

raben

SENIOR ADVISOR SPOTLIGHT

WITH GARA LAMARCHE

Activist, Strategist, Advisor, Writer

Q. What brought you to Raben, and what drew you to this work?

After 40 years at senior levels in human rights and philanthropic organizations, I wanted to find a way to continue contributing in a diverse environment alongside talented people committed to social justice.

Q. Drawing on your previous leadership experience, what perspective do you bring to organizations navigating today's challenges?

Age does not always bring wisdom, but if you work long enough for social change, you have seen many ups and downs. I cut my teeth during the impeachment of Richard Nixon! So, I have a lot of experience that can be helpful.

Q. What challenge do you think organizations are overlooking right now?

Much of the work I do at Raben pertains to governance, and in particular how boards function. Every organization that finds itself in financial or managerial crisis has a board that is not doing its job. That's why we created the Peer Cohort of Nonprofit Board chairs, now going into its fourth round.

Q. What issue or trend are you watching most closely, and why does it matter for leaders today?

Getting and keeping attention in our image-, entertainment-, and information-glutted world is harder than it has ever been. Our brains are changing, and organizations and campaigns that don't understand and adapt to that will be left by the wayside. I know this is important, even as I remain pretty much a 19th-century style of long-form communicator!

Q. What's one question every leader should be asking themselves right now?

Are we living our values in our program, our culture, or our funding practices? When we fall short — which we will always do from time to time — can we learn from it and self-correct?

About Gara

A senior advisor in Raben's Government Affairs and Issue Campaigns practice areas, Gara LaMarche provides strategy and counsel across a range of initiatives in the philanthropy and advocacy sectors. Most recently, Gara was president of the Democracy Alliance, providing overall leadership, strategic vision, and management capacity for the organization.

He is also a leader in residence at the Colin Powell School of the City College of New York, where he teaches and co-founded and co-chairs Leadership for Democracy and Social Justice.

Before joining the Alliance, Gara served as a senior fellow at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service and was previously president and CEO of the Atlantic Philanthropies. At Atlantic, he led the foundation's efforts to embrace a social justice framework for grantmaking and spearheaded the largest-ever grant made by a foundation for an advocacy campaign – over $25 million to press for comprehensive health care reform in the U.S. Before joining Atlantic in 2007, Gara served as vice president and director of U.S. Programs for the Open Society Foundations, launching the organization's pivotal work on challenges to social justice and democracy in the United States. A longtime advocate for human rights at home and abroad, Gara has held various positions with Human Rights Watch, PEN American Center, and the American Civil Liberties Union.

Gara is a frequent commentator on progressive issues in the news and is the author of numerous articles on human rights and social justice issues, which have appeared in The New York Times, Washington Post, Financial Times, The Nation, and American Prospect, among many others. He has taught courses on philanthropy, public policy, and nonprofit leadership at NYU Abu Dhabi, Hunter College, and NYU's Wagner School, as well as courses at the New School University and the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. He chairs the board of the New Press, serves as vice chair of the Fund for Global Human Rights, and is a member of the boards of the Open Society Policy Center, StoryCorps, the Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights, and the Westerly Library. A Westerly, Rhode Island, native, he is a graduate of Columbia College at Columbia University in New York.