



Nurturing California's Next Generation Arts and Cultural Leaders

Ann Markusen
Markusen Economic Research Associates

For the Center for Cultural Innovation | May 2011

Executive Summary

Leaders in the nonprofit arts world, many of them founders and builders of their organizations for decades, will be retiring in unprecedented numbers in the coming years. Organizations could become weaker and destabilized during this transition, a prospect that should be addressed with some urgency. Younger professionals should be able to take on these leadership roles and chart a new course in stressful and changing times. Yet an operational divide between the workplace needs and values of Next Geners and those currently in charge threatens this transition. It does not help that the nonprofit arts field suffers from a paucity of training and professional degree-granting programs, low pay, long work hours, and inadequate career advancement opportunities. The generation that sparked a powerful nonprofit arts movement more than thirty years ago now wonders about their successors: Are they motivated? Prepared? How can we recruit, train, nurture, and retain them?

This study was commissioned by the Center for Cultural Innovation (CCI) as part of a large-scale Next Generation Arts Leadership Initiative funded by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and The James Irvine Foundation that aspires to strengthen and retain a new generation of administrative talent in California's nonprofit arts field. It addresses nonprofit arts leaders' desire to know more about their younger colleagues and their experiences as professionals, board members, and volunteers.

To explore the experience of Next Geners, we developed a survey conducted in the summer of 2010. We define Next Gen arts leaders as individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 years who are currently working with a California nonprofit arts organization as administrators, artists or board members and who have worked in the field for less than ten consecutive years. More than 1,300 California Next Geners took the survey and with modest exceptions (under-representation of Latinos, African and Asian-Americans, and men, non-metropolitan regions, and certain art forms), their workplaces are generally representative of the size of and variation within the nonprofit arts sector in the state. For example, some 23% of our Next Gen respondents work for organizations with budgets under \$100,000, while 22% work in organizations with budgets over \$2 million.

Survey Highlights

- **Arts and cultural Next Geners work across an extraordinary array of organizations and in many different roles – some full-time, some part-time, and some as independent contractors and volunteers.** The majority possess multiple, diverse skills, suggesting greater multi-tasking and flexibility than in most private and public sector organizations. Just over a majority work in administration and management, with the rest in artistic, programming, technical, arts education, and board roles. Only half are salaried, and in general their wages, earnings and household incomes are below California norms. Two-thirds of Next Gen board members, serving on a voluntary basis, feel that they receive recognition for their contributions to their organizations.
- **Next Gen arts leaders have high aspirations. They report very strong commitments to an arts career.** Only for a minority (12%) is this a temporary path. Overall, survey takers are quite optimistic about their career potential in the nonprofit arts. However, many young arts leaders anticipate changing organizations, roles, and even sectors over the next five years. Of those not planning to stay with their current organization, 20% either plan to start their own business or organization or to pursue their artwork full time. Next Geners are tenaciously committed to California – 94% see themselves working and living here in five years. In pursuing a nonprofit arts career, they want to make a positive impact on society, develop professionally, forge peer working and networking relationships, and enjoy decision-making authority and chances for advancement. Compensation and absence of stress are very important to their career dedication.
- **Next Geners are highly satisfied with their jobs' involvement in the arts, being of service and producing something of value, and working with people they admire and enjoy.** Large majorities also report satisfaction with human contact and respect from employers, staff, and clients. Most acknowledge satisfactory opportunities for fun at work, flex time, family leave, cooperation on the job, participation in work design, decision-making authority, and career-building. In contrast, over 50% are less than or not at all satisfied with salary, benefits and other compensation. Large minorities report dissatisfaction with stress levels at work, lack of opportunities to network with young professionals in other organizations, and job insecurity.

Executive Summary

- **Next Geners as a group most often mention respect, pay, decision-making power, and ability to shape the strategic mission and outcomes of the organization as key to increasing their job satisfaction.** Many articulate their frustrations:
 - * A mismatch between job goals/aspirations and the structure of their organization
 - * A perception of dead-end tracks: no path for advancement, no challenge or ability to work up to their potential, ambitions but feeling powerless and voiceless
 - * A lack of nurturing: no time for it, no feedback, no relationship with one's supervisor, no money or process for professional training or networking
 - * A struggle to balance arts and cultural talents and responsibilities, or their leadership acumen, with the business of art
 - * A concern with the lack of strategic vision, financial realism, community awareness and diversity in their organizations
 - * A teetering on the edge vis-à-vis work demands, inadequate pay, family responsibilities
- **Next Geners bring many skills to their organizations from education and prior work experience, some of which they feel are under-valued.** As a group, they report considerable training and learning on the job but have many skills on their wish lists that they believe would strengthen their job performance and their organizations' success. More than one third are less than satisfied with training in their current organization – the reasons are diverse and are detailed in the voices of respondents. Next Gen board members, too, express a desire for more training.
- **Youthful arts leaders are receiving promotions, but many feel uncertain about or blocked in moving up the hierarchy into leadership positions.** While only half of our respondents have been in their current organizations for two years or more, 59% of those eligible (i.e. not contract workers, interns or board members) received a promotion. Of these, 91% received a change in title, 90% a workload increase, and 76% a salary increase.
- **Only a minority of Next Geners (39%) are interested in moving up the hierarchy of their current organization, while another 20% are unsure.** As a group, respondents identify deficits in leadership training, lack of budget support for professional development, and less than salutary on-the-job experience as major obstacles to advancement. Organizations' failure to make resource investments in professional development is most discouraging to them. In addition, half or more of respondents state that they are left out of the decision-making process, are discriminated against for age or inexperience, or are not nurtured by current leaders.
- **Both organizations and Next Geners can compensate for blockages, intergenerational tensions, and inadequacy of time and training resources by turning to external organizations, resources, peers and mentors.** High percentages of Next Geners report good peer relationships outside of their organizations. Similarly high shares have access to external listservs, networks, and resources. Yet only 57% of respondents are currently taking advantage of professional development workshops or conferences. When asked what skills they most desire for career development (rather than for one's current job), learning business and fundraising skills rank highest, with large majorities also hoping to acquire skills in understanding their own leadership style, in using networking and connections to achieve results, and in communicating and working with others. Mentorship within arts organizations is uneven, but 70% of Next Geners confirm access to other senior leaders in other organizations to whom they can turn for mentoring, advice and encouragement.

Next Steps and Recommendations

Although many differently sized, placed and focused organizations host the Next Geners taking the survey, three areas for improvement stand out:

First and perhaps easiest and least expensive, **Next Geners want more respect and engagement in their organizations.** They want to work for managers who acknowledge their skills and experiences, listen to their ideas on matters such as building audiences and updating organizational technology, and share decision-making power with them, including them in strategic planning. They want more and appropriate on-the-job training, and they want feedback on how they are doing.

Second, perhaps most difficult as well as expensive, **Next Generators want better pay, benefits, and working conditions.** Without these, there will be demoralization and attrition, especially as they create families and become more skilled. They want more transparency and candor about these issues and to be more involved in organizational planning that takes these, and the trade-offs involved, into account.

Third, **Next Generators need greater access to external training, professional development, peers, mentoring, and networks.** In addition to being more attentive to their Next Generators specific needs, arts organization leaders could work together to prioritize and identify external resources for these many purposes – by which external organizations (colleges

and universities, professional associations, consultants and trainers), at what cost, and with what resources.

Current arts leaders can be greatly encouraged by the very strong commitment of Next Generators to a career in the nonprofit arts and to California. By their over-whelming aspirations to be involved in the arts, to produce something of value, to make an impact on society. They are, overall, satisfied with many aspects of their work lives and optimistic about their arts careers. Given these affirmations and motivations, current arts leaders can feel optimistic about their organizations' futures as well. And they can make those futures rosier by making progress on three frontiers: respect and engagement, pay/benefits/stress, and external resources.