

LEADERSHIP BEST PRACTICES

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At the Brainerd Foundation, we recognize that effective organizations practice leadership at all levels. Of course, leadership from the Executive Director and Board are critical components to high functioning nonprofits. But, senior management, junior staff and volunteers should not be overlooked for their roles in strengthening overall organizational leadership now and in the future.

The Brainerd Foundation has supported capacity building since its inception and we offer the following as some of the best practices in the leadership of nonprofit organizations. We have found that these practices build stability and sustainability - and enable nonprofits to increase success in achieving their missions.

We realize not all of these best practices can (or necessarily should) be embraced by any one organization, but hope they provide fodder for internal discussions about the effectiveness of your organization.

1. Supporting Executive Director Leadership

- The Executive Director receives adequate compensation and benefits.
- The Executive Director benefits from professional development opportunities through training, networking and/or peer-learning.
- Sabbaticals or other renewal opportunities are made available.
- Mentorship and/or coaching are available and used, as needed.
- The organizational structure includes a deputy director, an administrative director or a Chief Operating Officer.
- The Board sets performance targets for the Executive Director and evaluates her/him annually. The Board holds the Executive Director fully accountable and is attentive to the Executive Director's professional development.

Resources:

Daring to Lead 2006: A National Study of Nonprofit Executive Leadership, CompassPoint Nonprofit Services and the Meyer Foundation
http://www.compasspoint.org/assets/194_daringtolead06final.pdf

Support Your Executive Director, CompassPoint Nonprofit Services
<http://www.compasspoint.org/boardcafe/details.php?id=37>

A Leader's Guide to Executive Coaching, The Nonprofit Quarterly
http://www.nonprofitquarterly.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1358:a-leaders-guide-to-executive-coaching&catid=150:from-the-archives

2. Focusing Board Leadership

- The Board has a "results orientation", focused on setting the organization's goals and monitoring the success or challenges in reaching those goals, rather than micromanaging how the work gets done.
- The Board's leadership extends beyond legal and fiduciary duty to strategic planning and stewarding the organization's vision.
- The Board understands and embraces its roles and responsibilities

(see resources below).

- Orientation and training are part of the Board's culture.
- Board members and officers have terms; an appropriate flow of new leadership enters and builds on the Board.
- There is a rigorous nominations process that includes a detailed assessment of board composition and results in targeted recruiting of new members with specific skills and attributes.
- Diversity is actively promoted by and supported on the Board. Diversity includes not only ethnicity and gender, but economic status, sectors, and perspectives.
- The Board sets performance targets for itself and evaluates itself annually.
- The Board is empowered and prepared to hire or fire the Executive Director, if necessary.

Resources:

The Elephant in the Board Room, Kim Klein, Amanda Ballard and Manami Kano
http://www.brainerd.org/downloads/Elephant_in_the_Board_Room.pdf

Twelve Principles of Governance that Power Exceptional Boards, BoardSource
<http://www.boardsource.org/Bookstore.asp?Item=171>

3. Building Broad Leadership in the Organization

- Staff and Board as a whole are well connected to community networks and actively cultivate and expand the organization's connections.
- Diversity is valued and concrete steps are taken to include and support diverse viewpoints and diverse representation.
- New staff are recruited and existing staff are nurtured with an eye towards their ability to gain and offer leadership in the organization.
- Staff are encouraged to develop leadership and provided the support to take on leadership responsibilities within the organization.
- All staff have the opportunity for professional development.
- Volunteer recruitment and stewardship emphasize the value of volunteers and provide them with clear roles and direction.

Resources:

Next Shift, Beyond the Nonprofit Leadership Crisis, Building Movement Project
<http://www.buildingmovement.org/news/entry/3>

Ready to Lead? Next Generation Leaders Speak Out, CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Meyer Foundation, and Idealist.org
http://www.compasspoint.org/assets/521_readytolead2008.pdf

4. Ensuring Sufficient Succession Planning

- There is reliance - but not dependence - on the Executive Director; a smooth transition to a new leader could be anticipated; one or more members of the management team could potentially take on the Executive Director role.
- There is a succession plan that details explicit steps for the transfer of leadership in the case of either an unexpected or planned transition.

- Board members have an expectation of taking a leadership role at some point during their tenure on the Board; the Board creates a pipeline to ensure that Board members are available and prepared to step up as officers retire.

Resources:

Building Leaderful Organizations: Succession Planning for Nonprofits, Executive Transitions Monographs, Annie E. Casey Foundation
<http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Publications.aspx?pubguid={6A71AF4B-8742-4C36-9BCE-9193C6BD0E91}>

Succession Planning for Nonprofits of All Sizes, CompassPoint Nonprofit Services
<http://www.compasspoint.org/boardcafe/details.php?id=9>

5. Managing Effectively across the Organization

- The Executive Director makes staff and Board feel valued and connected with the mission - and inspires them to do their best work.
- The Executive Director has the ability to delegate and employs it effectively.
- All those who supervise others ensure that staff have the skills, knowledge and cultural sensitivity to effectively deliver programs. Staff development is promoted through coaching, mentoring and training.
- The organization's staff has confidence in each other's abilities so the work is accomplished in the most efficient and effective manner.
- All staff are open to constructive feedback.
- Human resource problems and interpersonal conflicts are effectively, judiciously and consistently resolved.
- Staff are a frequent source of ideas and momentum for improvement and innovation.
- Staff performance is evaluated annually against pre-determined benchmarks/goals.
- Staff are made to feel valued through positive feedback, rewards and increased responsibilities, where appropriate.
- All staff and Board are accountable to themselves and the organization and have a high level of trust in the performance and integrity of others.

Resources:

Free Basic Guide to Leadership Supervision, The Free Management Library
www.managementhelp.org/mgmt/prsnlmt.htm

6. Advancing Organizational Leadership

- There is a culture on the staff and Board that encourages experimentation and innovation.
- The staff and Board welcome analysis and actively invite input.
- Board and staff are able to think strategically and generatively. Generative thinking provides insights, creativity and new approaches to the way that the work gets done and the mission is realized.

Resources:

The CompassPoint Model for Board Governance and Support, CompassPoint

Nonprofit Services

<http://www.compasspoint.org/boardcafe/details.php?id=27> (Part I)

<http://www.compasspoint.org/boardcafe/details.php?id=28> (Part II)