

Executive Summary: Learning From Those Who Have Gone Down the Path

Twelve programs were reviewed by members of the Working Group (reviews were condensed and combined for this report). Given the diversity of the programs reviewed, it was not possible to quantify the results, so a more qualitative approach was used to summarize the programs. The following points highlight the key programmatic and structural components of these programs in an attempt to provide practical advice to those seeking to build or grow leadership programs. Learning from those who have already done this work helps build on our collective efforts, streamlines learning, allows others to apply tested methods, and saves us from reinventing the wheel.

PURPOSE—Programs were assessed by first identifying the motivations and/or reasons for starting/developing leadership programs. These include:

- Developing leaders who show initiative, listen intently, understand the breadth of perspective on issues, assume responsibility, and exercise sound decision making;
- Diversity and inclusion;
- Meeting community challenges and recognizing opportunities;
- Engaging and supporting future nonprofit leaders;
- Building the capacity of large and diverse networks of young people;
- Promoting an efficient, viable, and inclusive nonprofit sector that supports the growth, learning, and development of young professionals;
- Combating staff turnover and “brain drain” of senior management;
- Strengthening the management capacity of employees;
- Succession planning; and
- Becoming an employer of choice.

BENEFITS—Benefits for those participating in leadership programs:

- Learning to define success;
- Formulating a new or more complete professional identity;
- Gaining access to leaders as well as networks of people and organizations within a location or field;
- An ability to create positive change;
- Building on existing leadership skills; and
- Improving self-development and leadership skills.

MODE OF LEARNING—Learning methods in leadership programs:

- Multiple adult education models, staying away from lectures;
- Networking, including nonprofit, civic, and community leaders meeting at various sites around the state;
- Longer sessions (day, weekend, weeklong);
- Experiential learning including simulations, re-creations, volunteering, group projects, and roundtable discussions;
- Structured plan for learning that is reassessed regularly;
- Seminars on general topics as well as more specific topics based on trainees’ interests;
- Site visits;
- Social opportunities;
- Skills development trainings; and

- Moderated panels of speakers who share their experiences about a specific topic.

RECRUITMENT—Recruitment and retention methods:

- Through various media: public service announcements; newspapers; email; newsletters; websites; and
- Through outreach: word of mouth; alumni referrals; contact with human resources professionals and businesses; referrals through donors, open houses, and those previously interested; building relationships with organizations serving the population you want to reach with the program.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS—Setup and Requirements:

- Commitment to diversity;
- Program should last at least six (6) months and can last up to two (2) years;
- An orientation session at the beginning of the program with all participants and their families if applicable;
- Create a safe space for participants to talk without consequence; and
- Peer-elected advisory council to help make decisions about the program and give participants further leadership opportunities.

STAFFING—Staff and funding:

- At least one full-time dedicated staffer. All senior staff should contribute in some way;
- Gather sponsorships and donations from local businesses, large corporations, members, universities, government, etc.;
- Ask participants to fundraise part of the cost of their participation (provide them with materials and guidance for fundraising);
- Fundraise to gather an endowment for the program; and
- Try to get volunteer presenters or facilitators for the program to cut costs.

ASSESSMENT—Tracking and Evaluation:

- Surveys after workshops and sessions;
- Anecdotal evidence;
- Annual survey of participants;
- Individual self-evaluations;
- Staff evaluations of program's progress; and
- Formal 360-degree evaluations after program cycles are complete.

ADVICE—Additional lessons and challenges to address:

- Allow some flexibility in program structure and timing;
- PLAN, have a clear understanding of the goals of the program before beginning; start by listening to the needs of those participating;
- When communicating, focus on the importance of nonprofits being interconnected with the community, the important and distributive role of established leaders, and the necessity of networking for younger leaders;
- Create two-way streams of dialogue between participants and trainers, always focusing on what is relevant and interesting;
- Allow emerging leaders to identify themselves;
- Create an alumni network for those who have completed the program;
- Rotate the location of different sessions and trainings so everyone has to travel regularly;
- Focus on specific topics during each session (as opposed to making the discussion wide ranging);

- Be mindful of time restraints and short attention spans;
- Committing for the long term is a challenge—there is no “payoff” in the beginning;
- Measuring impact is very difficult: you have to decide what impact you want to demonstrate before you can evaluate the program;
- Training someone to be a leader can lead to changes in his/her life as well as job, and the personal changes can be profound;
- Getting initial commitment from boards is a challenge; and
- Follow up can be difficult.