

THE LEADERSHIP GAP IN NORTH AMERICAN NON-PROFITS

I recently attended the annual Canadian Leaders Retreat of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) in our nation's capital. During the weekend's agenda, the topic of the "leadership gap" was once again presented, as it is an ongoing concern. Since 2013, the Underdeveloped Report has shaken-up the non-profit sector to recognize the facts that everyone knows, but did not have the political will to address. Our charities are under attack from a lack of leadership for the future, which puts at risk the very sustainability we seek for them.



High turn-over of key staff and fund development personnel, means that the relationships that are key to revenue growth are always in flux. The person you got to know leaves the organization and your interest in supporting the agency is now in question. Unrealistic expectations of fundraising revenue growth have always been the main culprit as well as a lack of leadership from the Board to assist in opening doors and making personal commitments to the very Board they serve. If you join a Board and believe that you are not responsible for a personal contribution to verify your leadership "skin in the game", then you should resign immediately. A Board's strength comes from many skills, but the most important is an annual gift of some size, appropriate to your capacity. Why do you ask? You model the behavior that you want others to embrace and if you only lend a name and no personal financial commitment, your reputation suffers because your name shows on the Board list, but not the donor's list. Everyone can afford a gift and time is not a gift, but rather a commitment to stewardship of an organization you and your reputation are now tied to.

Back to the Underdeveloped Report...the AFP Foundation for Philanthropy – Canada is considering an RFP for a Canadian version of the 2013 report but in a Canadian context. CompassPoint, the U.S. organization that brought the original report to light, is re-visiting this topic to see if there have been any improvements in the last 4 years. This is all good news as we have two organizations considering the idea of providing research into a vital area of non-profit sustainability.

At the AFP Retreat, we had over 80 leaders from AFP Chapters coast-to-coast, providing insight and ideas on how to practically address the gap in leadership coming through the system. One idea the group suggested was that of an institute, similar to the Institute of Corporate Directors (ICD), be created and potentially operated by one of the leading non-profit umbrella associations. They would provide the appropriate training and laddering to leadership opportunities that involve all aspects of non-profit management. Program people will need to understand finance and fund development, fundraisers need to appreciate the work of the frontline team as well as control systems in the business office, while finance has to fight their urge to control everything and learn to trust the other key colleagues who make a non-profit tick. This was a very active and engaged conversation and is a great first step in charting a course to providing the leadership required for the future while addressing chronic issues within the sector. I am encouraged by this conversation and hope that proactive activity will result in a solution, earlier rather than later, which provides the sustainability that all non-profits need, now and forever.

Derek Fraser ([click to see Derek's profile](#))
Senior Advisor

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