

Special Report: Nonprofit Leadership: The Way Ahead

Introduction

LESLIE WRIGHT

Executive Director, The Agora Foundation, Toronto, Ontario

The Editorial Board of *The Philanthropist* brings together a diverse group of people from the nonprofit sector. As educators, executive directors, legal counsel, financial advisors, and policy people, we are broadly representative of the sector.

The Philanthropist is concerned with publishing articles that not only inform the work of the management and directors of charitable and nonprofit organizations but also contribute to debate and discussion.

The special report in this issue has been developed to focus on the critical subject of leadership in the nonprofit sector, with an emphasis on the paid leadership at the senior level.

These articles are not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, it is hoped that they will contribute to and inform current thinking and planning in the sector about the important role senior staff play in organizations.

The articles explore the context and issues facing the sector as we think about leadership—from developing, attracting, retaining, and compensating leaders to understanding the role and the complex environments in which today's leaders work. The articles raise many questions that need exploring, including:

- Do we as a sector have our eye on the future?
- Does our sector and do our individual organizations have adequate plans for leadership development and retention?
- How are we simultaneously encouraging and supporting people to stay in the sector while building the next generation of leaders?
- Are we creating leadership opportunities at all levels of our organization?
- Do we understand our changing communities and demographics and what these changes mean to leadership?
- Do we need to rethink our perceptions and expectations of leadership and explore new organizational models and structures that can respond to the complex and rapid change within our sector?

The articles in this special report represent a range of views and perspectives—from funders who are developing leadership development programs to the HR Council for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector, a national nonprofit organization

committed to the development and enhancement of a skilled workforce that is focused on building better communities and improving the lives of Canadians.

In thinking about how leadership within the sector improves the lives of Canadians, Bob Wyatt provides a snapshot view in “Charity Leaders: A Matter of Trust” and highlights *Talking About Charities 2006*, published by The Muttart Foundation. Though the level of public trust in charity leaders remained fairly constant between 2004 and 2006, it has declined somewhat among certain segments of the population. This a useful reminder of our need to be diligent in building and fostering the leadership of charitable and nonprofit organizations in order to maintain the public’s confidence.

“The Moral High Ground: Perceptions of Wage Differentials Among Executive Directors of Canadian Nonprofits,” by Femida Handy, Laurie Mook, Jorge Giniñewicz, and Jack Quarter, explores how executive directors across Canada are being paid, as well as their perceptions of the wage differentials between the nonprofit and for-profit sectors. This article is a useful resource for supporting boards of directors and the sector widely in proactively addressing both the financial and non-financial compensation of executive directors. It points out that senior leadership is motivated by more than financial remuneration and that there are many progressive approaches boards can take to ensure that the compensation and benefits accorded to staff are competitive.

“Exploring the Looming Leadership Deficit in the Voluntary and Nonprofit Sector,” by Lynne Toupin and Betty Plewes, examines the dimensions of the leadership deficit as it relates to employees in senior positions within organizations. Basing their discussion on some American and emerging Canadian studies, the authors remind us that we need to be concerned about the leadership deficit and leadership turnover within the voluntary and nonprofit sector. The authors not only give us a context for thinking about leadership development, but they also put forward a range of ideas and approaches for how to both encourage and support existing leadership while at the same time accelerating the development of a new generation of leaders.

“How Might We See the World Differently? Leadership for a Changing City,” by Colette Murphy and Anne Pyke, wraps up our volume by presenting the work of some funders in developing leadership programs for the voluntary, nonprofit sector. It focuses on the Emerging Leaders Program developed by United Way of Greater Toronto and Metcalf Foundation, in partnership with the Schulich School of Business at York University. The article builds on the other articles in the special report and speaks to the importance of examining in depth what leadership needs to look like within complex and changing urban environments. The authors explore three aspects of leadership that require attention: the capacity of leaders to think creatively and collectively, to create compelling visions, and to realize their full potential.

The Editorial Board of *The Philanthropist* hopes that this special report will animate conversation and planning both within the sector and within individual organizations about leadership and what is being done to support, foster, and develop capacity.

As Lynne Toupin and Betty Plewes point out in their article, “We are sitting on the cusp of the boomer exodus. While the clock is ticking, it does not appear that we have yet reached the eleventh hour. There is still time to discuss issues and develop strategies to cope with [this] demographic shift... It is important that the sector reflect and act upon what the implications of [trends affecting the sector] will be for leadership in the voluntary and nonprofit organizations now, before the crisis arrives.”

This is an important message that needs to be taken very seriously. Leadership has never been a more critical issue than it is now.