

# Who is Building Leadership Well?

## The Durfee Foundation

*Los Angeles grantmaker supports local nonprofit leaders through sabbaticals, fellowships, mentorships and more.*

### Quick Grantmaker Stats

Type of funder	Family Foundation
Geography/Issue Area	Los Angeles area
When founded	1960
Total assets (as of FY 2013)	\$30 million
Annual giving (as of FY 2013)	\$1.8 million
Number of staff	3
Website	<a href="http://www.durfee.org">www.durfee.org</a>
Brief description of the program/ practice being discussed	Suite of leadership programs aimed at supporting leaders through sabbaticals, fellowships, general operating support and mentoring.

### 1. Describe the situation or practice.

The Durfee Foundation is a family foundation focused on supporting nonprofit leaders in the Los Angeles area to strengthen their ability to lead their organizations to better outcomes. According to the foundation’s president, Carrie Avery, Durfee’s commitment to supporting and rewarding nonprofit leaders stems from the values of its founders (and Avery’s grandparents), Dorothy Durfee Avery and R. Stanton Avery.

“My grandfather was an entrepreneur, and he emphasized how success in business and community endeavors depends on having the right people,” Avery said. “And so as a foundation we focus on supporting and sustaining valuable leaders so they stay in the game and can lead their organizations and their causes to succeed.”

## 2. What have you tried to do differently?

As a small foundation, Durfee conducts most of its grantmaking through a few focused programs. Three of these programs are dedicated to supporting nonprofit leaders. They include:

### **Sabbaticals**

Since 1997, Durfee has been a leader in philanthropy in exploring how best to provide nonprofit leaders with opportunities to take time away from their often-stressful jobs to renew themselves for the work ahead. The Durfee Sabbatical Program provides a \$40,000 grant to up to six individuals a year to “travel, reflect or otherwise renew themselves in whatever manner they propose.” The program also seeks to build organizational capacity by strengthening the skills of senior staff who assume interim leadership during the leader’s sabbatical, and provides consulting to that end. Additional support of up to \$5,000 is available to the leaders’ organizations to create a permanent fund for professional development for all staff.

### **Stanton Fellowship**

Durfee launched the Stanton Fellowship in 2005 to support nonprofit leaders to spend time exploring solutions to urgent issues facing Los Angeles. Fellows receive \$75,000 over a two-year period for projects they could not otherwise complete in the course of their day-to-day work. Possible uses of the funds include travel to sister organizations in the United States or abroad, apprenticing to experts, preparing policy papers, enrolling in training programs or hiring research assistants or consultants. Durfee names a cohort of six fellows every two years.

### **The Springboard Fund**

The Springboard Fund provides two-year grants of up to \$50,000 to new social-benefit ventures in the Los Angeles area. These unrestricted funds can be used for general operating support, salaries, technical assistance, equipment or whatever else the founder deems necessary for the organization’s development. As part of the program, the foundation pairs Springboard recipients with Sabbatical Program alumni who are engaged as paid mentors to provide advice and assistance during the two-year grant.

## 3. What has been the result?

Several years ago, the Durfee Foundation joined with three other grantmakers — Barr Foundation, the Virginia C. Piper Charitable Trust, and the Rasmuson Foundation, along with the Alston Bannerman Fellowship Program — to conduct a study on the short- and long-term effects of their sabbatical programs.

Sabbatical recipients who participated in the 2009 Creative Disruption study reported highly positive effects from their experiences, according to the authors. Among the impacts that participants reported most often were that the sabbaticals rejuvenated them and helped them reconnect to their work with a new sense of purpose and vision. The report also found that sabbaticals can increase organizational capacity by supporting second-tier leaders to take on new responsibilities and providing sabbatical participants with the motivation and tools they need to delegate more effectively.

The Durfee Foundation Executive Director Claire Peeps said the grantmaker participated in and supported the Creative Disruption study because Durfee had been supporting sabbaticals for nearly a decade. “It felt like the right time to step back and see how this was working,” she said.

Given that the foundation’s other leadership programs are newer, Peeps said Durfee has not yet invested the time and resources needed to fully evaluate results. However, with the Stanton Fellowship program entering its tenth year, she said she and her colleagues are beginning to discuss options for evaluating that program. “We are a small foundation and we recognize that quantitative data is important, but we are willing to wait to collect it until we feel there is enough data and we can tell a fairly complete story about how things are going,” Peeps said.

As for qualitative information, Durfee has collected many stories over the years showing how its leadership investments have impacted participants and their organizations. The foundation shares these stories on its [website](#).

*“Now that we have been doing this for some time, the true reward is seeing that the work of supporting nonprofit leaders is cumulative. We keep growing the alumni pool for these programs and they begin to form a network of people who are supporting each other and getting better results than they would if they hadn’t created those connections.”*

*– Carrie Avery, President*

#### 4. What are your key insights from doing the work?

As the Durfee Foundation has broadened its support for nonprofit leaders, it has become more intentional about building opportunities for networking into its programs. The Stanton Fellows, for example, meet quarterly to share their work, learn from each other about their respective fields and projects, and



discover more about Los Angeles through field trips to different neighborhoods and hearing from local experts. In addition, sabbatical alumni gather semi-annually for half-day gatherings and retreats organized by the foundation.

“We are strong believers in the idea that networks can accelerate problem-solving so we try to add networking components to these programs wherever we can,” Peeps said.

The foundation also engages its network of nonprofit leaders to help make decisions about its leadership programs. The Springboard program, for example, is a direct result of Durfee asking former grantees what would help them most. “We convened a group and asked if they were designing a program to help newer nonprofits, what would they do?” Avery said. “And they said having experienced mentors would be an enormous boost.”