



**Fund the  
People Toolkit**

Discussion Guides

# **Talking Talent for Nonprofits**





# Talking Talent for Nonprofits

## Objectives



### This tool will:

- Provide guidance and a shared vocabulary that facilitates productive conversations about talent
- Increase the number and frequency of conversations that funders and nonprofits have about talent needs and potential talent investments
- Increase funders' understanding of the strengths and challenges of nonprofit talent, and the mutual benefits that can result from such investments

## Purpose of Guide

This discussion guide is designed to help your nonprofit team initiate a meaningful conversation about your people systems – the organizational practices, policies, habits, and structures that support and strengthen the morale, ability, and advancement of employees and volunteers so that they perform at the highest levels of excellence. The idea is to identify your strengths and weaknesses, so that you can subsequently plan, budget, and secure resources to build on the strengths and address the weaknesses.

## How to use

Use this guide with your entire team or sub-groups (i.e., emerging leaders, line staff, managers, board members, etc.). We suggest sending the questions to your team in advance so they can reflect, inquire for data, and take note of their own thoughts. If you believe sensitive issues will arise, you might want to create an

anonymous survey based on these questions, then hold a facilitated team meeting to discuss the results.

## Caveats

- **Facilitation:** More important than the questions, securing skilled facilitation is crucial to having a frank and productive conversation. Consider professional facilitation, if possible. You may also engage the best facilitator on your team or find a skilled volunteer who is allied with your organization.
- **Buy-In:** Before your organization can secure resources to invest in talent, this conversation should take place across the organizational chart, from bottom to top. Executive leadership should discuss with the board; emerging leaders and apprentices (such as interns) should weigh in as well. Optimally, the board and staff should be aligned in their thinking about how intentional staff development can advance the organization's performance, impact and sustainability.



## Ideas for Use

- **Think/Pair/Share:** Ask each member of your staff or board to consider the questions posed in the discussion guide, taking notes as they silently reflect. Individuals should then discuss their responses with one or two other people before sharing highlights with the full group.
- Use selected questions as a reflective exercise at the start of your next meeting or series of meetings.
- Create a team of staff and board representatives to explore talent funding. Ask them to determine responses to these questions after conversations with other staff and board members.

## Required Readings from the Fund the People Toolkit

- [Case Making Materials](#)
- [Glossary of Terms](#)
- [Talent-Investment Menu](#)

### Section 1: Current Status of Talent Investment and Funding

- 1) **What do we believe are the benefits of investing in our organization's leaders and staff?**
  - a) Are perspectives aligned across our organization and between board and staff? Describe the perspectives.
  - b) To what extent do our practices align with our beliefs about investing in talent?
- 2) **How is talent currently developed in our organization?**
  - a) Think about formal and informal learning opportunities, internal and external trainings and programs, and development available to new and seasoned staff
  - b) Is there a focus on opportunities, equity and inclusion across your organization's talent development systems? If not, how can you begin to incorporate this into your strategies, tactics and activities?

- 3) **Are current talent development practices sufficient to attract, retain, and develop the staff our organization needs to accomplish our mission? Why or why not?**
  - a) Approximately what percentage of our budget goes toward developing our people? ([Fund the People's Talent Ratio report](#) might be useful.
  - b) Approximately what percentage of time (by the executive team, managers, and/or the board of directors) goes toward developing our people?
  - c) What gets in the way?
  - d) How are we incorporating an equity and inclusion lens into attracting, retaining and developing our staff?
- 4) **Do our organization's funders understand our talent development needs?**
  - a) Do we ask them to invest in our people? Why or why not?

### Section 2: Visions for Future

- 5) **What could we accomplish with more funding for talent development?**
  - a) What new (or expanded) professional growth programs would we develop? ([Fund the People's Talent-Investment Menu](#) might help you consider this question.)
  - b) What impact could an increase in talent investment have on specific programs/activities that our funders support, our specific issue areas, ultimate beneficiaries and/or our mission?
  - c) How could having an explicit focus on, equity and inclusion impact our target audience and mission?
  - d) What is the strongest case we could make to our funders for talent funding?



### Section 3: Practical Next Steps

- 6) What else do we need to learn about our assets and talent needs in order to move forward?
- 7) How can we frame our needs so that the benefits of investing in talent development are clear and compelling?
- 8) Which of our funders might we approach about investing in our talent development? What do we already know about their priorities and openness to a conversation about this topic?
- 9) How do we see equity and inclusion as integral to developing our talent?
- 10) Who else needs to be involved in this conversation in order for it to succeed?



## About Fund the People



Fund the People is the national campaign to maximize investment in the nonprofit workforce. To achieve this goal, we make the case, equip for action, and build a movement to change the attitudes and behaviors of funders, fundraising nonprofits, and the intermediaries that support them. There is a long-standing, sector-wide deficit of investment in the nonprofit workforce. Nonprofit professionals work in environments typified by high burnout and stretched resources. So there is a real demand for equitable salaries and benefits, more and better professional development, improved

human resources functions, and healthy organizational culture. Together, we can address these challenges by reshaping existing resources to prioritize nonprofit people as the central asset of nonprofit performance. Now more than ever, we can ensure that America's civic leadership is diverse, well-supported, high-performing, and sustainable for the long haul. Launched in 2014 and headquartered in Beacon, NY, Fund the People (originally known as Talent Philanthropy Project) is a project of Community Partners. Our work is informed by an Advisory Council of diverse leaders and a team of skilled staff and consultants, and is supported by a coalition of regional and national foundations.

**To learn more about Fund the People visit:**  
[fundthepeople.org](http://fundthepeople.org)

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