

Members of the Alliance for Children and Families and others first began sounding the alarm two years ago.

When participants gathered for the Alliance's 2005 scenario planning exercises, designed to identify critical uncertainties that will face the non-profit sector over the next 10 years, they repeatedly questioned whether the field was successfully recruiting its share of bright, well-educated, mission-oriented, young people.

Some suggested these people are attracted elsewhere, to other higher paying jobs with more career advancement opportunities, or to other opportunities marketed as short term service jobs. "Where are our young workers?" asked one participant. The others did not have a good answer.

Turning the Tide

In September 2006, the Alliance for Children and Families commenced a planning process with Public Allies (www.publicallies.org), the national nonprofit organization that advances diverse young leaders to strengthen communities, nonprofits, and civic participation, to develop a campaign that would attract bright, young professionals to opportunities in the human services. Cornerstones for Kids, an initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, has generously funded the first six months of the project.

"Where Are Our Young Workers?"

Workforce initiative focuses on attracting young talent to human services

Through the program, called Turning the Tide, the Alliance hopes to better understand the barriers and opportunities to recruiting talented young professionals to nonprofit human services, as well as what child- and family-serving agencies must do to become more attractive magnets for young professionals interested in working for nonprofits.

In order to continue to create good outcomes for the children and families the nonprofit human services sector serves, leaders in the field agree that strategies must be developed to help organizations effectively recruit, train, and retain young staff. Yet many nonprofit organizations lack the kind of work environments that appeal to the so-called "millennial" generation.

"Through Turning the Tide, the Alliance and Public Allies hope to ensure the future viability of the nonprofit human services sector by recruiting more of the best and

brightest," says Peter Goldberg, president and CEO of the Alliance. "Our collective efforts can help families and communities."

Representatives from four Alliance member organizations and four Public Allies centers were selected to serve on an advisory committee that will help inform the direction and scope of this initiative.

The advisory committee consists of individuals in various stages of their careers offering different perspectives. "I was most impressed by the younger members of our group. I found their commitment to and depth of understanding about our field of work amazing," comments committee member Gayle O. Ricks, president and CEO, Growing Home Southeast, Cayce, South Carolina. "I appreciated their curiosity and willingness to participate in this collaborative. The work of the committee helped me gain insight into some of my agency's challenges with a younger workforce."

In addition to the advisory committee, five focus groups were conducted around the country with young people currently working in nonprofits, and interviews with Alliance member organization CEOs and human resources directors were conducted by the Alliance Department of Research and Evaluation Services. Interviews were also conducted with other national organizations working on similar "next generation" issues.



Public Allies is working with the Alliance to develop a campaign that would attract young professionals to careers in human services. Pictured are Public Allies participants working on a local project.

Major Research Findings

The research activities yielded significant information pertinent to the work of the advisory committee. Findings include:

What young people are saying about working in the nonprofit sector:

- Peer networks, friends and family referrals are the main avenues by which young people find work with a nonprofit organization.
- Workers are drawn by the opportunity to create immediate impact, do meaningful work, and be with other passionate people.
- They have to overcome negative stereotypes about their work and what they do.
- A shortage of advancement opportunities within organizations causes workers to pursue lateral positions elsewhere or to continue with higher education.
- Workers are inspired by organizations' inclusion and diversity efforts; and are distressed by tokenism and hypocrisy.
- Forty percent say they aspire to a leadership position with a nonprofit or social change organization.

What CEOs and human resources directors are saying about how they hire and manage young talent:

- Very few organizations are trying proactively to recruit young professionals.
- Many organizations report difficulties attracting young talent, and even more significant problems retaining young talent.
- Organizations rely heavily on relationships with local, post-secondary educational institutions, current staff, and job fairs to recruit talent.
- Organizations mainly post job openings on their own Web site and on the Web sites of local affiliated organizations.
- Some organizations consider young professionals a liability because of perceived mismatches in values, culture, and work ethic.
- Many CEOs believe "millennials" are less committed to work, less invested in achieving results, and more self-involved.
- Many organizations cite a strong need to hire minority and bilingual staff.
- Diversity is a significant issue for many organizations, and has not been addressed at the level of policy and hiring practices.

Significant Work Ahead

Numerous studies conducted in the past few years have recognized the challenges the nonprofit sector faces in recruiting its workforce, from front-line service positions to executive leadership. For example, the Bridgespan Group (www.bridgespangroup.org) reports that the nonprofit sector will need 640,000 new leaders over the next 10 years, and Compasspoint (www.compasspoint.org) says that nonprofit leaders are struggling to meet the demands of their positions.

The research and development phases for Turning the Tide have now concluded. Alliance member Board of Child Care, Baltimore, has generously pledged a contribution to support the next phase of the project, while the Alliance and Public Allies continue to seek additional support. The next phase includes testing the model that was developed during the initial phase. This model focuses on the following components:

- 1 Bridging promising talent with supporting human service organizations; addressing the cultural chasm that exists between "millennials" and nonprofit human service organizations.
- 2 Facilitating creation of an ideal entry-level position within human service organizations. The proposed concept for this initiative is a three-year entry-level position that will inspire longer-term commitment, offering formal opportunities for young professionals to institutionalize innovation.
- 3 Guiding young professionals to approach their career path strategically, encouraging them to participate in a specialized skill-building curriculum, professional affinity groups, mentoring, and coaching.
- 4 Establishing a guild for professionals who complete the three-year entry-level process. Guild members will have access to benefits, loan forgiveness/deferment, continuous learning, and social networking. The guild can also be useful in gathering insights and opinions from this emerging population of nonprofit human service professionals.



Turning the Tide Project Advisory Committee

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"I think of Turning the Tide as a creative and forward thinking response to very serious and critical issues for nonprofits, especially in the human service sector," comments advisory committee member Brian J. Langdon, president and CEO, FSW, Inc., Bridgeport, Connecticut. "It is about an available workforce willing to serve families and communities and provide leadership. It is about developing today's youth who represent the diversity of our communities and country. It is about tapping into their creativity while providing opportunities for learning and personal growth." ■