

# RELEASING SEEDS TO THE WIND

The Story of **GENERATIONS AHEAD**



**GENERATIONS  
AHEAD**



Dear friends, allies and supporters,

We are in a moment of multiple political upheavals in the United States. As ever more crises erupt and new models of organizing blossom into public spaces, we are coming to accept that we cannot solve the problems ahead using the same economic, political and social models that brought us to this point.

Generations Ahead was borne out of the knowledge that the new challenges of our world, especially genetic technologies, cannot be met with old ways of thinking. As we officially close our doors on January 31, 2012, we wanted to document some of our work and share a vision for addressing issues ahead of the curve—a model for moving from our movement silos to a more aligned and thus more effective social justice approach to social change. We offer this story of Generations Ahead in the spirit of celebrating the change and impact this organization has made on behalf of our communities and movements—and in the hopes that the lessons and wisdom gained from our experiences will benefit leaders, organizations and advocacy efforts moving forward.<sup>1</sup>

#### Board and staff of Generations Ahead

Crystal Plati  
(Board Chair)

Sujatha Jesudason  
(Executive Director)

Rebecca Fox

Marina Ortega  
(Managing Director)

Alison Kafer

Le'a Malia Kanehe

Jackie Payne

Dorothy Roberts

Silvia Yee

Miriam Yeung

---

<sup>1</sup> As part of our closure process/documenting our work, we conducted a total of fourteen interviews with key stakeholders: staff, board members, allies and funders. The quotations contained in this paper best captured the themes, lessons and insights from these interviews. See the Appendix for a list of interviewees.



## THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD

“I was so inspired and excited by the boldness of Generations Ahead. How dare we bring different movements that have conflicting stands on issues into the same room, and have a conversation about that conflict?”

-Crystal Plati, former executive director of CHOICE USA and Generations Ahead board chair

From 2008 through 2011, Generations Ahead was the only organization in the United States working with a diverse spectrum of social justice advocates on the social and ethical implications of genetic technologies. There were no organizations working directly with community and advocacy organizations grappling with the effects of new practices in human genetics, developments that could radically impact family formation, health care, community life, economic development and scientific innovation. Using a comprehensive social justice framework, Generations Ahead worked to increase awareness and activism on concerns related to assisted reproductive technologies, prenatal genetic screening, egg and sperm donation, surrogacy, DNA forensic databases, sex selection, personalized genomic medicine, genetic trait selection, and race-based medical therapies.

Originally founded in 2004 as the Gender, Justice and Human Genetics Program of the Center for Genetics and Society (CGS), Generations Ahead launched independently in 2008 with a bold vision: to build a multi-movement coalition dedicated to addressing the ways new genetic technologies affect women, people of color, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQI community.

At our founding, most social justice organizations were not tracking human genetics as an issue of community

concern and did not have genetic technologies on their educational or advocacy radar screens. Those that did tended to address these issues from a more narrow, self-interested perspective—sometimes at the expense of other groups or concerns.

Reproductive rights advocates were understandably focused on defending and affirming women’s reproductive autonomy. Disability rights advocates wanted to prevent discrimination against people with disabilities through the use of assisted reproductive technologies. LGBTQI communities saw reproductive technologies as offering more opportunities for family formation. And, organizations advancing the rights of women of color had concerns about the exploitation of women of color as egg donors and surrogates.

In short, the goals, and even the tactics, of movements “were colliding,” stated Rebecca Fox, former executive director of the National Coalition for LGBT Health and Generations Ahead board member.

This lack of alignment became painfully clear as issues surrounding genetic technologies were thrust into public discourse through the introduction of legislation banning sex selection and through media attention on public figures such as Craig Venter and Sarah Palin’s son with Down Syndrome.



We saw a huge need for a larger education and alignment process amongst social justice organizations—and a huge opportunity to lead in this effort.

The challenge was a perfect fit for Sujatha Jesudason, first program director of the Gender, Justice and Human Genetics Program at CGS, and then founding executive director of Generations Ahead. As a strong, collaborative and visionary leader, Sujatha came to CGS with not only 20 years of

experience in social justice, but a sharp ability to identify promising new ideas and methods and leverage them in amplifying the power of movement building and advocacy.

With Sujatha at the helm, Generations Ahead set forth, daring to raise the social justice concerns about human genetics amongst advocates who already had their plates full and tended to view science as a positive and objective arbiter of social good.

## BUILDING A CONNECTED AND ALIGNED NETWORK: SEEDING A BASE OF LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS

**“WE** had never really thought about the issue of reproductive technologies in our lives as social justice activists. Once we got introduced to the issues, we realized how big and pervasive they were. And how scary they could be. How are we to meet these technologies in the most ethically and morally informed way?”

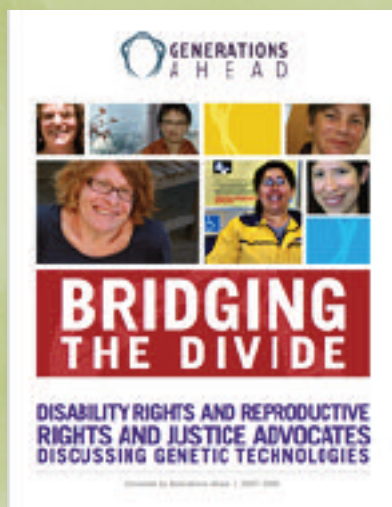
-Miriam Yueng, executive director of National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum and Generations Ahead board member

From 2004 through 2008, our staff’s primary role was educator and facilitator of necessary conversations within and across social justice movements on issues related to genetic technologies. Generations Ahead operated on the theory that the most effective policy advocacy campaigns will always be those with support from multiple movements. And in order to build cross-movement support, one needed to first build a network—a base of leaders and organizations that understood the complexity of the issues faced; had the will and capacity to stay in relationship with other social justice sectors when the going got rough; and maintained the commitment to advancing a social justice agenda for more than one set of constituent interests.

We reached out and engaged more than 200 organizations for reproductive health, rights, and justice; LGBTQI equality; racial justice; human rights; civil rights; and disability rights, among other social justice movements. This took the form of more than 100 organizational briefings, conference presentations, issue white papers, public events—reaching upwards of 2,000 leaders, advocates, and activists.

Generations Ahead also convened a number of cross-movement dialogues designed to bring together groups at odds with one another on issues of genetic technologies. Rather than “gloss over” divisive disagreements or reach a superficial consensus that swept tension and discord under the rug, Generations

# Bridging the Divide: Bringing Together Disability Rights and Reproductive Rights and Justice Advocates



From 2007-2009, Generations Ahead brought together 17 advocates in California from the disability rights and the reproductive rights and justice movements. These movements have often been at odds when it comes to the issues of abortion and increasingly available reproductive technologies, particularly prenatal genetic testing and screening.

Through the roundtables hosted and facilitated by Generations Ahead, these advocates surfaced areas of common ground. Two reports, *Bridging the Divide: Disability Rights and Reproductive Rights and Justice Advocates Discussing Genetic Technologies* and *A Disability Rights Analysis of Genetic Technologies: Report on a National Convening of Disability Rights Leaders*, capture the discussions and lessons learned in these meetings. Based on the shared values and relationships developed through this process, the two movements then worked successfully together on three different collaborative projects:

- ▶ The 2008 “Prenatally and Postnatally Diagnosed Conditions Awareness Act,” authored by Senator Sam Brownback (R-Kansas), called for comprehensive information and support for women who receive a prenatal or postnatal diagnosis of Down Syndrome or other conditions. National reproductive rights groups and lobbyists were initially suspicious and dismissive of this legislation, in large part because of its author, an ardent anti-choice advocate. Because of the cross-movement discussions led by Generations Ahead, however, reproductive rights advocates reached out to disability rights advocates and vice versa. Together these groups worked to ensure that the implementation of the act was done in a way that affirmed the shared values of both movements.
- ▶ The anti-choice legislation introduced in Nebraska in 2010 sought to make later abortion more difficult to obtain by replacing the 24-week viability concept with one based on the fetus’ ability to experience pain at 20 weeks. The initial messaging that pro-choice groups used often portrayed a pre-natal disability diagnosis as a “tragedy” and a justification for access to late abortion in ways that seemed disrespectful to people living with disabilities. Advocates who had participated in Generations Ahead’s roundtables quickly mobilized and developed five concrete recommendations for reproductive rights advocates to defend access to abortion without demonizing disability.
- ▶ Dr. Edwards won a Nobel Prize in 2010 in recognition of his pioneering work in assisted reproductive technologies. As a leader in this sector, he also promulgated the use of these technologies to prevent the birth of children with disabilities. Together, advocates from the roundtables issued a statement titled, “The Unnecessary Opposition of Rights.” More than 150 individuals and organizations signed the statement in support of both reproductive rights and disability rights together.





Ahead created a culture where differences were openly, honestly and constructively addressed. We used intersectional analysis as a tool to surface how each community experiences issues differently and how these struggles are interconnected. From this perspective of interconnectedness, shared values and principles, and eventually common agendas could emerge.

*“I remember a Generations Ahead retreat back in 2007. There were many friends and colleagues in the room. Assumptions could have been made that we were all relatively in agreement on most social issues. After all, here were people who had dedicated their lives to social justice work! But what amazed me was that the more we probed and explored where our values lay, it became clear just how much nuance, diversity and disparity there was, even among these colleagues. But the disagreement wasn’t uncomfortable. In fact, it was quite the opposite. Generations Ahead staff had created such a safe space that it was quite comfortable to be in disagreement. We were able to hear what was behind each of our stances. I remember people even shifting their stances because of the discussion.”*

*–Jill Adams, executive director of Law Students for Reproductive Justice*

In addition to using intersectional analysis to increase understanding and generate alignment on core values

and principles, Generations Ahead intentionally created conditions for constructive dialogue. And that meant bringing the right set of people to the table and putting relationships before tasks. In constructing each roundtable, Generations Ahead incorporated relationship and trust building into the agenda. Invitee lists were designed to bring together the thought leaders who were not only influential in their sector, but who were also willing to frankly discuss their concerns and be open enough to stay engaged and curious in difficult, risky conversations. “They were folks you could sit in a hot tub with and discuss these issues with,” explained Crystal Plati, “people who were open to changing their minds about things.”

The cross-movement connectivity piloted by Generations Ahead was embodied within the organization itself. Our board was a mix of different disciplines: grassroots social justice advocates, academics, policy experts, writers. Each member came with a grounding in a particular movement: disability rights, Indigenous rights, LGBTQI rights, racial justice and reproductive rights and justice. All are thought leaders who approached this project with openness and curiosity. Board meetings became a venue not only for determining organizational direction and strategy, but for testing and playing out the organization’s methodologies and purpose.



## BUILDING A PRODUCTION NETWORK: WAGING ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS FOR POLICY WINS

**“BILLS** about sex selection have popped up before. And when they did, everyone ignored them. We didn’t want to say they were fine, but we didn’t want to say that it was bad. Frankly, we would have preferred to deny it ever happened.”

-Susannah Baruch, policy director and consultant to Generations Ahead

In 2009, Generations Ahead shifted into the next phase of its Theory of Change—building a production network to deliver advocacy campaigns for policy wins.

We chose to drill down on sex selection, an issue that swept mainstream debate in 2008 with the introduction of H.R. 7016, titled “Susan B. Anthony Prenatal Nondiscrimination Act of 2008.” This bill, authored by U.S. Representative Trent Franks (R-AZ), proposed to ban sex-selective and “race-selective” abortions.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, conservative anti-choice legislators and activists unleashed a series of billboard campaigns with the purpose of convincing the public that abortions were being used as a way to advance sex discrimination and represented a “genocidal” attack aimed at reducing the number of black and brown children.

Of course, the truth was that this bill would have penalized providers of reproductive health care and restricted women’s access to abortion services, with particular impediments for women of color.

From the perspective of Generations Ahead, the confluence of issues raised by H.R. 7016—race, sex selection, autonomy and reproductive technologies—struck at the core of our mission. The board and staff understood that sex selection is a gateway issue for all genetic trait screening and selection concerns. Policy on sex selection could set the foundation for how all selective technologies were understood and legislated in the future. And, it was

exactly the kind of campaign where the power of cross-movement alliance could be most transformative.

The pull to create a compelling campaign was enhanced by dynamics in the funding world. Fewer funders felt they could invest in long term capacity building—especially in this time of limited resources. Many foundations were shifting to funding strategic approaches and away from giving for issues, becoming much more specific in their requests to see impact, defined generally as policy gains. Organizations were under enormous pressure; Generations Ahead, and the organizations and movements we sought to engage, was no exception.

With these factors in mind, Generations Ahead pivoted its work—moving from facilitator and educator to thought leader and driver of game-changing strategies. Together with the National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum, SisterSong and the Reproductive Health Technologies Project, Generations Ahead led the formation of a national Working Group on Race, Abortion, and Sex Selection (RASS). We piloted bold communication tools and strategies, such as the Sex Selection Message Compass, that successfully shifted the parameters of debate around sex selection and abortion. Generations Ahead developed and launched a rich collaborative website that provided federal- and state-specific information on legislation and hired a consultant policy director in DC to drive its advocacy efforts.

---

<sup>2</sup> While H.R. 7016 was defeated that legislative cycle, the issue was not. Representative Franks reintroduced the issue late in 2011 (H.R. 3541). And since H.R. 7016, a number of copycat bills have been introduced in states across the country.

Generations Ahead led the way in staking out a nuanced position, one that sought to discourage sex-selective practices while protecting women's reproductive decision-making. Just as importantly, we supported allies in developing their own internal organizational positions on this complicated issue. Together with the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF) and Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice (ACRJ), Generations Ahead developed a toolkit, *Taking a Stand: Tools for Action on Sex Selection*, which provided reproductive rights and justice advocates ways to consider the issue and develop their own advocacy strategies.

While there were many reasons to make this shift, there were also opportunities lost. The campaign more centrally positioned Generations Ahead as a "reproductive rights and justice" organization, as opposed to an organization that helped form the crux of the intersections between issues and movements. The fact that the legislation was about sex-selective abortion meant that Generations Ahead was de facto scaling back its work with racial justice, LGBTQ, Indigenous rights and disability rights movements. And, it also meant that we were getting pulled away from genetic technologies and into abortion politics.

It was a challenging and difficult decision to make. The complex factors that went into this new direction are probably best captured by Dorothy Roberts,

professor at Northwestern University and Generations Ahead board member.

*"There's the funding, and then there's what people look to you to do, and then the question of what you have the human resources to do. I liked the idea of Generations Ahead being a movement builder—but I was also clear that these were exigent circumstances. I never saw our decision as abandoning our mission, only that it was a temporary focus and a different way to manifest the organization's work."*

The board made the difficult decision to dedicate 80% of the organization's work to sex selection while still keeping some organizational toes in other issues such as DNA forensic databases, egg donation and surrogacy. Staff then mapped out a strategy for shifting how sex selection was being addressed legislatively in the U.S. by reproductive rights and justice groups, by fertility doctors and health care providers, and in the South Asian American community. This multi-pronged focus allowed the organization to drill deep into a single issue from multiple perspectives and engage several different communities and constituencies. So, while the work became single-issue focused, the intersectional and cross-movement tactics continued to be deployed.







# What Kind of Parent Do I Want to Be? Confronting Race, Abortion and Sex Selection

Since the introduction of H.R. 7016, titled “Susan B. Anthony and Fredrick Douglass Prenatal Nondiscrimination Act,” Generations Ahead has worked to align national reproductive justice, rights and health advocates, and advance an agenda that discourages sex-selective practices, while protecting abortion rights and women’s reproductive decision-making.



Generations Ahead utilized several cornerstones in their strategy. The first was a sophisticated communications approach. Working with communications consultants to analyze linkages between sex selection, abortion and race, Generations Ahead translated these into talking points to advance our position. Our messaging shifted the discussion about sex selection (“What type of child do I want?”) to a discussion about parenting (“What type of parent do I want to be?”).

Second, as soon as Representative Trent Franks (R-AZ) reintroduced his bill in December 2011, Generations Ahead was part of a quickly mobilized group that briefed the Democratic staff on the Hill. We led the preparation of witnesses and provided national reproductive health groups with resources such as messaging, toolkits and reports on legislative activities. Using a previously developed toolkit, *Taking a Stand: Tools for Action on Sex Selection*, Generations Ahead was able to provide resources and support for reproductive rights and justice allies as they worked quickly to address this legislation.

Third, Generations Ahead did extensive educational work with women-of-color-led organizations who would be impacted by the legislation. Working specifically in the South Asian American community, Generations Ahead modeled what “discouraging sex-selective practices” might look like at the community level by partnering with South Asian American allies to conduct a survey and focus groups, disseminate public reports of our findings, and develop tools for community outreach. All these resources are being used by community organizations to raise awareness about the troubling norms associated with son preference that underlie sex-selective desires and practices.



Fourth, when MicroSort, the company that offers a means to sort sperm to improve the chance of conceiving a boy or a girl, was seeking FDA approval, Generations Ahead organized more than 40 organizations to request more information about the medically necessary uses of this technology. Walking a fine line of seeking transparency without asking the FDA to make an ideological ruling on the utility and use of the technology, Generations Ahead successfully raised awareness about concerns that ultimately translated into an FDA mandate to use sperm sorting only under very specific medical conditions.

And finally, Generations Ahead reached out to reproductive health doctors and fertility clinics to open up conversations about son preference and sex selection, and ethical ways of supporting women’s reproductive autonomy while raising the question of parenting boys and girls, gender stereotypes and biases.

## THE DARING DECISION TO CLOSE

**“WE** have some unfinished business. The critical questions still remain unanswered and the work still needs to get done. What Generations Ahead has done is to help us distill what the most dire questions are.”

-Miriam Yueng, executive director of National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum and Generations Ahead board member

In 2011, the board of Generations Ahead decided to close the organization, marking the end of one chapter and the start of another. There were a number of factors that led to this—perhaps the most salient one was the departure of our founding visionary and strategic executive director, Sujatha Jesudason. Her departure was prompted by an offer to start a “think and do tank” at the University of California, San Francisco. This new project, the CoreAlign Initiative, will work to invigorate the U.S. movement for reproductive health, rights and justice by developing a pipeline of strong leaders, innovative ideas and new voices. The CoreAlign Initiative will incubate a network to develop and implement a 30 year vision and plan for transforming public discourses and policies. The ultimate goal is a future where every woman will have the resources, rights and respect to make reproductive decisions for herself and her family.

This Initiative also presents a ripe opportunity to build on Generations Ahead’s model of organizing and cross-movement work, though it won’t likely pick up specific campaigns about reproductive and genetic technologies. And while the CoreAlign Initiative will focus on cross-movement alignment, learning from other social justice movements, it may not extend beyond the reproductive health, rights and justice sectors for several years.

The board of Generations Ahead faced a tough decision. Do we close down the organization, knowing that the work it set out to do is unfinished? Or do we transition to new executive leadership? The idea of an executive transition felt daunting, given the depressed state of the economy and of funding resources, particularly as long-time funders were shifting away from resourcing

genetic technologies and becoming more interested in abortion politics. The structure of Generations Ahead only added to the challenge. Over the years, the organization had moved to a model where consultants were doing much of the work under the direction of Sujatha and the managing director, Marina Ortega.

In a typical nonprofit structure, an internal bench of program or department directors would step up, under the leadership of the board, to smooth the transition to new leadership. But in our small organization, an internal bench of program directors simply did not exist. The board—while very active and engaged—did not have the capacity for, nor a practice of, focusing on organizational infrastructure. No succession planning had been undertaken.

These hurdles seemed too great, given the capacity and resources available at the time. Thus the Board made the bittersweet decision to close Generations Ahead, marking the end of a chapter.

Fortunately, the board and staff had cemented a practice of proactively and strategically planning for change. Rather than wait until the last moment, when few options were feasible, Generations Ahead actively embraced change, working to manage the transition on our terms. We had done this in 2009 in deciding to focus on a single issue. We were already in conversations about a less resource-intensive model for the work of Generations Ahead when the UCSF opportunity arose for Sujatha. This opportunity offered us another chance to lead unconventionally, proactively seeding our work in the other organizations in the network we had constructed over the years.



## LESSONS FOR THE MOVEMENT

Generations Ahead offers a story of leadership from an organization that chose to trail-blaze a path untested and unknown to social justice movements, funders and the broader general public.

This path consisted of two “Big Experiments.” The first was to bring people together, across movements, deliberately starting working relationships by identifying and talking about tension and disagreements. The second was to explore which organizational structures offer maximum impact for a start-up, given the resources and leadership styles at hand. In this section we highlight some of the lessons learned in each of these experiments.

### Cross-movement Alignment

*“So often, we say ‘come join us’ without paying attention to differences between movements. And*

*when movements move forward and fall apart, we don’t understand why. We were trying to move forward with an approach that really identified where we were in conflict—and to start from there.”*

*–Sujatha Jesudason, founder and executive director of Generations Ahead*

We realized success in the cross-movement work we embodied within our organization. Almost everyone interviewed spoke to the depth of relationships built through the board, and how the new perspectives and insights enabled by these cross-movement relationships changed their understanding of human genetics among other emerging issues. Board members also spoke to the ease with which the board operated and made decisions as a result of the relationships.

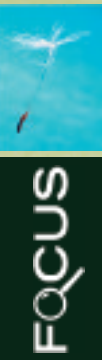
“There was a synergy and an alignment to Generations

## Forensic DNA Database Expansion: Growing Racial Inequities and Eroding Civil Liberties



In 2011, Generations Ahead published an accessible report titled, *Forensic DNA Database Expansion: Growing Racial Inequities, Eroding Civil Liberties and Diminishing Returns*. In many states, an aggressive expansion of DNA databases now includes the collection of DNA from individuals arrested for a felony offense, regardless of conviction. DNA samples collected upon arrest remain in the system indefinitely where they are compared against DNA samples collected from new crimes every week. This essentially creates a form of permanent genetic surveillance for certain segments of the population, primarily Black and Latino men, who are disproportionately arrested in this country.

Through a mini-media blitz, Generations Ahead got more than 28 social and racial justice bloggers chatting about this report, raising awareness of the importance of following the science of DNA forensics and human genetics among advocates who care about communities of color, youth, criminal justice reform and national security.



Ahead’s board that I haven’t seen in a really long time,” reflected Crystal. “Oh, we had disagreements. But it was the way we disagreed and how we stayed at the table through those disagreements. With respect, synergy, and always putting the organization first. That chemistry had everything to do with bringing the right people together on the board.”

At the same time, we found it challenging to advance cross-movement alignment in a sustained way outside the organization or internally amongst staff. In the face of conservative attacks on women, communities of color, LGBTQI folks and people with disabilities, our allied organizations struggled to stay engaged in what were perceived as non-urgent conversations. Over time, some of the convenings lost participants and staff left or got laid off, hampering our momentum.

It was also challenging to scale up our impact—to move from transforming relationships between individuals to transforming relationships between organizations and movements. Many interviewed attributed these challenges to the fact that Generations Ahead was trying to bring together movements of uneven sizes and at different states of readiness and capacity for cross-movement work. The reproductive rights and justice sectors have always included a medical component; they also benefit from having funders who recognize the importance of reproductive genetics and support work on these issues. This isn’t the case, for example, with the racial justice, disability or LGBTQI movements.

There were also challenges related to organizational baggage and to the defensive postures that emerge quite predictably due to operating in a politically conservative and financially constrained climate. Organizations—and their leaders—were more used to competing and pursuing individual organizational agendas, rather than identifying and advancing common goals.

Generations Ahead’s work highlighted what is possible—but also the very real challenges to multi-movement coalition building. We identified the pre-conditions for ambitious cross-movement work. These lessons can be summarized as follows:

**A. Pick the right people to be at the table.**

Authentic change happens when all sides are willing to be changed by the relationship and the work. Those in conversation need to be willing to learn and integrate new information, even abandoning certain perspectives rooted in a history of grievances or a victim-oppressor binary. Sometimes this means that the right people at the table are the mid-level leaders who don’t carry the burden of positioning their organizations, or the “rising stars” who have not yet become entrenched in dogmatic positions.

The “hot tub” criteria that Generations Ahead used to design participant lists was a valuable tool—albeit tongue-in-cheek—to create the conditions for interpersonal chemistry, change and rapport.

**B. Pick the right issues.** For cross-movement alignment, all sides need to be willing to move beyond preconceived notions or doctrinaire positions. Rather than recognizing that policy positions are simply a means to an end, some movements become attached to specific policy positions that leave no room for engaging with other movements and finding alternative paths.

Genetic technologies are emerging concerns; the vast majority of social justice organizations had not engaged on the issue at all. As such, most had not developed entrenched positions and perspectives. In the campaign to end sex-selective practices, many organizations were open to considering Generations Ahead’s position and key messages—from the more radically-minded and local reproductive justice organizations, to the more beltway-oriented reproductive rights organizations, precisely because they had not yet developed and become attached to one internal position.

But choosing an issue a step or two ahead of mainstream attention can be a double-edged sword. Despite the very real implications that genetic technologies held for social justice organizations, these issues are perceived to be “very much in the purview of scientists and experts,” reflected Holly Bartling, Program Officer at the General Services Foundation. “Depending on the specific technology, some groups may have felt too intimidated by the scientific nature



of the issue to take a stand. Others may have simply found that connecting their current work and campaigns to genetic and reproductive technologies required too much of a jump.”

The field of genetic technologies is not a monolithic one; while DNA databases may be many steps ahead of the current work of most organizations, issues like sex selection may not. And, in fact, when Trent Franks’s H.R. 7016 was introduced, external momentum built around the issue and provided ripe opportunity for organizations to take a stand and move an agenda. The bill also provided Generations Ahead with an opportunity to change the iteration of its experiment—to pursue the same purpose of building cross-movement alignment, but around an issue that had suddenly reached a critical mass of interest.

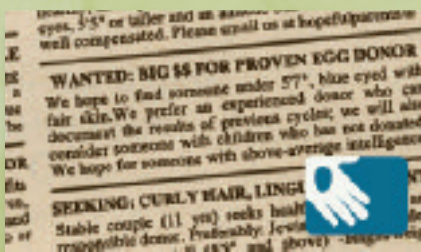
**C. Assess if the timing is right.** Even when you have the right people and issue—the ability to advance

cross-movement alignment requires good timing. Are resources there to sustain the effort? Are the movements being brought together of sufficient and similar capacities and sizes? Is there an overall state of readiness and capacity in the movement to act on agendas that are broader than individual interests? These are conditions critical for efforts to reach scale—yet, the answers to those questions can be very difficult to gauge. In fact, accurate assessment almost always requires jumping into the work itself.

“There is such a dominant sense in our movement that it must be ‘all of us, or none of us’. We end up waiting for the least-resourced group to move,” reflected Sujatha. “But the reality is that in some sectors, there was readiness to take action. And in other sectors, there was not. When we ultimately decided to move, we grappled with a tremendous sense of guilt. It felt bad to think that we might be leaving anyone behind.”

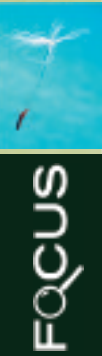
## Egg Donation: Whose Voices and Perspectives are Missing?

Selling eggs for fertility or research purposes is hotly contested: Is it safe? Is it ethical? Should women be paid for it? How much should donors be paid? Does it commodify and exploit young women? And, is it a form of designing babies? In these debates, young women—the primary targets of recruitment ads—are conspicuously absent. Generations Ahead worked with two partners, Choice USA and Health Equity Institute for Research, Practice & Policy at San Francisco State University to make sure that the perspectives of the women who donate are central in these discussions.



Through an online survey, Generations Ahead collected more than 450 responses from women across the country capturing what they think about egg donation and what information they need to make the best decisions about it. In addition, we launched a collaborative website that will serve as a one-stop place for comprehensive information on the process of egg donation and issues to consider—legal, medical, privacy, body, health, family, money, contracts, consent, sexuality, screening, rights and responsibilities.

Rather than telling women whether or not they should donate their eggs, we want to make sure that they have the information and resources needed to make the best decisions for their lives and bodies.



**D. Line up the resources, to the degree possible,** to support the overall alignment effort as well as for the organizations participating in the effort. The true cost of participation goes far beyond tangibles like travel and lodging; it lies mainly in staff time. This is even more pronounced for small organizations. A commitment of one staff person for a two-day meeting is indeed significant if the organization consists of three people.

Almost everyone interviewed agreed that if Generations Ahead had a sponsor/funder willing to commit sustained and substantial resources, the experiment would have had a different impact.

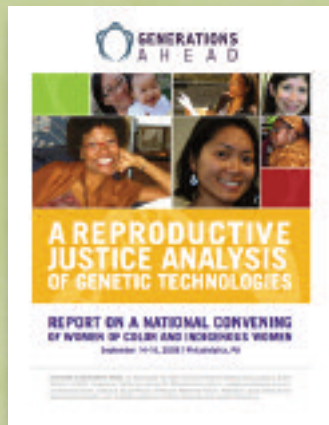
### Adaptable Organizational Structures

The other experiment that Generations Ahead tested was how best to structure an organization to maximize impact, capitalize on leadership style, and stay within budgetary constraints. The work first took the form of a program based at the Center for Genetics and Society. In 2007, this program became the first CGS program to spin off and become separate and independent, under the fiscal sponsorship of the Tides Center. In 2009, when several key funders announced cutbacks, the organization moved from a staff of six to a consultant model and retained just two people on staff, the executive and managing directors.



## Elevating Women’s Voices: Women of Color and Indigenous Women in the Debate on Genetic Technologies

In September 2008 Generations Ahead convened 22 women of color and Indigenous women leaders from across the United States to share and discuss their diverse viewpoints on reproductive genetic technologies.



Each community had distinct perspectives and concerns about genetic and reproductive technologies. Together, their perspectives formed a nuanced and holistic expression of what’s at stake for women of color and Indigenous women. From eugenics to criminalization, exploitation, and biocolonialism, these women affirmed that the potential harm—as well as the opportunities—posed by these technologies were too critical to be ignored.

Their experience forms the foundation for an alternative framework for considering this topic. This framework is based on notions of collective human dignity rather than the individual right to privacy and profit; the valuing of all human beings; respect for all types of families and all communities; and decision-making by those most impacted.

Given the many ways in which structural inequality and racism shape reproductive decisions, women of color and Indigenous women are among those most impacted—systemically bearing the burden of, while also being excluded from, the benefits of genetic technologies.

Never before had there been a convening to bring together women of color and Indigenous women from across the country to discuss these issues. Generations Ahead’s report, *A Reproductive Justice Analysis of Genetic Technologies: Report on a National Convening of Women of Color and Indigenous Women*, captures the concerns, perspectives and priorities of these women leaders in the U.S.—a first in the field.



At that time, we made the decision to evolve our program work, pivoting toward policy campaigns. From a personnel and structural standpoint, this was a challenging transition. In order to have maximum impact in this new iteration, we needed people with specific skills and capacities: effective relationships in the Beltway, high-level policy experience, high-level communications skills. The budget could not sustain these senior level positions full-time—but it could sustain consultants to get the precise work done as needed.

“Frankly, it felt very much like we were in uncharted waters,” explained Sujatha, in reference to their restructuring efforts. “No other organization that we knew had done this sort of thing.” In fact, many organizations facing funding challenges tended to shift to flatter, more democratic structures, rather than smaller, more consolidated and hierarchical organizations. She also spoke to her discomfort with the model. “I struggled with the more long-term social justice implications,” she confesses. “Especially when it came to laying off staff and not building a bench of new leaders for the movement. It felt more like a corporate than social justice model, even though it gave us the skill-sets we desperately needed for success.”

Nevertheless, the model worked well given the constraints of the budget and Sujatha’s leadership style. Almost everyone interviewed talked about the importance of adapting organizational structures to specific leadership styles. “It was really clear for me how the restructuring changed things for Sujatha, almost immediately,” said Alison Kafer. “It was a decision that meshed perfectly with who she was as a person and a leader. Different leaders need different kinds of structures.”

For organizations considering similar restructuring efforts, Generations Ahead’s experience can offer a few insights:

**A. Restructuring your organization to a consultancy model flies in the face of many assumptions held in the social justice movement. Be prepared for criticism.** The primacy of

organization building, and the belief that this requires ever-larger internal structures, is ingrained into us as activists and organizers. Many define a “good social justice organization” as one which trains young and inexperienced staff persons, and a “good social justice executive director” is required to lead an inclusive organization whose primary mission is developing future leaders, which can take priority over getting the job done.

In reality, some leaders excel in areas that don’t necessarily include staff management and staff development. At times, impactful work is not done by large inclusive organizations, but by small and nimble teams of sharpshooters. Organizations with lean staffs and a stable of expert consultants can sometimes better meet the needs of the moment and issue.

**B. Moving to a consultancy model can make available the great talent and expertise that exists.**

As Generations Ahead shifted into a low overhead model, resources were freed up to tap into a wide range of experts and cutting-edge innovators—organizational strategists, cognitive linguists, media and communications professionals, policy experts, website designers, public relations teams, community organizers, researchers, and people with deep relationships in specific communities.

**C. A consultancy model does not lend itself to organizational longevity.**

In a consultancy model, most of the work revolves around one or two people. Those people might choose to transition out of the organization. There are many things that an organization’s board can do to prepare for this – from building its own capacity to weather an executive transition; to having continuous dialogue with the director to clarify his/her level of commitment, and under what circumstances; to crafting a succession plan for when the director decides to leave.





## A DANDELION RELEASES ITS SEEDS TO THE WIND

**“BECAUSE** of the work of Generations Ahead, there is an opening for possibility that wasn’t there before.”

-Alison Kafer, Southwestern University professor and Generations Ahead board member

We’re proud to say, there are few if any reproductive rights or justice advocates who haven’t been introduced to genetic technologies from a social justice standpoint. Important bridges and relationships have been built between the disability rights and reproductive rights and justice movements, between racial justice and reproductive rights groups, and between community organizers, policy experts and academics. Generations Ahead helped to pave the way and build the capacity for these organizations to talk about issues of race, sex, disability, abortion and genetics in important and different ways.

But perhaps the most lasting impacts of Generations Ahead’s work lie in the culture by which some leaders and movements relate to one another. The individuals and leaders interviewed talked about having a deeper understanding and connection to each other, across movements. They have experience engaging in hard conversations, embracing differences and disagreements, and building the capacity to more deeply explore, listen and find connections.

“Sometimes when folks have a point of view, they can articulate their perspective, but they aren’t able to frame it in terms of the assumptions underlying that perspective. When that happens, there’s no possibility for synthesis or higher level of understanding because people aren’t hearing each other,” said Taj James, executive director of Movement Strategy Center. “Generations Ahead created a methodology to help folks clarify and better understand their own perspectives, so that they can be in better relationship with others.”

Like the seeds of a dandelion, individuals who have been transformed by their participation in Generations Ahead will carry forward elements of the organization.

Perhaps the clearest example here are the organization’s board members and allied organizations. A number of our stakeholders talked about the community created on the board, how the experience not only deepened their understanding of the complexities of these issues but also expanded their thinking of what’s possible.

We also have vehicles in place, most notably the CoreAlign Initiative and the Novo Foundation’s Move to End Violence Program<sup>3</sup>, to carry forward elements of our strategies and programmatic work. Choice USA is planning to continue engaging young women on college campuses on the topic of egg donation, especially given the onslaught of aggressive advertising and increasing costs for higher education. The National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum will carry the Working Group on Race, Abortion and Sex Selection and lead the fight against sex-selective abortion bans that stigmatize Asian women. And, Narika, Manavi and Sakhi, all South Asian American women’s organizations, are planning multiple efforts in their communities to address son preference and sex selection, work they began in partnership with Generations Ahead.

Beyond this, only time will tell how Generations Ahead’s work will move forward. The social and political issues related to genetic technologies will only increase, given how medicine, capitalism and science are progressing. Correspondingly, the need for a clear social justice approach to these technologies, and the need to develop that through cross-movement alignment, will only grow. When the “opportunities for movement action present themselves,” as Taj James notes, the tools and lessons from Generations Ahead’s work will be there for social justice activists and organizers to make good use of them.

<sup>3</sup> The NoVo Foundation’s Move to End Violence Initiative invests to end violence against girls and women in the United States. The program aims to uplift the innovation occurring within the field; create the space and opportunity for leaders to align around a collective vision; and strengthen the capacity of individuals, organizations, and the movement to effect lasting social change and end violence against girls and women in the United States. Jackie Payne, Generations Ahead board member, serves as the director of this initiative.

## APPENDIX: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

- |                    |                      |                     |                  |
|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| 1. Jill Adams      | 5. Rebecca Fox       | 9. Marina Ortega    | 13. Silvia Yee   |
| 2. Susannah Baruch | 6. Taj James         | 10. Jackie Payne    | 14. Miriam Yeung |
| 3. Holly Bartling  | 7. Sujatha Jesudason | 11. Crystal Plati   |                  |
| 4. Anne Finger     | 8. Alison Kafer      | 12. Dorothy Roberts |                  |
- 

Thank you to all the funders who generously supported our work: Akonadi Foundation, Appleton Foundation, Ford Foundation, General Service Foundation, Groundswell Fund, The Moriah Fund, Ms. Foundation, Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, and Womens' Foundation of California.

