
- Despite this overwhelming support for these strategies, a good number of the organizations they work for are not implementing these strategies.
- Only $\frac{1}{2}$ of the professionals whose organizations *had* implemented one of these strategies believed the strategy was effectively addressing their nonprofits' leadership challenges.

Structural change is underrated

- Only $\frac{1}{2}$ of survey respondents rated structural change as potentially high-impact, a stark contrast to the rave reviews the other 4 strategies received.
- Yet when this strategy was implemented, structural change was the most effective strategy we investigated.
- Focus groups reveal that young professionals think flatter organizations incentivize collaboration, help leaders push each other to improve and give new leaders a better chance to succeed.

Competitive Compensation is key...but a good manager can help

- Survey participants played the role of nonprofit leader and made resource allocation decisions across these strategies. "Offering competitive compensation" was the strategy they prioritized.
- Focus group participants believed good managers can help compensate for low pay. Survey data and commentary indicate that nonprofit managers are interested in their staff's professional development and are effective internal champions when compensation decisions do arise.

Being left out is not uncommon

- 1 in 5 survey respondents whose organizations implemented one of these strategies reported that they were not involved in the development or implementation of that strategy.
- Survey data reveals greater diversity amongst staff than amongst executive leadership. Prioritizing the inclusion of younger leaders in strategy development and decision-making may help bridge the critical gap between having diversity and effectively including diverse perspectives.

Despite systemic challenges, we remain mission driven

- Only $\frac{1}{3}$ of the professionals we surveyed stated that they are 100% committed to building a nonprofit career.
- Of the professionals that were hesitant to commit to a nonprofit career, 57% stated that they required their job to have an explicit social mission. This means over 70% of our full sample remains committed to building a mission-driven career.



Putting Findings into Action

Good in Theory, Problems in Practices findings support a set of recommendations on how we can approach leadership development in the sector to create inspired, sustainable careers.

Nonprofit Executives: Consistently and appropriately involve young professionals.

- **Develop your staff as a key stakeholder.** Design a decision making process that involves the rest of the organization at key steps in strategy and planning.
- **Provide informal, easy-to-implement opportunities for two-way communication.** Open-door policies or office hours can go a long way in helping your leadership team build trust.
- **Share insight into decision-making.** Young professionals understand why you are leading the charge and that some decisions will be made without their input. However clearly articulating the process and sharing your insight will help them feel their perspectives were taken into account.

Emerging Leaders: Bring high-impact ideas to your organizations.

- **Understand context before suggesting a solution.** Make sure you thoroughly understand the problem your organization is facing. Talk with those who may deeply understand the problem so you get the evidence you need to make your case.
- **Leverage relationships.** Colleagues, supervisors and mentors can help you think through ways to get the ball rolling or provide honest feedback on where the idea may land on your organization's priority list.
- **Be a partner.** Respect the process it will take to get your suggestion organization's full attention, but also find smart and creative ways to keep it on the radar of the right people. Reach out from the position of a partner who has new ideas on ways to make positive change.

Funders: Invest in the leadership of an entire organization, not just its Executives.

- **Take a long-term view on grantee's sustainability.** Grantees are often evaluated on their leadership team and are granted resources to help that team thrive, but the same organizations' leadership pipeline is skipped over as an area of interest and investment. Supporting nonprofits on their leadership development efforts can help improve morale and performance now while preparing for strong leadership later.

All Sector Stakeholders: Develop talent as if they are your organization's next senior leaders.

- **Cooperate in building the talent pool.** What if the sector – instead of competing for talent- cooperated? If every organization built up its talent, the pool of talent leaving an organization would be balanced by a pool of talent ready to step in. Unfortunately, all it takes is one organization to anticipate a young professional's future departure rather than improve her leadership potential for the next organization to lose its incentive to develop its own talent. Do not let your organization start this chain.
- **Embrace the flow of talent.** As professionals become better at their job, they want to stretch themselves and new opportunities to do so arise. Embracing this flow rather than being restrained by it will mean our sector collaborates in developing the sector's next generation of leaders- ensuring a bright future for nonprofit organizations and the communities they serve.

For additional information about *Good in Theory, Problems in Practice*, please contact:

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