Innovators Come In All Shapes And Sizes

Power & Influence honorees harness the power of ideas

BY PAUL CLOLERY

A uthor James Herriot would be proud of this year’s NPT Power & Influence Top 50 celebration of the executives moving and shaping the nonprofit world. The creator of All Creatures Great and Small would be delighted because this year the honorees run the gamut from the smallest organizations to a few of the largest.

This unveiling of the industry’s innovators showcases the power of great ideas and how those concepts often trump small bank accounts. The kids in a history class in New York City needed supplies. Their teacher got the idea to go online and donors responded. The concept has taken hold and now has a name – crowdsourcing. There are a few million unnecessary emergency room visits every year. For those who suffer though without medical assistance there is a network bringing free care to a town near you whose national infrastructure could meet in a phone booth. For those who don’t remember phone booths, it’s a great analogy. You could fit, maybe, three people in them.

There is the other end of the spectrum. Executives of some of the more well-heeled organizations are bankrolling ideas that, on paper, have little chance of being successful. They understand there is much to be learned by the journey. Others on the list are allocating millions to realign for the next generation of organizations and constituents.

There is quite a bit of turnover in this 16th annual catalog of the sector’s big brains. There are 18 new honorees and three executives who are returning to the club after taking some time off, apparently to come up with new ideas. Honorees and their guests will be feted in Washington, D.C., next month during the annual NPT Power & Influence Top 50 Gala. The evening’s keynote will be national commentator Juan Williams.

The evening always involves conversation between people who would not normally have the opportunity to interact. One commonality of this year’s honorees is a discussion regarding ending vitriolic language when there is a difference of opinion. Several of the Power & Influence honorees are leading the national discussion of one America. They have initiated conversations about putting the civility back in civil society. Some of the honorees have found unique methods of convening and facilitating such discussions.

Nearly everyone is weary of the lack of cooperation in Congress that has spilled into the nation in general. It seems as if we can’t talk to each other without being branded conservative or liberal with the branded feeling compelled to react in a certain form and manner. The honorees this year have been reaching out past their usual constituencies to foster conversation about what it means to be a civil society. Although the words and nomenclature are often different, the goal is the same.

Here they are – The 2013 NPT Power & Influence Top 50 honorees. NPT
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mandates financial transparency for religious organizations. Busby’s
are tapped to do a TED, you can pretty much write your own ticket,
A history teacher in the Bronx, Best needed supplies for the kids.
Everyone has an agenda, whether it’s infants, youth, GenXers or
board. You need to be in everyone’s ear in these fragile political
times and Aviv has the pop to get in the door.

Some of the world’s biggest brains gather to discuss ideas that can
change the world at TED conferences. TED was always interesting
but Anderson has turned it into a worldwide phenomenon. If you
are tapped to do a TED, you can pretty much write your own ticket,
although the conference disdains corporate and self-promotion.

Aviv is one of the sector’s savviest political operatives in
Washington, D.C. There is sometimes a howl when she makes a
move and that’s only because they don’t see the rest of the
board. You need to be in everyone’s ear in these fragile political
times and Aviv has the pop to get in the door.

A self-described philanthropy wonk, she uses social media
to push out and gather thoughts on how to create, fund, and
distribute shared social goods in the digital age. She writes
about how data are fundamentally reshaping the flow of
philanthropy, calling it the future of good.

A history teacher in the Bronx, Best needed supplies for the kids.
That was about $105 million ago. He was one of the first to
harness the web in what people now call crowdfunding.
Any public school teacher in the country can tap into it.
Some sites are bells and whistles. You’ll only see
them here if a teacher needs bells and whistles.

There might be a day in the not-too-distant future when tax law
mandates financial transparency for religious organizations. Busby’s
members will be ready. He has put his neck out to make financial
accountability a near creed within a membership often not happy
about drawing the curtains back and letting the light shine in.

One of the centerpieces of the Affordable Care Act is to reduce
the number of emergency room visits for non-emergency,
indigent patients. The model is already in place and Busby runs
it. And, the 1,200 clinics in the network do it with almost
no federal or state money. Large hospital systems should
learn how it is done and delivered well

Everyone has an agenda, whether it’s infants, youth, seniors or
singles. Those are deep silos. Butts found a way to intelligently
show that it’s really one agenda and that the generations are
interdependent and provide worth to each other. She’s a go-to
person in Washington, D.C. on intergenerational dependence.
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The name should be enough. It’s enough to fund eradicating disease in poor countries. But Gates has been a pioneer in funding projects that just might not work, or in some cases have little chance of working. It has been a model for foundations to be risk-takers if they want to actually change the world.

John H. Graham IV
President & CEO
ASAE/The Center for Association Leadership
Washington, D.C.

If he wasn’t a high-powered association executive you might find Graham in a well-appointed garage trying to figure out a way to make something work better. He is constantly seeking ways his 22,000 members representing nearly 11,000 organizations can deliver better constituent service. It’s C-suite learning and mentoring at its best.

Paul Grogan
President & CEO
The Boston Foundation
Boston, Mass.

There is very little going on in the Back Bay that Grogan doesn’t coordinate, participate in or fund. He convenes important conversations about local issues and has the checkbook to back up whatever is decided. He is a power broker throughout the state on poverty, social innovation, healthcare and education.

Wendy Harman
Director, Information Management, Disaster Services
American Red Cross
Washington, D.C.

Harman continues to be a leading voice in the nonprofit online space. And, she can be blamed for teaching the President of the United States how to tweet. She has the Red Cross at the top of the social media implementation scale but realizes those clicks are about people. She shares data and methods that make everyone better.

Stephen Heintz
President
Rockefeller Brothers Fund
New York, N.Y.

A brilliant tactical negotiator, he is leading the concept for the reconvening of America, called The National Purpose Initiative. He is pushing sector leaders to understand the intertwined economies of what they do. Heintz takes his unique worldview and is developing a game plan to make it all work. It starts with ideas and understanding.

Sr. Georgette Lehmuth
President & CEO
National Catholic Development Conference
Hempstead, N.Y.

Sr. Georgette has called what she does “a sacred trust” and has referred to finding cash to do it the “ministry of fundraising.” It’s all very nice unless you’re an elected or appointed sot trying to run over the sector. She collaborates with everyone while keeping everyone’s eyes fixed on the prize – service to others.

Dara Richardson-Heron, M.D.
Chief Executive Officer
YWCA USA
Washington, D.C.

When you think YWCA, the Affordable Care Act isn’t the first thing that snaps to mind. It should. YWCA has always been involved in women’s health issues. Richardson-Heron understands the politics of it, has been through personal health issues and won’t take “no” for an answer no matter who says it.
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James (Jim) Manis
Mobile Giving Foundation
Issaquah, Wash.

The Internet is the Wild West, even when it comes to donations. Manis is working to make sure that doesn’t happen with mobile giving without stifling innovation. Everyone has a smartphone and eventually it will be a huge source of income. Setting the standards now and working with the Better Business Bureau shows leadership in an expanding field.

Tim McClimon
President
American Express Foundation
New York, N.Y.

McClimon is a leading example of the correct way to do corporate social responsibility. His words in Forbes: "Employees are key stakeholders and expect that the organizations they work for are supporting their communities. In exchange, employees can be valuable brand ambassadors that help us expand the reach of programs.” He also expects results.

Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, M.D.
President & CEO
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Princeton, N.J.

Lavizzo-Mourey is a key player in what this nation’s healthcare will look like, from cradle to senior citizens. She either sits on or leads many national and international health policy boards. She also pushes RWJF and the sector to realize the importance of measuring results and outcomes, of clear accountability.

Neil Nicoll
President & CEO
YMCA of the USA
Chicago, Ill.

While the government is bailing on projects, he’s found a way to get them to pony-up. Convincing the feds to give him money to counter diabetes via exercise and counseling is transforming the organization into more than just a gym and daycare operation. His trademark has become taking on old problems in a unique way and making it work.

Jacqueline Novogratz
Chief Executive Officer
Acumen
New York, N.Y.

Novogratz believes that values have a tension and a balance. Those she picks to be part of the team of this nonprofit global venture capital fund need more than skills and personality, as she had put it. Her idea on patient investment is a fresh voice in a nonprofit space more driven with instant outcomes measurement these days.

Michelle Nunn
Chief Executive Officer
Points of Light Institute
Atlanta, Ga.

Nunn connects with more volunteers than many Fortune 100 organizations have employees. While national service is a theme and she is a master visionary into how it should work, she understands that volunteering is local. A lot of executives are missing that piece of the puzzle. She is a leading voice on communities and the power of people.

Wayne Pacelle
President & CEO
Humane Society of the United States
Washington, D.C.

Pacelle is fighting back against the shadowy individuals who use nonprofits as a cloak to attack the sector with half-truths and in some cases straight-out lies. Along with running a great organization, he is the poster executive for attacks by anti-business and others who won’t put their names behind their smear campaigns. He still wins most of the fights.

Lisa Paulsen
President & CEO
Entertainment Industry Foundation
Los Angeles, Calif.

Many organizations claim they measure outcomes. With Paulsen, if you don’t hit your goal EIF will find physicians and researchers who can. It is a fundraising, research-funding and awareness juggernaut. While the main thrust has been cancer research and awareness, she is also pushing a national service and education agenda.

Michael Piraino
Chief Executive Officer
National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association
Seattle, Wash.

Abused and neglected kids need more than a mentor. They need adults who are trained and screened. Piraino has built a network of more than 77,000 volunteers who serve 243,000 abused and neglected kids via more than 900 program offices. Don’t call his office and expect to get him. The odds are that he’s on the road.

Rebecca Rimel
President & CEO
The Pew Charitable Trusts

By what she calls “raging incrementalists,” she made Pew very focused and very strategic regarding resources, ideas, individuals, and institutions to move the needle on certain key issues. An interesting idea from deep pockets: “Bigger may be interesting, but it’s not necessarily better. Strategy and design of philanthropic investment is equally important.”

Anthony D. Romero
Executive Director
American Civil Liberties Union
New York, N.Y.

Romero focused the Rockefeller Foundation on “building resilience.” Whether it is Asia or New York City, she is pushing key infrastructure initiatives worldwide. Her words: “Resilience means creating diversity and redundancy in our systems and rewiring their interconnections, which enables their functioning even when individual parts fail.”

William Schambra, Ph.D.
Director
Hudson Institute/Bradley Center
Washington, D.C.

Schambra is consistently sticking his finger in the eye of the sector’s elite, who have forgotten that it’s not about them but their missions. His writing smacks around his conservative brethren, as well as D.C. liberals. He asks questions and convenes conversations designed to broaden the idea of philanthropy’s role in America today.

Paul Schmitz
CEO
Public Allies
Milwaukee, Wis.

A member of the White House Council on Community Solutions, this community organizer’s mantra is “Everyone Leads.” To sustain social change the people who have to live with the results should determine the work and be co-producers of the impact. He believes change can’t occur if communities wait for an individual hero.
Seffrin is resetting the clock at the ACS in its 100th year. It is an ambitious overhaul that is more than just management structure. Some of the change challenges traditional ideas of fundraising and revenue. Other organizations have restructured operations. This one has a chance at changing patient outcomes.

Crowdfunding is quaint. Microfinance is what will change the world as grants shrivel up and donors continue to be concerned about where their money goes. When banks say no, neighbors say yes and Shah and his roughly 1 million members have been at the forefront of community financing a couple of bucks at a time.

Unlike some of her predecessors, Spencer only sporadically sees her Washington, D.C. digs. She is on the ground ensuring that national service work is continuing and effective. As services take more of a role in national issues, making sure this isn’t just an extension of FEMA or another government agency is a challenge for which she appears to be ready.

It takes an extraordinary leader to go from running the Gates Foundation, straightening out the Smithsonian and sitting on a White House panel to running a small community development agency. She’s never lost her humanity. Her ideas and clout transformed thousands of lives. Now she’s doing it one person and community at a time.

Ward isn’t everywhere, it just seems that way. Her funding for community service makes an impact. She is all about policy issues, reorganizing school models, and leveraging social and new media. Her passion to empower others, and her professional life, are dedicated to service and diversity in both nonprofit and corporate settings.

Watt brings an international view to philanthropy, especially when lobbying and explaining to cloistered members of Congress that government is housing poor people for nickels and dimes and not focusing on real issues of growing a civil society.

Everyone wants to build grantee capacity. Worthington understands that there is a balance between capacity building and direct service delivery. There is a large turnover in leadership at international organizations. He is working to get the world up to speed, cooperating, building new coalitions and partnerships for both sides of the balance.

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