

Building Nonprofit Leaders

OUR POINT OF VIEW, RESEARCH, AND SOLUTIONS



Introduction



Forces in politics, economics, and society constantly affect nonprofit organizations working to enhance the quality of life of the communities they serve. Nonprofit leaders need leadership skills to effectively manage the countless issues, personalities, and challenges they will encounter, and funders expect that organizations will be run by strong leadership. Nonprofit employees cite lack of development and growth opportunities as reasons why they leave their organizations. Given the high costs of employee turnover in dollars, productivity, and effectiveness, nonprofits have enormous incentive to focus on development.

That's why, as part of its strong commitment to philanthropy and learning, American Express teamed up with the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL)® to train emerging nonprofit leaders in the skills they need to move up, take on new responsibilities, and lead their organizations into the future. The result was the American Express Leadership Academy (AELA) — a program designed to address the special challenges nonprofit leaders face.

For over a decade, this partnership hosted more than 130 programs across 12 countries, training more than 4,300 nonprofit and social sector leaders.



To better understand the leadership competencies needed for success in the nonprofit sector, we collaborated with AELA on an in-depth research project, using more than 12 years of AELA participant 360-degree feedback ratings from the Benchmarks® for Managers™ assessment. This data consisted of over 1,100 self-reported ratings and over 11,000 observations by bosses, direct reports, peers, superiors, and other colleagues.

Across all rater categories there was consistent agreement on the **5 most important competencies** for leaders in the nonprofit sector:



Change Management

Uses effective strategies to facilitate organizational change initiatives and overcome resistance to change.



Confronting Problem Employees

Acts decisively and with fairness when dealing with problem employees.



Decisiveness

Prefers quick actions in many management situations.



Taking Initiative

Takes charge and capitalizes on opportunities.



Leading Employees

Delegates to employees effectively, broadens employee opportunities, acts with fairness toward direct reports.

Understanding the key competencies leaders in the nonprofit sector need is only half the equation. To build the field, we also wanted to understand where these leaders excel, and where (according to their raters) they need to develop to be more effective. **The analysis also uncovered the top 5 areas for development for nonprofit leaders** are:



Change Management

Uses effective strategies to facilitate organizational change initiatives and overcome resistance to change.



Strategic Perspective

Understands the viewpoint of higher management and effectively analyzes complex problems.



Decisiveness

Prefers quick actions in many management situations.



Taking Initiative

Takes charge and capitalizes on opportunities.



Composure

Demonstrates self-control in difficult situations.



In a recent survey, we asked our AELA alumni to reflect on the nonprofit sector more broadly and forecast key leadership challenges they will face. Our analysis identified several key themes about the major external forces influencing the success of nonprofit leaders (resources, career growth, political climate, talent) and all could be influenced by better preparing them to lead.

The most significant **leadership challenges of tomorrow for nonprofit leaders** include:

- Change management
- Talent management
- Innovation
- Promoting collaboration
- Marketing and communication
- Leveraging technology

Despite these challenges, AELA alumni leaders are still highly motivated and feel more equipped to lead, particularly after their experience with the Leadership Academy created by American Express and the Center for Creative Leadership. The program design focused on these key challenges and incorporates our research-based content on how to hold effective talent conversations with employees, influence people over whom they have no authority, and lead transformational organizational change. One-on-one personalized coaching and action plans also promote lasting impact. **AELA participants report better self-awareness, an improved capacity to learn, and gains in their ability to adapt, with 93% reporting they felt confident in their ability to apply these new skills to improve the success of their organizations.** Our collaborative partnership and long-term engagement with nonprofit leaders in this program has amplified our knowledge about nonprofit sector leadership challenges and enhanced our solutions for addressing them.



“The landscape in which nonprofits operate is changing, and it’s not yet clear what that new landscape is. Today’s nonprofit leaders need to operate in uncertainty, be able to explore untested approaches, and confidently lead through change management.”



Our Solutions

We have decades of experience partnering with nonprofit organizations to design, deliver, and evaluate leadership development efforts. Our solutions range from training programs for emerging, mid-level, and executive nonprofit staff to providing development opportunities for next-generation social sector leaders.



Amplify: Heighten Your Impact™

Our self-paced online professional development training for nonprofit leaders goes beyond leadership development and builds leadership capacity and an evaluation mindset for social sector leaders.



Frontline Leader Impact

A highly interactive online learning experience that helps first-level managers develop a basic understanding of the competencies necessary for success and a common leadership language among their peers. Frontline Leader Impact transforms participants into leaders by developing 6 critical competencies.



Lead 4 Success®

Using our time-tested approach, the Lead 4 Success program moves leaders from average to high performing by developing the 4 fundamental skills (self-awareness, learning agility, influence, and communication) in a robust training experience representing the essence of our proven leadership content.



CCL Boost™ for New Leaders

An online tool based on our research that equips new managers with the leadership skills, confidence, and support needed to effectively transition into a management role. It provides 6 flips or tactics that new managers can use while on the job to attain immediate success in their new role.



Better Conversations Every Day™

No matter the size of an organization, Better Conversations Every Day helps build coaching skills, drive social impact, and create lasting change at scale. This program's impact transcends that of a typical coaching skills program. Appropriate for leaders at every level, participants learn core behaviors to start holding coaching conversations that build stronger relationships, fuel collaboration, and foster a culture of feedback. This scalable coach training for leaders creates a common mindset, skillset, and language and equips your people with the expertise, tools, and motivation to break down silos and bring your strategy to life.





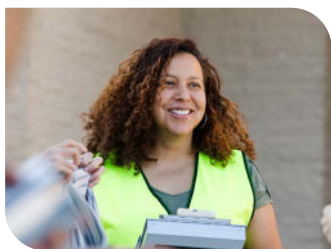
Executive Team Development

The ability of your executive team to work together effectively may be the single most critical element in your organization's success. Partner with our experts in senior leadership team development, who can assess and improve executive team dynamics. Our proven, research-based guidance will help align your leadership and culture with your strategy and priorities.



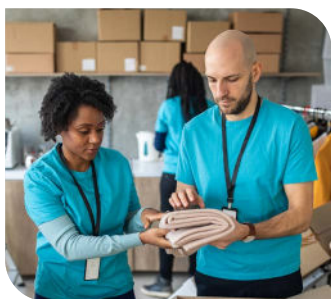
Custom Development Programs for Nonprofit Leaders & Organizations

We can partner with you to help you make investments in your leaders that give you and your community the greatest possible return on investment. Our work is exceptionally thorough and focused on your needs. Through a discovery process using a combination of leadership analytics, talent diagnostics, 360-degree assessments, and other instruments, we can do a deep dive into your leaders, your culture, your organizational priorities, and your employee engagement levels to help inform your investment in nonprofit leadership training.



Leadership Analytics & Evaluation

All programs incorporate evidence-based measurement and evaluation. We prioritize the collection of relevant data through our Culture Assessments, Climate Surveys, and Leadership Team Assessments, which are incorporated into the classroom experience, so you leave with a clear understanding of how to improve outcomes.



Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

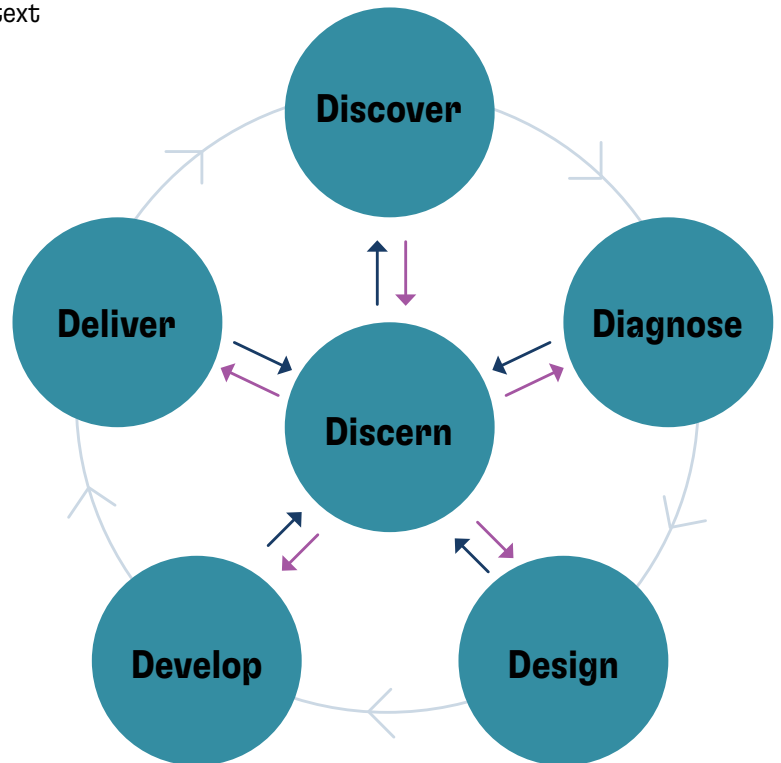
We bring our decades of leadership research and our understanding of intergroup challenges (social identity, outgroups, discrimination, privilege), and are ready to partner with you to craft custom solutions for your organization's specific context. Our evidence-based REAL™ framework focuses on helping leaders make the leap from awareness to meaningful action and sustainable culture change, to support equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace. [Contact us](#) to learn how we can incorporate this framework into solutions for your organization.



How We Partner

Our client relationship process is built around understanding you. Our goal is to create solutions, insights, and impact that improve and strengthen nonprofit leaders and organizations. With each partner, our approach is consistent, but the outcome is one of a kind. The D6 process is the basis for designing our leadership solutions and collaborating with you. Our methods of communication during the design process will range from face-to-face design meetings, design review webinars, weekly project team conference calls, and any other individual conversations needed to assure success.

- **Discover** your organizational challenges and context
- **Diagnose** your leadership need and outcomes
- **Design** your customized initiative
- **Develop** the detailed design and materials
- **Deliver** your solution
- **Discern** the impact



CONTACT US

Our Strategic Client Partners will rally a team of solution designers, project managers, evaluation experts, and other skilled individuals to begin planning your initiative. Visit our website at ccl.org/nonprofit to start a conversation.

Contact us, and the process can begin. Let's create results that matter.



Additional Resources

WHITE PAPER

[Confronting Wicked Problems: 5 Strategies for Reimagined Leadership in the Social Sector](#)

CASE STUDIES

[Developing a New Generation of Nonprofit Leadership to Bridge a Talent Gap](#)

[McKnight Foundation: Leveraging Leadership in Community Agriculture](#)

[Aga Khan Foundation Partners With CCL to Design and Deliver WiL Programme](#)

[American Express Leadership Academy: A Decade of Building Nonprofit Leaders](#)

WEBINARS

[Intentional, Inclusive & Interdependent: Creating Effective Leadership in the Social Sector](#)

[Mission: The Hidden Superpower Behind Building Trust in Nonprofit Organizations](#)

[Amplifying Impact Through Nonprofit Leadership and Evaluation](#)





At the Center for Creative Leadership, our drive to create a ripple effect of positive change underpins everything we do. For 50+ years, we've pioneered leadership development solutions for leaders at every level, from community leaders to CEOs. Consistently ranked among the world's top providers of executive education, our research-based programs and solutions inspire individuals in organizations across the world — including $\frac{2}{3}$ of the Fortune 1000 — to ignite remarkable transformations.

Meet our people where you are: ccl.org/locations