

# THE NECESSARY CHALLENGE

Understanding and Fostering Innovation in the Social Sector

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## 2014 American Express NGen Fellows

Convened by Independent Sector

**NGEN** MOVING NONPROFIT LEADERS  
FROM NEXT TO NOW



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## Executive Summary

Innovation in the social sector is challenging and sometimes misunderstood, but is also viewed as valuable and necessary. While there is almost universal agreement that innovation is necessary to the sector, the sector by-and-large is behind in adopting innovation as a practice, however, despite the challenges inherent in pursuing innovation, it must be done. The paradox of innovation—as a difficult yet crucial component of the future health and vibrancy of the social sector—drives this report. The purpose of this research is to explore how the social sector and its organizations might mitigate barriers and encourage stronger, more sustainable innovation.

As part of the activities of Independent Sector's 2014 American Express NGen Fellowship, the NGen Fellows researched the perceptions of innovation in the social sector. This research included attempts to understand the way that organizations of different types, sizes, ages, and missions view innovation, and the role that different individuals play in creating opportunities for innovation within their organizations and their communities.

In order to identify these possible solutions, the NGen Fellows invited a cross-section of practitioners, from throughout the hierarchy of the organizations, to share their opinions about the role of innovation in the sector as a means to fostering change. The NGen Fellows partnered in this work with The Forbes Funds, a supporting organization of the Pittsburgh Foundation focused on strengthening the capacity and impact of community-based nonprofits. The Forbes Funds team helped conceptualize the survey and provided the NGen Fellows with interview access to finalists for the UpPrize, a social innovation challenge created by The Forbes Funds and BNY Mellon in 2014 to help connect and support Pittsburgh-based nonprofits and for-profits working to improve the lives of vulnerable populations.

This research was conducted in two parts: an online survey to a pool of 1,000 organizations within the social sector and a set of in-person interviews with 10 finalists for The Forbes Funds' UpPrize. The authors sought to surface trends, highlight barriers, and propose recommendations for how the social sector might better embrace and foster not just valuing innovation, but acting on it.

This report explores the difference between the belief in transformative innovation both within and through the social sector<sup>1</sup>, and the reality of attempting to create and maintain a culture of innovation in the (mostly) nonprofit space. What follows is a summary of the basic findings and a set of recommendations on how the social sector might mitigate barriers and encourage stronger, more sustainable innovation within the sector.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this report, the "social sector" includes nonprofit and for-profit organizations of all types that work for the public good. This includes both organizations that directly serve individuals in various capacities, and organizations that instead primarily work toward the betterment of aggregate communities and the environment.

## Core Findings

### About the Respondents

- There were **294 individual respondents** to the survey representing organizations based in **42 states and the District of Columbia**. More than half of the respondents represented nonprofit organizations.
- More than half of the respondents work at organizations with 10 or fewer employees, and almost half work at organizations that are 25 years old or older. In more than half of the responses, the founder of the organization is no longer involved.

### Defining Innovation

- In both interviews and survey results, a clear distinction emerged between **process innovation**, which focused on internal shifts in how the organization works, and **product innovation**, which focused on external disruptions to existing marketplaces.
- Interviewees, when discussing the nonprofit space, **mostly focused on the difficulties of process innovation**, which were viewed as an impediment to even beginning the discussion of meaningful product innovation.

### Innovation and the Organization

- **Over half** of survey respondents said their organization **valued and attempted to integrate new ideas** wherever possible.
- Almost two-thirds of survey respondents indicated a **lack of time and/or a lack of money** as significant barriers to innovation.

- When asked about how innovative different aspects of their organization were, internal components like **staff, leadership, and programming were scored as more innovative than external components** like primary funders and other peer organizations.
- When asked who in their organization **championed innovation**, over half of respondents indicated their **senior executive**, and around half indicated **other senior- and mid-level staff**. One-third indicated members of their board of directors are champions.
- Where there was practice of social innovation inside organizations, it was most likely to be deemed “organic” or “informal.” Structured practice, such as Kaizen<sup>2</sup>, occurred at a much lower rate.

### Innovation and the Individual

- About 40 percent of the respondents were the chief executive of their organization, and a third were other senior leaders.
- More than three-quarters of respondents either **always or often felt empowered to make change** within their organization.
- Respondents' positions in their organizations correlated highly with how innovative they felt people in those positions were (i.e. **CEOs were more likely to say that people in the CEO role were the drivers of innovation**).

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<sup>2</sup> The Japanese practice of continuous improvement.

## Key Recommendations

- **Organizations exist on a spectrum of innovation and should be encouraged to move from normative or reactive practices to a more proactive anticipation of needs** and change that will foster innovative practice and position them as leaders. Small innovative practices done routinely throughout an organization develop a culture of innovation.
- **Organizations seeking to reduce barriers to innovation like a lack of money and lack of time must be open to change**—a state that may run counter to the day-to-day stress of running a nonprofit. Day-to-day challenges are opportunities for innovation.
- **Organizations can accelerate innovation by engaging more stakeholders in the process.** By engaging in innovation vertically, throughout the organization, it may be possible to capture and act upon more transformative adaptations over a shorter period of time.
- **The sector should increase its speed and quality of innovation by educating staff on more formal, systematic approaches to innovation.** The amount of organic/informal innovation that is happening indicates a desire to innovate, but may be indicative of a lack of knowledge of more formal alternatives, and in turn a decrease in efficiency and, possibly, sustained impact.
- **Leaders in organizations must empower innovators and champions of change throughout the hierarchy** of the organization, and must be cognizant of a bias towards believing that they, and people vocationally similar to them, are more innovative than others.

## Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore how the social sector and its organizations might mitigate barriers and encourage stronger, more sustainable innovation.

As part of the activities of Independent Sector's 2014 American Express NGen Fellowship, the NGen Fellows researched the perceptions of innovation in the social sector. This research included attempts to understand the way that organizations of different types, sizes, ages, and missions view innovation, and the role that different individuals play in creating opportunities for innovation within their organizations and their communities.

We hypothesized that innovation is key to healthy organizational progress—whether created by an individual, team, or organization. While we believe that most leaders in the social sector want to foster such change and understand the importance of innovation in their work, we also recognized that there are often obstacles that prevent these changes from occurring.

In order to identify these possible solutions, the NGen Fellows invited a cross-section of practitioners, from throughout the hierarchy of the organizations, to share their opinions about the role of innovation in the sector as a means to fostering change.

The NGen Fellows partnered in this work with The Forbes Funds, a supporting organization of the Pittsburgh Foundation focused on strengthening the capacity and impact of community-based nonprofits. The Forbes Funds team helped conceptualize the survey and provided the NGen Fellows with interview access to finalists for the UpPrize, a social innovation challenge created by The Forbes Funds and BNY Mellon in 2014 to help connect and support Pittsburgh-based nonprofits and for-profits working to improve the lives of vulnerable populations.

What follows is a report on the basic findings, an analysis, and a set of recommendations on how the social sector and its service organizations might mitigate barriers and encourage stronger, more sustainable innovation within the sector.

## Methodology

This project was conducted in two parts.

An online survey was deployed to more than 1,000 organizations using the contacts of the 2014 NGen Fellows and members of the Independent Sector network. The survey was responded to by 294 individuals from those organizations. The major requirement was that respondents worked at some level within a “social purpose” organization (which could be for- or nonprofit, and will herein be referred to as the “social sector”).

Respondents answered a series of multiple-choice and open-ended questions about the demography of their organization, their own personal views on innovation in their organization and in the social sector, and their views on their organization’s ability to respond and react innovatively over time.

Concurrently, a set of in-person interviews was conducted with 10 of the finalists for The Forbes Funds’ UpPrize— a social innovation challenge that supports for-profit organizations working to propose innovative, scalable solutions to social issues. This support includes a number of resources as well as partnership with local nonprofits working to address the same challenges. While similar questions were used to craft the interviews, and similar themes were explored, the survey mostly focused on quantitative responses/multiple-choice questions, while the interviews were designed to be more open-format and free-form.

The NGen Fellows analyzed both the survey responses and interviews before compiling the findings into this report. Unless otherwise noted, any quantitative responses discussed in this report relate to the survey, and any qualitative responses relate to the interviews.

## Why Innovation?

Innovation in the social sector is challenging and sometimes misunderstood, but is also viewed as valuable and necessary. It can be transformative for the individuals and organizations that make up the sector. When asked to select from a predetermined set of words (both positive and negative) to describe how the social sector views innovation, responses resulted in the following word cloud—with more popular responses resulting in larger words relative to less popular responses and their corresponding smaller words.

The paradox of innovation—as a difficult yet crucial component of the future health and vibrancy of the social sector—drives this report,

and crops up again and again in the findings. Individuals operating at various points throughout the sector view innovation differently. For-profit/nonprofit status, job title/level within the organization, disciplines, budget size, etc. all influence different understandings of innovation and the most successful way to create an environment in which innovation is easily fostered.

However, there is almost universal agreement that innovation is necessary to the sector, that the sector by-and-large is behind in adopting innovation as a practice, and that despite the challenges inherent in pursuing innovation, it must be done.

necessary  
challenging  
misunderstood  
required critical valuable  
transformative



## How Do We Define Innovation Anyway?

Innovation is a slippery term.

**“Social Innovation:** *A novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals.*”<sup>3</sup>

When asked about their level of agreement with the above definition, 82 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Only 3 percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. However, in interviews conducted as part of this research two strong, separate definitions of innovation emerged: one situated around novel solutions to internal problems, which falls into the category of *process innovation*, and one situated more externally, creating novel solutions for communities, which falls into the category of *product innovation*.

### Types of Innovation

- **Process:** Implementing different methods of increasing efficiency or achieving impact for existing programs or strategies.
- **Product:** Creating fundamentally different ways of achieving mission by developing new initiatives, services, or deliverables.

When asked to discuss a moment of innovation, respondents mostly discussed process examples—such as operations and methods. These shifts often were innovative internally to the organization, but may not be truly new or disruptive for the sector. Several respondents cited the "carbon copy" adoption or slight modification of best practices from other organizations into their work.

If the social sector hopes to encourage more social innovation within its organizations then the sector must understand the spectrum of practice related to innovation and meet organizations where they are.

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<sup>3</sup> James A. Phills Jr., Kriss Deiglmeier, & Dale T. Miller. "Rediscovering Social Innovation," Stanford Social Innovation Review, Fall 2008.

## Process Innovation

*Quotes from interviewees*

“Innovation is creating efficiencies, stripping back the process and the idiosyncrasies, and making things easier.”

“Innovation is taking something that works, and doing something to make it work better.”

## Product Innovation

*Quotes from interviewees*

“Innovation is solving a problem in a scalable way.”

“When you’re talking about technology innovation, success is disruption. It’s that device that disrupts all previous innovations.”

One distinction that emerged in the interviews<sup>4</sup> centered on *proactive* versus *reactive* innovation. Nonprofit staff were more likely to indicate that their innovations came in response to a crisis or problem, whereas for-profit staff spoke more often of planned disruptions to marketplaces, whether for social good or profit. In some cases, innovation was viewed as too disruptive to be tenable, particularly inside nonprofit organizations—which allows entrenched systems to remain.

Respondents were asked to give examples of a time they felt they were innovative. When reviewing these stories, a few themes emerged related to the impetus for innovation and the types of innovation employed.

### Impetus for Innovation

- A response to a problem or crisis
- A response to funders, constituents, or partners based on direct feedback or lack of engagement/involvement
- A self-identified need to generate new relevance or connection, or adapt to societal expectations and norms

These are generally reactive moments and indicate organizations in the social sector would benefit from more proactively pursuing innovation. This would allow organizations to position themselves as leaders in creating new trends and instituting new practices, as well as predict and mitigate problems before they arise.

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<sup>4</sup> Quotations in boxes are from interviews conducted with the finalists for The Forbes Funds and BNY Mellon’s UpPrize. The interviewees represented both for-profit and nonprofit

organizations, all of whom were pursuing innovative solutions in the social sector.

## Reactive and Proactive Innovation

*Quotes from Interviewees*

“Nonprofits are completely out of touch with more efficient ways to do anything. Everything comes down to dollars in hand, which impacts the way that your organization is structured and the way you structure decision-making.” – *for-profit UpPrize finalist*

“When you think about competition, you usually are looking at outside competitors, right? But getting this product ready for market, we’re learning that the biggest competition is the organization’s current process of doing it internally, on their own.” – *for-profit UpPrize finalist*

“It’s just a different train of thought – it’s about short term versus long term impact – we’ve learned that to do business with nonprofits, you have to lay it out for them to help them understand the difference.” – *for-profit UpPrize finalist*

“Even when I went to talk to other nonprofits to offer them this service for *free*, it took another hour of conversation for the lights to finally go off. When you’re totally stressed your brain literally can’t innovate. The nonprofit mentality is so entrenched. No one will take the time to schedule things that aren’t directly related to mission.” – *nonprofit UpPrize finalist*

## About the Survey Respondents

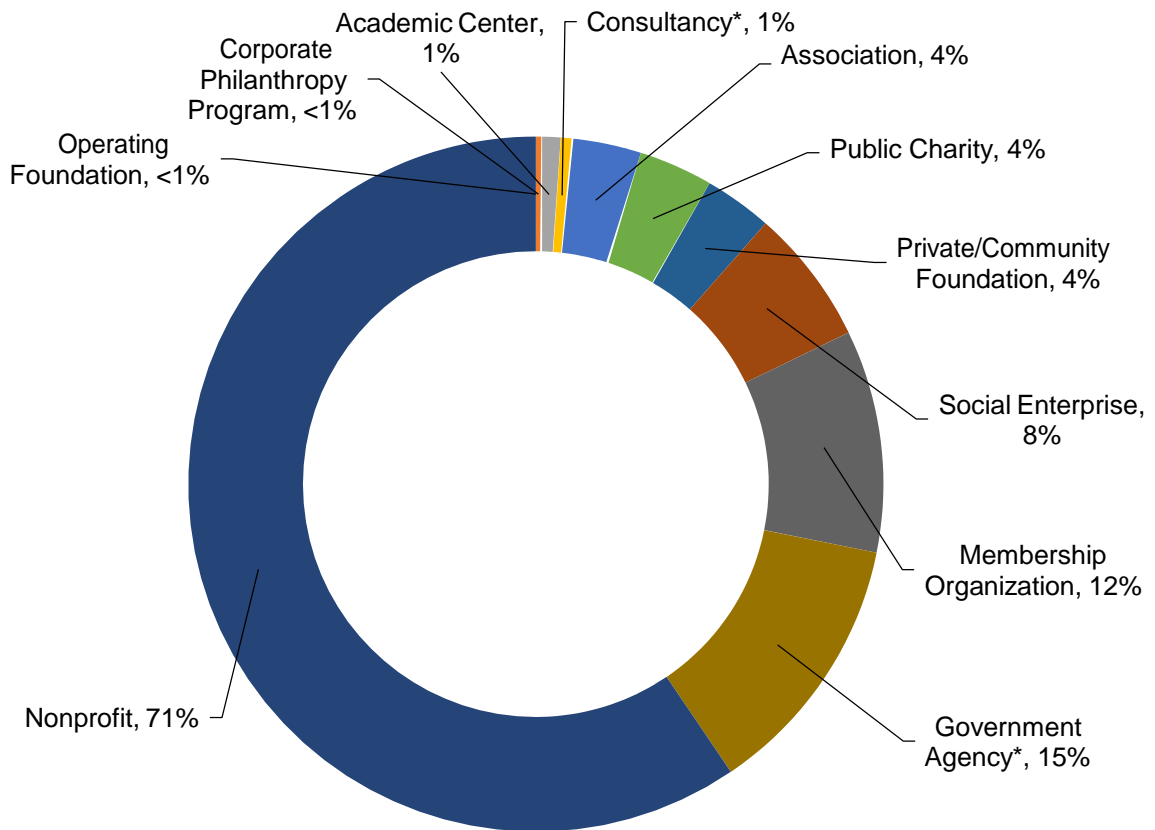
### Summary Findings

- A total of 294 individuals responded to the survey, representing organizations based in 42 states and the District of Columbia.
- More than half of the respondents represented nonprofit organizations.
- More than half of the respondents represented arts and culture organizations, although five other subsectors had sufficient representation to do further analysis by sub sector.
- More than half of the respondents work at organizations with 10 or fewer employees, and almost half work at organizations that are 25 years old or older.
- In more than half of the responses, the founder of the organization is no longer involved.

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Some of those individuals may have represented the same organization, but because the survey was anonymous, we are unable to determine how many organizations are represented in the survey. For the purposes of analysis, we have treated all responses as singular.

## Organization Type



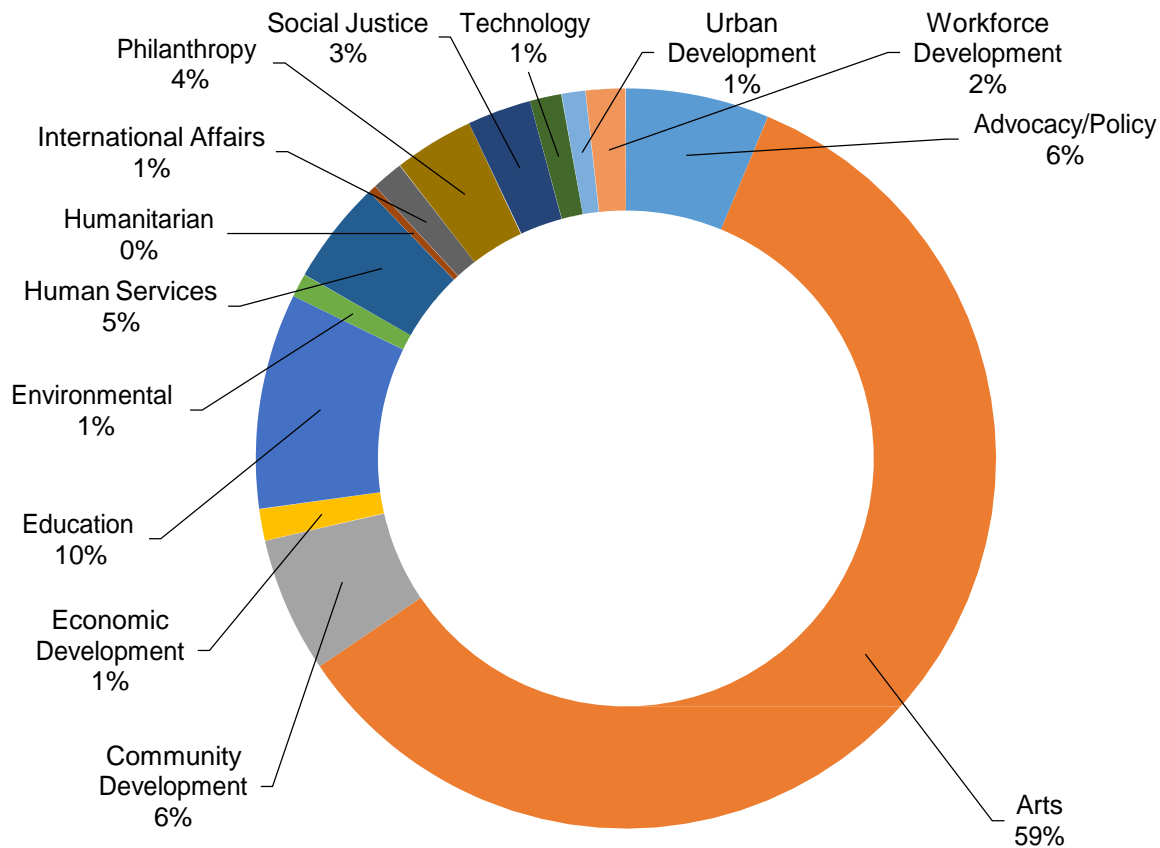
(\* indicates write-in category)

The vast majority of respondents, 71 percent, indicated that they worked at a nonprofit. Fifteen percent of respondents said they worked for a government agency, and 12 percent indicated theirs was a membership organization. Less than 1% of respondents indicated they worked at a

corporate philanthropy program or an operating foundation.

Please note that respondents were able to select multiple organization types. The average number of organization types selected by respondents was 1.34

## Organization's Primary Focus Area



Over half of respondents (59 percent) represent arts organizations due to a disproportionate response by organizations from the arts and culture sector. To address concerns about whether the preponderance of arts-related respondents was skewing results, we looked at how certain question responses changed when the arts respondents were removed. While there was some variation, in general, aggregated responses were consistent across subsectors.

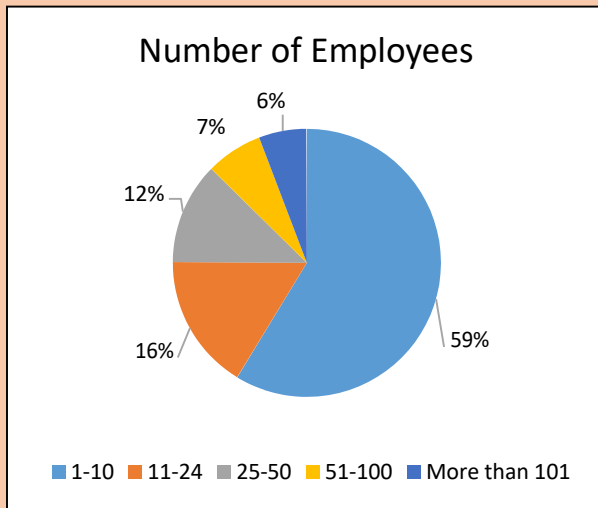
See the next page for a comparison example of a question with and without arts-related respondents.

Organizations were only allowed to select one focus area. Other subsectors that received sufficient response for independent analysis were Advocacy/Policy (6 percent), Community Development (6 percent), Education (9 percent), Human Services (5 percent), and Philanthropy (4 percent).

What follows is a sampling of how aggregate responses varied when the arts respondents were and were not included in the sample. These graphs are indicative of the general trend, which is that the arts respondents, while vastly more prevalent in the sample than arts organizations are in the social sector overall, *did not generally skew the sample*. Future, more specific analysis of differences would likely be of interest.

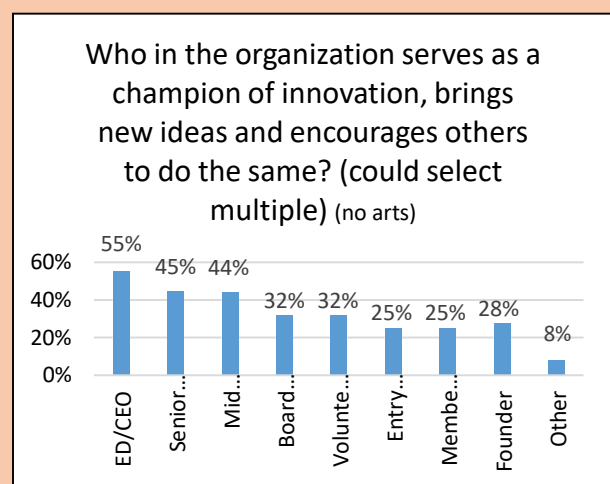
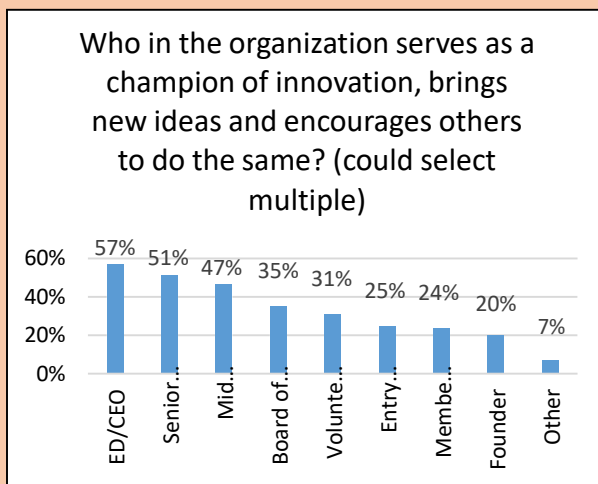
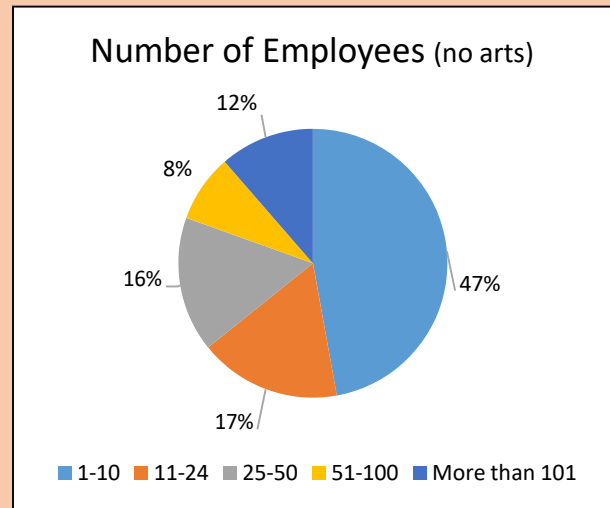
## Full Sample

(including arts respondents)



## Partial Sample

(excluding arts respondents)



51%

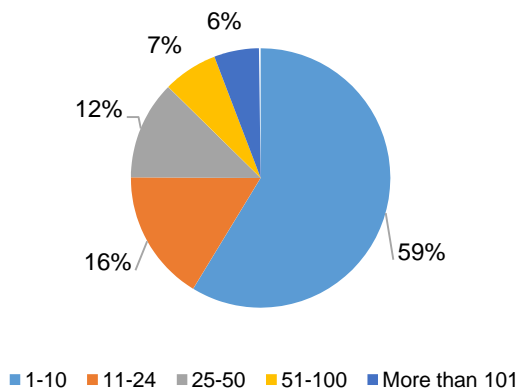
## Geographic Distribution

The 294 respondents came from 42 states and the District of Columbia. Sixteen respondents were based in the greater Washington, D.C. area, 14 in greater Los Angeles, 13 each in greater New York City and the Bay Area, 8 in Seattle, 7 in Minneapolis, and 5 in Chicago. Eight respondents

were from the state of Pennsylvania, including 4 in the greater Pittsburgh region, home of The Forbes Funds.

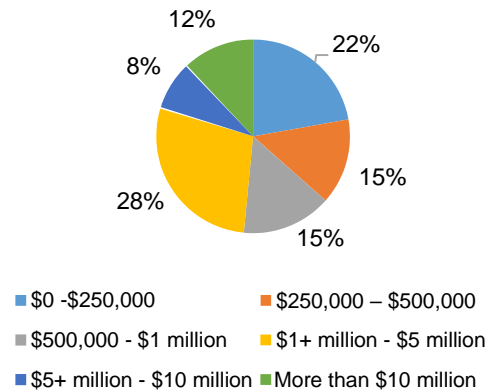
## Basic Organizational Characteristics

Number of Employees



Three-quarters of respondents had 24 or fewer employees, and over half (59 percent) had 10 or fewer employees.

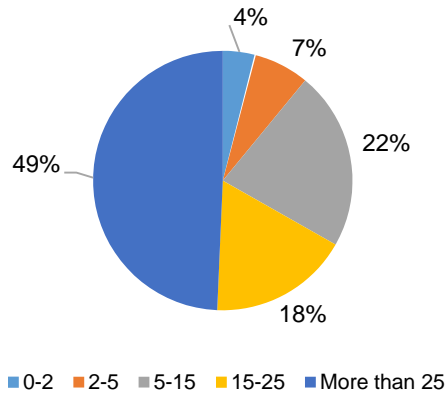
Budget Size



In terms of budget size, the sample pool was approximately evenly distributed, with some over-representation among very small (\$0-\$250,000, 22 percent) and midsize (\$1 million-\$5 million, 28 percent) organizations.

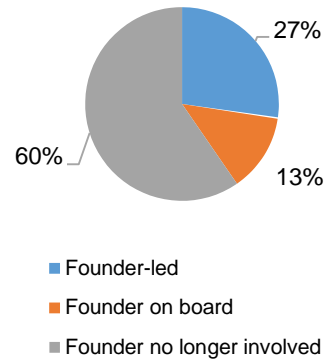


Age of Organization (Years)



Fully half of the respondents worked at organizations that were 25 years or older. The approximate average age of the respondents' organizations was 20.8 years. Verbatim responses indicate that certain organizations were over 100 years old. A third of respondents (33 percent) worked at organizations that were 15 years old or younger.


Founder Relationship



Of the respondents, almost two-thirds (60 percent) worked at organizations where the founder was no longer involved, while a quarter (27 percent) worked at organizations still directly led by the founder.

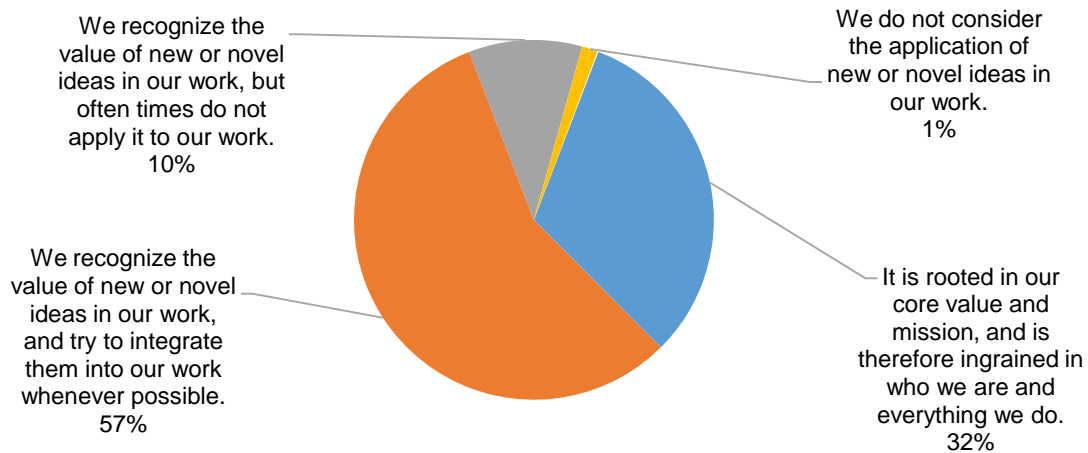
## Innovation and the Organization

### Summary Findings

- More than half of respondents said their organization valued and attempted to integrate new ideas wherever possible, and another third considered integration of new ideas to be core to their mission.
  - Almost two-thirds of respondents indicated a lack of time and/or a lack of money as a significant barrier to innovation—by far the most frequent response.
  - In terms of innovative aspects of their organization, internal components such as staff, leadership, and programming were scored as more innovative than external components such as primary funders and other peer organizations.
  - When asked who in their organization championed innovation, more than half of respondents indicated their senior executive, and around half indicated other senior- and mid-level staff. One-third indicated members of their board of directors as champions.
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## The Integration of New or Novel Ideas

How does your organization prioritize the practice or integration of new or novel ideas into your work?



When asked how and whether their organization prioritizes the practice and integration of new or novel ideas into their work, more than half of respondents (57 percent) indicated that their organization *both* valued new or novel ideas *and* attempted to integrate them wherever possible. A third of respondents (32 percent) considered the integration of new and novel ideas to be core to the organization's mission. Ten percent of respondents indicated that their organization recognized the value of new and novel ideas, but did *not* often integrate them into work, and one

percent of respondents indicated that the integration of new or novel ideas did not enter into their organization's work.

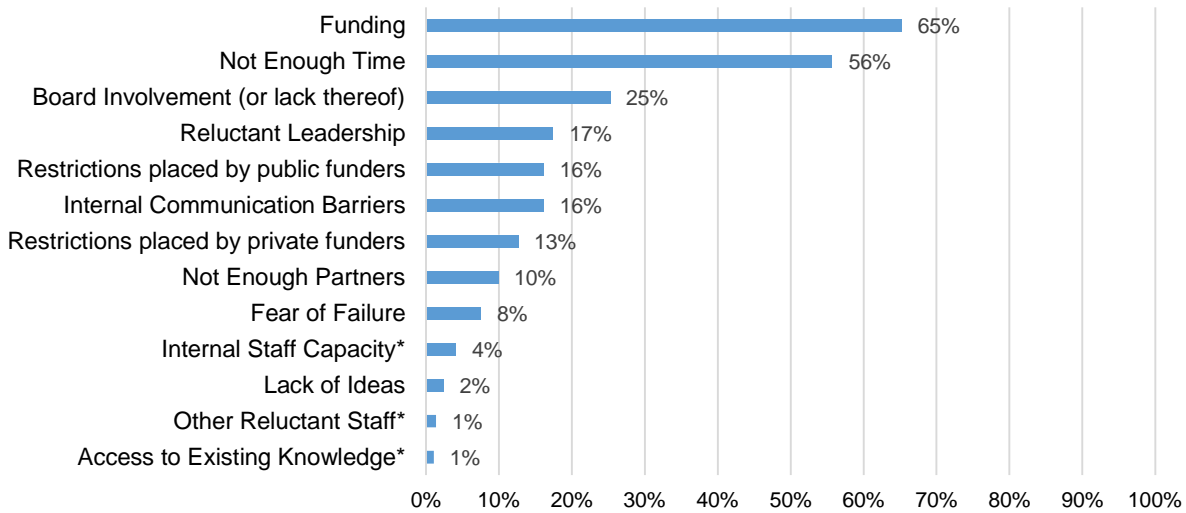
As noted previously, when asked to give examples of innovation in their work, many cited practices that may represent innovation for them, but may not be innovative when compared with other groups. For example, integrating social media into their communications for the first time, or asking supporters to wear certain colors to show support for a cause.

### ➤ Recommendation

**Organizations exist along a spectrum of innovation and should be encouraged to move from normative or reactive practices to a more proactive anticipation of needs and change that will foster innovative practice and position them as leaders. Small innovative practices done routinely throughout an organization develop a culture of innovation.**

## Barriers to Innovation

What are barriers to innovation inside the organization?



(\* indicates write-in category)

When asked about barriers to innovation inside the organization, two-thirds of respondents (65 percent) indicated funding as a barrier, and more than half (56 percent) indicated time as a barrier. A quarter of respondents called out board over- or under-involvement, while 17 percent and one percent indicated that reluctance on the part of leadership and other staff, respectively, were barriers. Internal communication was an issue for 16 percent of respondents, and restrictions placed by public/government and private funders were considered barriers 16 and 13 percent of the time,

respectively. Only two percent of respondents indicated that a lack of ideas was an issue.

A closer examination of the two leading barriers, funding and time, shows an equal distribution regardless of respondents' organization size, highlighting that the crunch for financial and staff capacity is not something only small organizations experience.

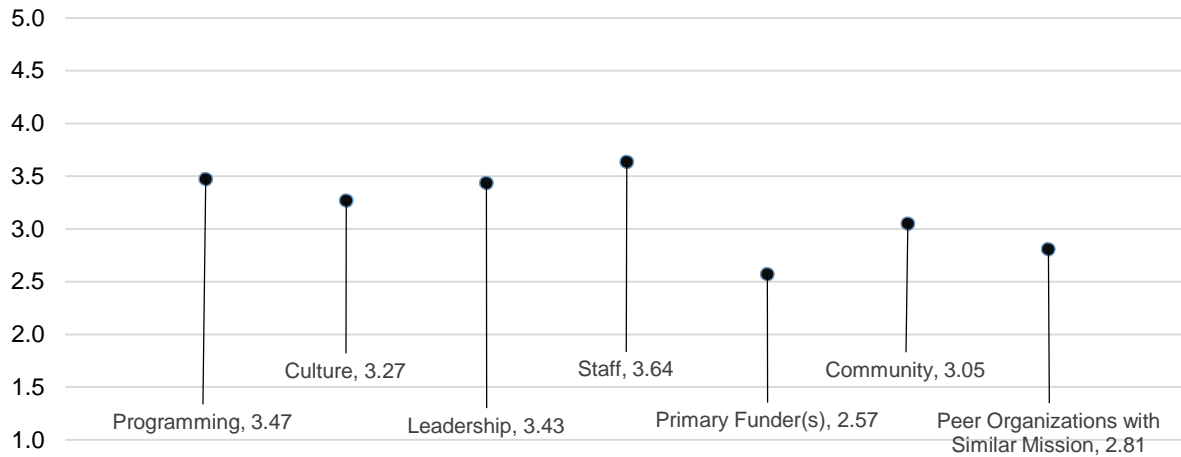
Organizations were allowed to select multiple barriers.

### ➤ Recommendation

**Organizations seeking to reduce barriers to innovation like a lack of money and lack of time must be open to change**—a state that may run counter to the day-to-day stress of running a nonprofit. Day-to-day challenges are opportunities for innovation. Innovating as an organization requires embracing innovation and disruption inside the organization first.

## Nature of the Organization

How traditional (1) or innovative (5) are the following organizational characteristics?

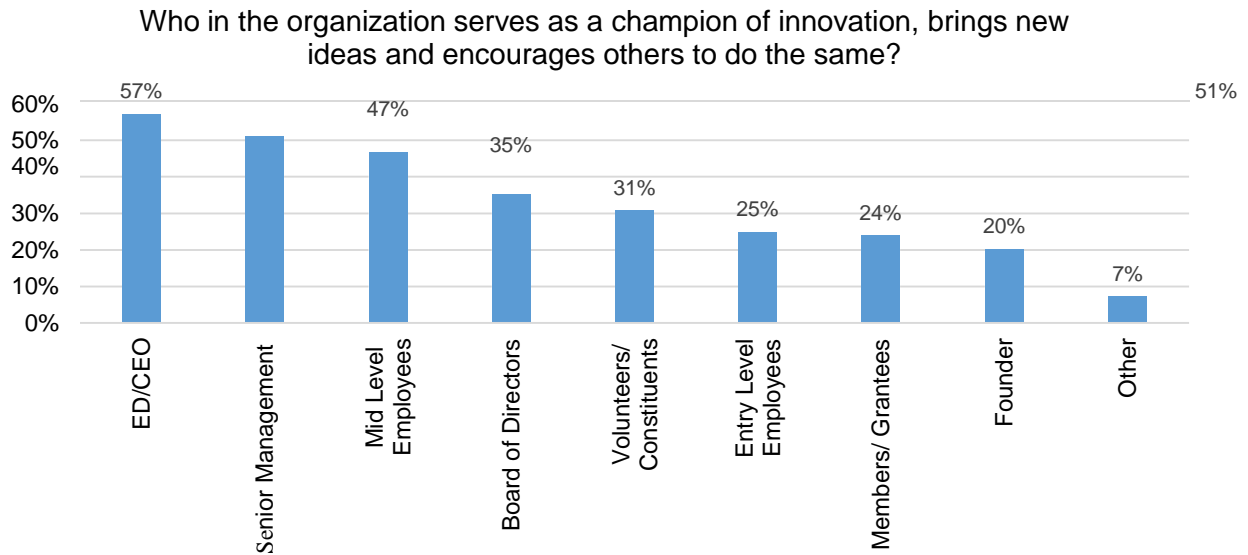


Respondents were asked about how traditional or innovative they considered different aspects of their organization to be. Two of the seven organizational areas in question had average scores below the median—an organization’s primary funders (2.57) and peer organizations with

similar missions (2.81). Staff, programming, and organizational leadership scored on average as the most innovative (3.64, 3.47, and 3.43).

Staff were considered, on average, to be the most innovative aspect of an organization.

## Champions of Innovation



Respondents were asked to identify who inside their organization champions innovation, brings new ideas, and encourages others? They were allowed to select multiple responses. More than half of respondents, 57 percent, indicated that their executive director or CEO was a champion of innovation. Approximately half of respondents, 51 percent and 47 percent respectively, indicated senior- and mid-level employees were champions.

About a third of respondents, 35 percent, said their board members were champions.

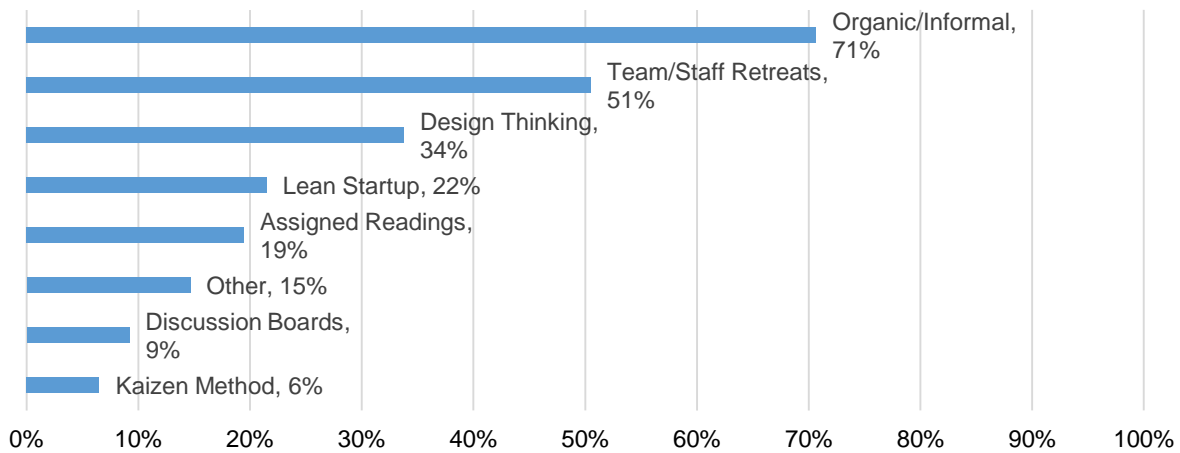
Respondents from organizations operating for less than five years rated the founder highest as a champion of innovation, while organizations operating for more than 25 years of operation rated the ED/CEO highest with senior and mid-level staff both close behind.

### ➤ Recommendation

**Organizations can accelerate innovation by engaging more stakeholders in the process.** The biggest opportunities for innovation often happen close to the customer and away from the C-suite. By engaging in innovation vertically, throughout the organization, it may be possible to capture and act upon more transformative adaptations over a shorter period of time.

## Practicing Social Innovation

What methods does your organization use to practice social innovation?



When asked what methods (if any) their organizations use to practice innovation, respondents most frequently cited organic or informal techniques (71 percent), followed by team


or staff retreats (51 percent) and design thinking (34 percent). Other options were selected less frequently.

### ➤ Recommendation

**The sector should increase its speed and quality of innovation by educating staff on more formal, systematic approaches to innovation.** The amount of organic/informal innovation that is happening indicates a desire to innovate, but may be indicative of a lack of knowledge of more formal alternatives, and in turn a decrease in efficiency and, possibly, sustained impact.

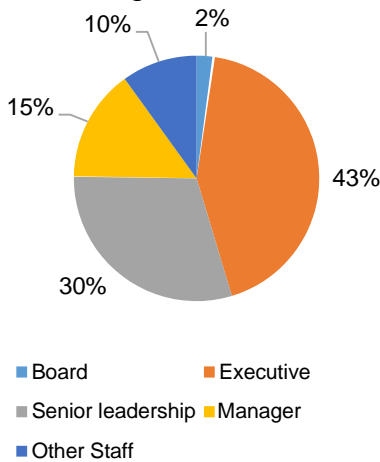
## Innovation and the Individual

### Summary Findings

- About 40 percent of the respondents were the chief executive of their organization, and another third were other senior leadership. The remainder were managers, other junior staff, and board members.
  - More than three-quarters of respondents either always or often felt empowered to make change within their organization.
  - Respondents were more likely to rate their own position as the most innovative, regardless of role (i.e. CEOs were more likely to say that people in the CEO role were the drivers of innovation).
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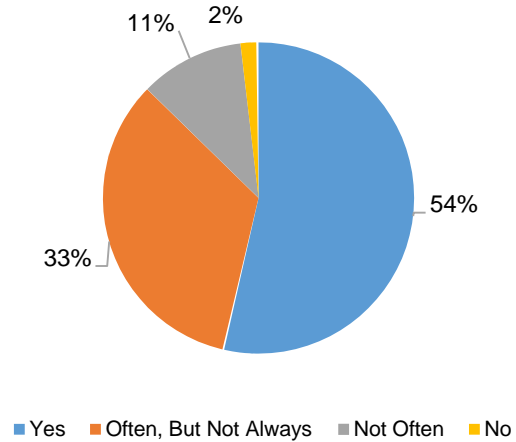


What is your position within the organization?



When asked about their position within their organization, 43 percent indicated they were the chief executive of the organization, and another 30 percent indicated they were senior leadership. Respondents who identified as board members were responding for organizations that were much smaller than most—an average of 7 employees and \$392,000 in annual budget, less than a quarter of the average sized organization in the sample.

Do you feel empowered to make change in your organization?

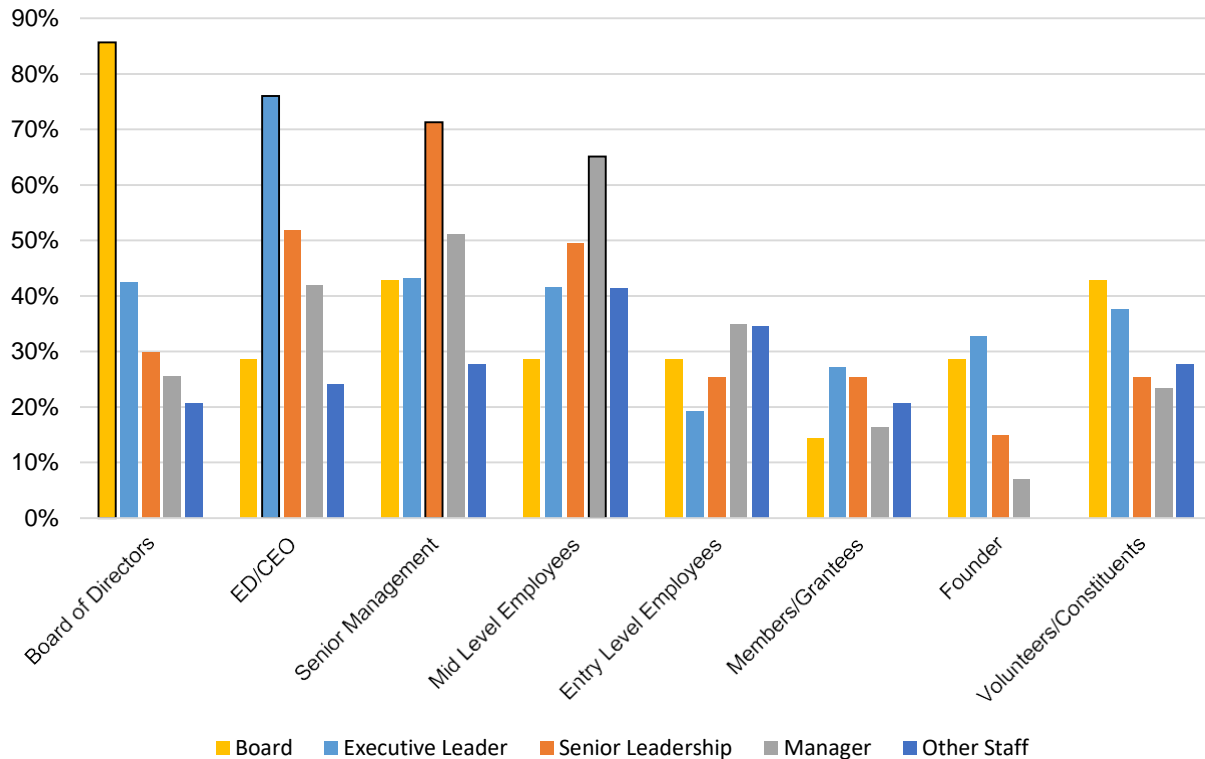


When asked if they felt empowered to make change in their organization, more than half (54 percent) said 'always', and another 33 percent said 'often'. Only 2 percent felt 'disempowered'. When segmented by the job title of the respondent, board members and the executive leaders felt wholly empowered over two-thirds of the time, with degree of empowerment decreasing based on seniority.

Do you feel empowered to make change in your organization?



Who in the organization serves as a champion of innovation?



One trend to note: when segmented by job title, it becomes clear that respondents tend to believe that people like them are the most likely champions of innovation inside organizations. Members of the board were more than twice as likely as other respondents to indicate that the board was a champion of innovation. Similar trends—indicated by black outlines on four columns in the graph above—are evident for chief

executives, senior management, and mid-level employees/managers.

“Other staff” was ranked as a champion of innovation more often by mid-level employees than by entry-level employees, perhaps as a reflection on the direct manager’s view of innovative insights and actions by their staff.

➤ Recommendation

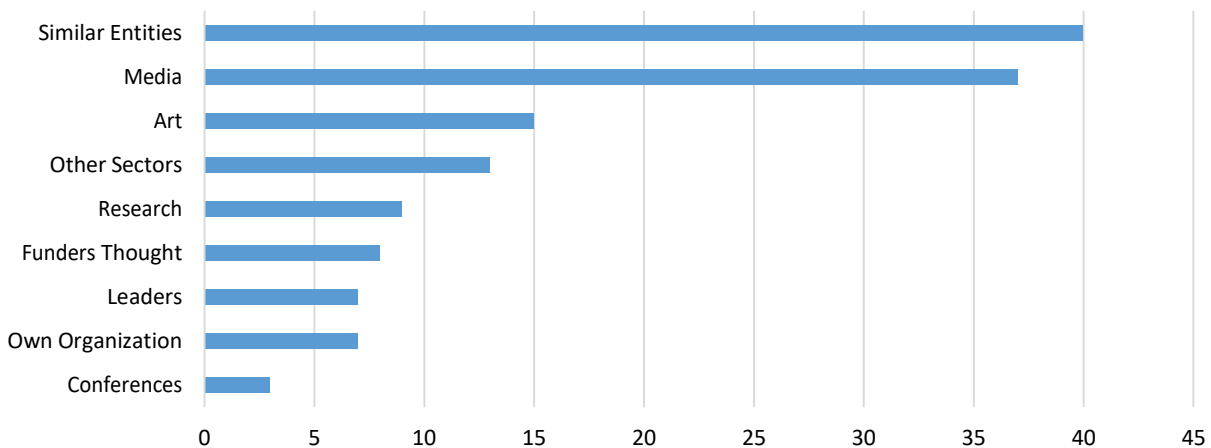
Leaders in organizations must empower innovators and champions of change throughout the hierarchy of the organization, and must be cognizant of a bias towards believing that they, and people vocationally similar to them, are more innovative than others.

## Sources of Social Innovation

Survey respondents were asked where they look for information or guidance when it comes to social innovation. The results suggest that survey respondents look to a wide variety of resources when it comes to social innovation. We separated the open-ended responses into two major thematic groups: General Resources and Specific Resources.

General Resources of social innovation information include simple responses that did not call out specific organizations, journals, or individuals, with the exception of Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook, which were categorized in General Resources under the Media category. Examples of General Resource responses include: peers, books, media, and their board of directors. General Resources were grouped into 9 categories.

**General Resources Cited for Social Innovation**  
(open-ended responses aggregated after the fact by the researchers)



1. **Similar Entities** – the largest group of responses suggest that the people around us, including colleagues, peers, friends, partners, our community, personal networks, and similar organizations to the ones we work for, are significant sources of information about social innovation.
2. **Media** – the second largest group of responses includes media of many forms, including traditional media like television, newspapers, books and newsletters, as well as social media and online sources including general keyword searches, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and online newsletters.

3. **Art** – this group of responses included art in general, art organizations, artists, artistic publications, and arts-based emerging leaders. It is important to note that a large proportion of respondents to this survey come from arts organizations. This is one area where responses were decidedly skewed by the over-sampling of arts organizations.
4. **Other Sectors** – this group of responses includes other sectors than the one the respondent identified with, which included responses such as the business sector, for-profit technology companies and industry, social justice and entrepreneurship organizations, and health and human services.
5. **Research** – this group of responses suggested that research emerging from academia and industry, including journals and publications, were resources of social innovation information.
6. **Funders** – this group of responses included foundations, donors, and fundraising experts as sources of information about social innovation.
7. **Thought Leaders** – this group of responses included sector leaders, thought leaders, youth, elected leaders, and innovation specialists and experts.
8. **Own Organization** – this group of responses included board of directors, executive director, and founders as innovation resources.
9. **Conferences** – the least reported response group and possibly the most traditional form of information sharing and gathering for employees was conferences.

## Specific Resources

Specific resources of social innovation included organizations, companies, and resources. Eight the responses that singled out specific individuals, resources were cited five or more times.

Specific Resource	Count	Website
Stanford Social Innovation Review	37	ssir.org
American for the Arts	23	americansforthearts.org
Harvard Business School Review	17	hbr.org
Grantmakers in the Arts	8	giarts.org
EmcArts	7	emcart.org
Fast Company	7	fastcompany.org
Independent Sector	5	independentsector.org
Ted Talks	5	TED.com

## Conclusion

Innovation is, to be certain, a buzzword of our day. The purpose of this research is to explore how the social sector and its organizations might mitigate barriers and encourage stronger, more sustainable innovation within the social sector. By understanding how social innovation is viewed and practiced, we hoped to identify ways to support more adoption of social innovation—not only in work and deeds, but also in the culture of workplaces that strive to better serve people and communities.

To create a cultural norm and expectation of social innovation as a practice in the sector, more funding and research will be required to support

organizations in their journey toward adoption. In particular, more can be done to help organizations realize that innovation need not be a separate budget line-item requiring dedicated staff to champion, but a creative recognition of how to do their work in a forward-thinking, power-diffuse, cost-effective manner that anticipates needs, stays ahead of trends, and creates differentiation between them and other groups.

Partnerships, cross-sector collaborations, and online tools and resources can all aid in this journey and evolution toward a more innovative social sector for all who serve it.

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