



**Fund the
People Toolkit**

Field Stories

Community Memorial Foundation





Community Memorial Foundation

cmfdn.org

At a Glance



Founded	1995
Current Talent Investments	Leadership Institute (for board/executive teams), Executive Coaching, “Ladders to Leadership” for mid-level managers
Assets:	\$90 million
Foundation	Community Memorial Foundation
Type	Private Health Conversion Foundation
Service Area	27 communities in western Chicago suburbs

For Community Memorial Foundation (CMF), a health-focused private foundation in suburban Illinois, helping to increase the capacity of its nonprofit grantees is a core part of its mission and vision. Over the years, that’s increasingly meant a focus on talent and leadership development.

From the outset, CMF offered technical assistance and workshops to grantees for capacity building, but the organization quickly learned that the nonprofits they supported needed more than discrete skill-building engagements.

“We did a lot of listening within the sector,” says Greg DiDomenico, president and CEO. “Our current initiatives are a direct response to our grantees’ need for a comprehensive, strategic approach to leadership development.”

CMF decided to build off of its existing capacity-building programs by immersing nonprofit leaders in more intentional developmental opportunities.



Program Offerings

1

CMF's Leadership Institute began in 2011 as a program for grantee board members, but it has grown to include senior staff for development, communication, program, and other areas as well. The Leadership Institute provides a range of workshops on various aspects of nonprofit management, such as leadership development or succession planning, and couples those sessions with "deep dives" into specifics. For example, training on the board's role in staff leadership development is followed by assistance in creating a staff leadership development plan. While other programs are open only to existing and past grantees, any area nonprofit can take part in Leadership Institute sessions. There is high demand, as organizations across the area seek to develop their own talent and capacity but resources for doing so are few and far between. In this way, CMF's Leadership Institute adds value to the entire nonprofit landscape.

nearing the end of executive service who wish to leave a positive legacy and transition out of their roles as smoothly as possible.

"There aren't many opportunities to get this type of one-to-one support," says DiDomenico. "Participants see it as a rare opportunity that is uniquely tailored to both their skill set and career stage."

3

After focusing on board and executive leaders, CMF turned its attention to mid-level managers, whom they refer to as emerging leaders. The Foundation saw the need to "build the bench" by building the confidence and skill sets of this level of leadership.

"The focus on emerging leaders is important, but it requires a level of quality and intensity that very few nonprofits can support on their own," says Tom Fuechtmann, a program officer who oversees CMF's capacity-building offerings. "Community Memorial Foundation saw this as a real opportunity to serve our grantees."

In 2014, CMF launched Ladder to Leadership, a 16-month, cohort-based program for mid-level professionals, created and presented by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). CMF selected the Ladder to Leadership program after 18 months of research into available leadership training models and conversations with other foundations. The introduction to CCL came from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), which paid for the creation of the Ladder to Leadership program for its own grantees. RWJF's evaluation of its program showed that 95 percent of participants and 90

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The foundation also provides executive coaching for its grantees, and after starting with six slots, it quickly grew to serve approximately a dozen area nonprofit CEOs per year. CMF consulted with the Retirement Research Foundation to learn about coaching methods and models as well as application and interview processes. Foundation staff then took these lessons to develop CMF's executive coaching program.

Executive coaching helps CEOs at three different stages of their careers. It supports new executives who are at the helm for the first time, experienced executives who face significant new challenges, and those who are



percent of participant supervisors, peers, and direct reports saw an increase or significant increase in the participants' leadership effectiveness. They also gave the program high marks for increasing their ability to collaborate effectively, coach others, and become ready for promotion. "The Ladder to Leadership program requires a significant commitment on behalf of all parties, but we quickly realized that it was the only way to facilitate the type of professional growth that also has meaningful impact on an organization," says DiDomenico.

Cohorts of 12–14 participants collaboratively learn how to influence systems, bring about organizational change, adapt and innovate, and collaborate across sectors or boundaries. (CMF graduated its first cohort in 2015 and is now in the midst of training its second cohort.) Smaller groups within the cohort then work together on collaborative projects to address community issues. One such project included a community-wide public awareness campaign about mental health that has since become an ongoing program of a local nonprofit.

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Participant feedback from the Ladder to Leadership program is overwhelmingly positive. A formal evaluation of the first cohort showed high levels of satisfaction and increased self-confidence, as well as increased connections among organizations and broader community perspectives among participants. Since that cohort graduated, 10 of the 13 members have moved up into higher positions, many within their organizations.

Internal Investment

"Nonprofit leadership development isn't an add-on for the Foundation. We believe that strengthening our grantees is critical to transforming our communities, so we invest significantly in this work"

"We are very intentional about tying our talent and leadership development work into our mission, vision, and programmatic investments," explains DiDomenico. Part

of the foundation's budget for each program initiative includes funds to help grantee organizations build their own capacity and leadership capability.

The Foundation also invests staff hours in talent and leadership development; five of the six foundation staff have defined roles in the creation and delivery of each leadership development program. For Fuechtmann, it's a major part of his job and a role that is key to grantee success.

"Nonprofit leadership development isn't an add-on for the Foundation. We believe that strengthening our grantees is critical to transforming our communities, so we invest significantly in this work," he says.



Quick Case 1

Create Future Leaders

After 17 years at the helm of Aging Care Connections, Executive Director Debra Verschelde is no stranger to leadership development herself, nor to the vitally important role it will play in her organization's future.

"I started my own executive development by participating in a small learning circle that CMF offered," she recalls. "At first I was hesitant — I thought I had way too much to do and couldn't fit it in. But it turned out to be one of the best things I ever did and really got me in the mind-set of seeing talent and leadership development as helpful rather than a burden."

Since then, Verschelde has participated in CMF's executive coaching as well as some Leadership Institute sessions with her board members. She's also enrolled one middle manager in the Ladder to Leadership program. This investment in rising leaders is essential, she says, because of the changing nature of the workforce.

"We don't see people coming up and making a long-term commitment like we have in the past, especially in the field of aging," she observes. This observation is coupled with the reality that Verschelde, like many of her peers in executive positions, are contemplating retirement in the near term. "There's going to be a huge void for leader talent in the nonprofit community over the next 5–10 years. For us, succession planning is a pressing need."

Verschelde and her board very much want to promote her replacement from within, and she has worked with her executive coach to study the options and identify prospects. She intentionally works with staff to give them more responsibility, but she notes different levels of engagement between senior staff and middle management.

"It's harder to get middle management engaged in leadership development," she observes. "I don't see a lot of young talent wanting to take on the level of responsibility and commitment for upper leadership. Workplace mind-sets are changing as we move toward an economy where workers tend to be more transient and less connected, so we believe that leadership and talent development is important for retention."

This is where leadership development programs like Ladder to Leadership prove to be highly valuable. "We have some young talent with great potential, and anything we can do to give them formal leadership training is valuable. The staff who have that potential realize that we wouldn't be investing in them if we didn't believe in them. The end result is always well worth it."

Those results are not something Verschelde's organization could secure on its own, and CMF's investment in talent and leadership development is highly valued.

"We would have had to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars if we'd tried to do this level of development on our own," she says. "For a nonprofit in general, and especially one like us that is growing larger, it would be very difficult to spend money on our own talent and leadership development. CMF offers so much in terms of their support for nonprofit professionals. They should be a model for others."



Quick Case 2

Unleashing Executive Confidence

Eight years ago, Deb Baker reentered the workforce as an assistant to the executive director at HCS Family Services after spending 13 years as a stay-at-home mom. Today, after leadership training compliments of CMF, she's worked her way to the agency's helm.

It wasn't the smoothest of roads. While Baker rose through the ranks from assistant to development director and finally to assistant director, the agency was plagued by a series of executive-director turnovers that left it on the brink of crisis and left Baker in a stressful situation. "Because we had so much turnover, I was put in a position where I was managing the staff but wasn't really their supervisor. There were lots of inconsistencies here, and [it was] hard for me to grow in my position. I was always the bad guy."

Fortunately, one board chair saw Baker's potential and suggested she enroll in CMF's Ladder to Leadership program. "At first I just looked at it as a way to build self-confidence, but I learned so much more about myself," she says. "It changed my professional and personal life."

Baker learned about her own leadership style and worked one-on-one with a coach to address weaknesses and build strengths. She worked with a team from her cohort on a collaborative project. And she built a tightly knit network of peers who continue to serve as sounding boards and to bolster her confidence. Those newfound skills and that network were assets Baker called into action immediately.

"Right when Ladder to Leadership ended, our board let an interim executive director go and I was demoted to operations director," says Baker. "Had I not gone through Ladder to Leadership, I may have taken that very personally and probably would have left. But instead I knew what needed to be fixed, got the staff organized, and focused on team building. The board

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quickly saw that the previous executive directors had been handcuffing me a bit and saw us move forward. That built their confidence in me."

Baker saw that the staff was stretched too thin, because responsibilities were unclear and overlapping. She helped determine staff needs and clarify roles. She developed a set of goals that her team was able to achieve quickly, which restored their confidence and that of the agency's funders.

In response to Baker's performance, the board named her executive director in 2015, but her leadership development didn't end there. CMF provided an executive coach, who helped Baker map out a path forward for her board while she continued to hone her management and presentation skills. As a result, Baker has taken the organization to new heights, opening a groundbreaking new school-based food pantry and securing a highly competitive \$500,000 grant from the local Junior League.

"Without CMF's support for leadership development, I think our organization might have folded," says Baker. "I don't know that our board realized how important it was at the time, but they understand that now. Seeing how much CMF believed in our organization – and in me – helped keep them motivated when times were hard. CMF's investment in our organization really helped us get to the next stage."



Lessons Learned

1

Establishing talent development programs takes time for foundations

Developing a meaningful approach requires intentional consideration of how that approach aligns with a foundation's strategy, mission, and vision. Then there's the time required to create or adapt a relevant curriculum and figure out the logistics.

Leadership development may be reluctant to take part and may require encouragement (or permission) from funders about the importance and value of leadership development.

2

Participating in talent development requires time from nonprofits

For many nonprofits, the barrier of time can be just as intimidating as the barrier of cost. The hours spent honing talent to become better leaders may be seen as hours not spent on "regular work." However, investments of time definitely pay off in terms of skills gained and their resulting benefits to the organization.

Let grantees lead

CMF didn't develop its plans for talent and leadership development within its offices. It took an externally focused, iterative approach — and every iteration was led by the needs expressed by grantees.

3

Buy-in is needed at every level

Foundation boards must be willing to invest in programs for which impact may be difficult to quantify. Nonprofit boards and even potential participants in talent and

4

Be willing to fully engage

Leadership development can be an intense process, but that intensity is often necessary to do the job well and create an experience that is relevant, meaningful, and lasting. Be committed to, but not intimidated by, what will deliver the best outcomes.

5



Looking Forward

Connecting the Dots

What's next on the horizon for CMF? The Foundation would like to “connect the dots” between its leadership capacity offerings. By doing so, CMF hopes to provide greater cohesion among programs and more firmly imbed learnings in the minds of leaders who participate. This, in turn, can make for greater, longer-term effectiveness and stability for the organizations each leader represents — a win-win for the individual leader, nonprofits, and CMF.

Focus on Diversity

DiDomenico and Fuechtmann would also like to place increased focus on diversity within their talent and leadership work. “As a foundation, we’ve always been intentional about supporting programs that reflect our increasingly diverse community,” says DiDomenico. “Now we’re interested in exploring diversity as a leadership development strategy, whether it be cultural, functional, or otherwise. One of our current Ladder to Leadership teams is focused on promoting diversity,

equity, and inclusion in the workplace, which tells us that there is a need for this type of engagement.” CMF also sees the importance of increasing coordination and collaboration across nonprofits in their community and would like to help create leaders who know how to work in concert with others. “True sustainability and impact will come from people working together,” says Fuechtmann. “Right now, we’re exploring what leadership development focused on coordination might look like.”

Expanding Opportunity

One option may be supporting groups of leaders who want to come together to tackle specific issues and move them forward together. In tandem with that approach, CMF is also considering expanding eligibility for its talent and leadership development support beyond existing grantees. “We want to open the door to include other stakeholders,” says DiDomenico. “It is only through engagement with all sectors that the foundation will achieve its vision of becoming the healthiest region in the country.”



CMF Leadership Programs

Program name	Leadership Institute	Executive Coaching	Ladder to Leadership
Target participants	Board members and/or executive directors	Executive directors	Mid-level leaders
Number of participants per year	100-180	11-12	13-14
Content partner	National thought leaders/experts	Individual coaches	Center for Creative Leadership
Topics covered	Examples include fund-raising, succession planning, board development, and strategic planning	Tailored to the needs of the individual	360 assessments, team building, management skills, collaboration
Time commitment	4-6 sessions per year	One year, renewable	16 months
Annual program cost	\$50,000-\$70,000	\$50,000	\$200,000
Year started	2011	2012	2014



About Fund the People



Fund the People is the national campaign to maximize investment in the nonprofit workforce. To achieve this goal, we make the case, equip for action, and build a movement to change the attitudes and behaviors of funders, fundraising nonprofits, and the intermediaries that support them. There is a long-standing, sector-wide deficit of investment in the nonprofit workforce. Nonprofit professionals work in environments typified by high burnout and stretched resources. So there is a real demand for equitable salaries and benefits, more and better professional development, improved

human resources functions, and healthy organizational culture. Together, we can address these challenges by reshaping existing resources to prioritize nonprofit people as the central asset of nonprofit performance. Now more than ever, we can ensure that America's civic leadership is diverse, well-supported, high-performing, and sustainable for the long haul. Launched in 2014 and headquartered in Beacon, NY, Fund the People (originally known as Talent Philanthropy Project) is a project of Community Partners. Our work is informed by an Advisory Council of diverse leaders and a team of skilled staff and consultants, and is supported by a coalition of regional and national foundations.

To learn more about Fund the People visit:
fundthepeople.org

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Authored by Elizabeth Russell and Kris Putnam-Walkerly, MSW, Putnam Consulting Group. Fund the People commissioned the firm to produce this field story which part of the field story collection in the Fund the People Toolkit, a source of practical resources meant to help funders and nonprofits to maximize their investment in the nonprofit workforce.

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