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## BenchMark 3.5 Proposed Plenary Sessions

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### Plenary Session # 1: EDUCATION FOR A CHANGING FIELD IN CHANGING TIMES

**Session Overview:** The first Benchmark conference 35 years ago attempted to establish boundaries for what eventually would become the Nonprofit/Philanthropic Studies field. Today, however, we are in an era when boundaries between academic fields are increasingly porous. One scholar has even called the current era a time of “blurred genres.”

Boundary spanning and the blurring of professional and organizational identities certainly have occurred in the third sector in recent years. Today, for instance, it is not uncommon for nonprofit organizations to establish for-profit operations that provide a revenue stream to support the organization’s work. The reverse is also happening, with for-profit organizations establishing foundations that often are much more than vehicles for public relations and corporate promotion. Some for-profit organizations even claim to be operating solely to support work that is in the public interest. Further, social enterprise – cooperatives for example – are a growing phenomenon in Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand and represent a hybrid form of organization that is has both a social and capital generation purpose.

The boundaries between the nonprofit, public, and business sectors also have begun to crumble. For example, some nonprofits increasingly rely on governmental grants and contracts to do their work, and governments increasingly rely on nonprofits to deliver services that they, themselves, once provided.

Once distinct lines of study within educational programs make less sense in an increasingly blurred and complex landscape of organizational forms, multiple expressions of social and economic agency, and often divergent approaches to achieving social ends.

**What does all of this mean for the nonprofit/philanthropic studies educators and for the field of Nonprofit and Philanthropic Studies generally?** The need to answer that question was one of the reasons the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC) organized a fourth Benchmark conference



## N O N P R O F I T A C A D E M I C C E N T E R S C O U N C I L

five years earlier than it would normally have occurred if the prior ten-year cycle had been followed. The question is front-and-center during this initial plenary session.

### **Plenary Session # 2:**

#### **THE CHANGING FACE AND LIKELY FUTURE OF NONPROFIT FUNDING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATING NONPROFIT LEADERS**

**Session Overview:** In the United States, foundation support was crucial in establishing an academic field of study focused on nonprofit organizations and philanthropy. Many academic programs and/or research centers that provided the knowledge base for the emerging field were established, at least in part, through foundation funding. In addition, a number of the field's crucial infrastructure organizations—e.g., ARNOVA and NACC (the sponsor of this conference)—received substantial foundation support during their (and the field's) formative years.

In recent years, however, many of the foundations that traditionally have funded nonprofit and philanthropic education programs and the organizations that serve as a major part of the infrastructure for the field have embraced new priorities. Consequently, those in the field have had to look to other venues for fiscal support. At times this has meant more deeply embedding nonprofit/philanthropy education into the credit-generation and budgeting systems of universities, but attention also has been given to other countries in which the government tends to play a more direct role in supporting nonprofit/philanthropic studies education programs and/or the research that contributes to the knowledge base taught in these programs.

This session will explore the past, present and future of funding for nonprofit and philanthropic studies education, both in the United States and in other parts of the world. It will ask questions such as the following: (1) Why have foundations that traditionally supported nonprofit/philanthropic studies education programs reassessed their priorities? (2) What are the prospects of generating foundation support in the future, and what, if anything, can the field do to generate future funding from the foundation world? (3) What are the challenges and benefits of embedding nonprofit and philanthropic studies programs more deeply into a university's standard operating procedures for credit generation and budgeting? (4) How have academics in countries other than the United States funded nonprofit and philanthropic studies education programs, and what is the prognosis for funding such programs in these countries in the future?



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**Plenary Session # 3:  
CHANGING GOVERNMENT POLICY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATING NONPROFIT  
LEADERS**

**Session Overview:** The third sector has always been influenced by government policy. Indeed, in the many countries the sector is normally demarcated by using a category of organization defined by a governmental organization, i.e., the International Revenue Service, Canada Revenue Agency. As is the case with other relationships in a rapidly changing social environment, however, the relationship between the government and nonprofit sectors has been changing in recent years and changes are likely to accelerate in the future. Entrenched neo-liberal regimes and the dramatic expansion of “new public management” practices in past few years in areas, such as audit and risk management, have fundamentally changed the nature of public post-secondary education. In some countries, nonprofit programs are at risk because they are seen to create risk to the institution either because they cannot generate surplus revenue, or, more troubling, because such programs critically and publically examine government policy. Governments not supporting such inquiry and education have simply stopped funding these degree programs.

This session focuses on the government’s changing impact on the nonprofit sector both within and outside of the United States and explores the implications of this change for educating the field’s future leaders.

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**Plenary Session # 4:  
TECHNOLOGY AND EDUCATION FOR LEADERSHIP IN THE THIRD SECTOR**

**Session Overview:** This conference’s plenary sessions are focused on the impact of changes that have been occurring and that, almost certainly, will accelerate in the future. A major driver of change, of course, is technological innovation. Changes in technology have and, undoubtedly, will continue to impact both the operation of nonprofits and the way future nonprofit leaders are educated. This session focuses on the impact of technological change on the third sector, generally, and on nonprofit and philanthropic studies education programs, in particular. The medium of presentation during this session will be part of the session’s message. Consistent with much of the learning generated by new technologies, there will be no front of the room and no single sequence of events. Rather, the session will include a swirl of activities using a range of



N O N P R O F I T A C A D E M I C C E N T E R S C O U N C I L

delivery systems that conference participants can select from and experience in whatever order they chose.