This year, we’ve talked a lot about investing in professional development. Here in the GPA Grant News and elsewhere we’ve had discussions about:

- Donating to the Grant Professionals Foundation in support of their scholarship programs
- Holding internal professional development trainings focused on cross-training areas of expertise
- Going to the GPA National Conference (see you in Portland!) and regional conferences for the excellent sessions and phenomenal networking opportunities
- Participating in GPA’s weekly one-hour webinars and watching archived webinars on subjects of interest to you
- Reading everything you can get your hands on related to grant seeking, development, nonprofit management, etc., but also reading fiction, autobiographies, historical novels, and anything else that gets your creative juices flowing
- Writing regularly (in proposals of course but also poetry or prose or lyric) to improve your craft

But professional development is more than just inward facing, I think. It’s not just about the list of activities that make me a better writer or professional. Professional development is also about serving as a mentor to new grant writers or training nonprofit professionals to become better grant seekers. Mentoring and training are our legacies, but through these interactions we often also become the students.

At one of my last large trainings, 25% of the participants were unemployed and considering entering the grant writing profession. Most of those individuals were passionate about one cause or another, and they were willing to make less while they learned a skill they felt, as one participant stated, “could make the world a better place for my children.” What I learned from that experience was that too many people go down what appears to be the safe career path, not knowing that nonprofits employ about 10% of the national workforce and in some states are major economic engines. I remember when I was in college and told folks back home I wanted to work in the nonprofit sector, the resounding response was, “That’s impractical. You can’t make a living doing that.” Not much has changed in 20 years, sadly.

So, through the confluence of that training experience and writing this “back to school” article, I decided to put my money where my mouth is. In 2015, my alma mater Carey High School will
Beyond Professional Development: Reaping What We Sow

By Heather Stombaugh, MBA, GPC

offer the first Brett Stombaugh Social Justice Scholarship for students who want to pursue a career in the nonprofit sector. Named in honor of my brother who died when he was four years old (and was the driving inspiration for my very first nonprofit job at age 15), the scholarship is a legacy that, I hope, will create meaningful outcomes for the next generation of nonprofit professionals. I want 2015’s grads to know nonprofit work is not only a viable option, it’s a crazy smart one and a place where you can make a decent living doing work that rewards your soul.

How will you lead the next generation of nonprofit professionals?