

# 2024 Leadership Development and Capacity Building Survey and Focus Group Results

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **SURVEY OBJECTIVE**

In the summer of 2024, The Lake County Community Foundation (LCCF), in collaboration with fellow local foundations, surveyed nonprofits across Lake County, IL to better understand the sector's most pressing leadership development and capacity-building needs. LCCF also conducted a focus group representing a diverse set of nonprofits to talk more deeply about issues and trends facing the sector. The feedback from this survey and focus group will guide LCCF's future program design and service prioritization in the areas of nonprofit leadership development and capacity building. The survey was distributed to a significant number of local nonprofits and we received a total of 103 responses, with a 95% completion rate.

**LCCF defines leadership development as opportunities that help build a pipeline of competent, emerging leaders for the county's nonprofit sector, increasing access to quality programming and building the overall leadership capacity of the nonprofit sector.**

**Capacity building is defined as providing support to nonprofits to build their internal capacity so they can better serve the community. LCCF recognizes that providing capacity building support is a vital tool to supporting nonprofit sustainability, efficiency and growth.**

### **SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES**

Nonprofits identified their top 3 most significant challenges as:

- **Fundraising**
- **Staff retention and recruitment**
- **Capacity building issues** (such as the need for additional office space, processes to measure and demonstrate impact and strategic planning)



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## EMERGING THEMES

Recurring themes that emerged throughout the survey and focus group included:

### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- **Networking & Thought Partnership:** Nonprofits are looking for spaces for thought partnership with their peers to network, share ideas and brainstorm creative solutions to their most pressing issues including employee retention, benefits and organizational culture. There is significant interest in one-on-one coaching, cohorts and affinity groups.
- **Fostering a Collaborative Culture:** The nonprofit culture in Lake County is challenging; there is competition for dollars and nonprofits are looking for ways to meaningfully partner and collaborate.
- **Workforce Recruitment & Retention:** Workforce is a significant issue in Lake County's nonprofit sector as organizations are struggling to recruit and retain qualified candidates. 50% of respondents stated that their organization has positions they want to fill but are unable to because of the lack of available workforce.
- **Equity Resources:** Equity education tailored for staff, board and volunteer levels is needed to help foster equitable leadership, decision-making and organizational policies and procedures.

### LEARNING STYLE

**56%**  
of nonprofit  
professionals prefer  
hybrid learning  
opportunities  
over strictly  
in-person or virtual.

### CAPACITY BUILDING

- **Fundraising:** Support and education around fundraising is a clear need as organizations struggle with various aspects of development including finding grant opportunities and new donors, diversification of funding and competition for funding in Lake County.
- **Board Education and Management:** Training for emerging board members about expectations and best practices of board service is needed.
- **Multi-Year Flexible Funding:** Nonprofits need multi-year grants and flexible, general operating support to ensure they can anticipate funding needs and provide livable wages and benefits.
- **Organizational Infrastructure:** Support is needed for organizational infrastructure and systems including shared human resources services, case management systems, back office support and more. Benefits are expensive; nonprofits want to offer benefits for employees and their dependents, but it is cost-prohibitive.

### CAPACITY BUILDING NEEDS

Nonprofits ranked the following top 5 topics as most important:  
**board recruitment and management, artificial intelligence training, strategic planning, data and impact and fundraising.**

## SHORT-TERM IMPLEMENTATION PLANS *(REMAINDER OF 2024, INTO 2025)*

LCCF is committed to using the information from the survey and focus group to take action to meet the needs of the sector in collaboration with fellow local funders and community partners. Staff will use the data gathered to create a comprehensive plan for a robust and formalized Leadership Development & Capacity Building Program. Priorities that we plan to address within the next year include, but are not limited to:

### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- Launch of the [Lake County Equity Working Group](#) in October 2024, a collective of executive directors committed to institutional change through equitable policies, practices, processes and cultural shifts within their organizations.
- Launch the Lake County Nonprofit Executive Director Roundtable. We will take a phased approach with the rollout of this group and will give executive directors a variety of ways to engage including an email listserv and quarterly

networking breakfasts designed to provide a space for executive directors to network and build relationships. Over time, the group will collectively determine how it evolves based on member needs.

- Launch of the Health and Human Services Executive Leadership Cohort in partnership with The Alliance for Human Services, Northwestern Kellogg School of Nonprofit Management and Illinois Partners for Human Services, a 6-month pilot program that focuses on board development, building a collective voice for health and human service organizations and enhancing leadership support systems for executive directors.
- Continued partnership with Northwestern Kellogg School Center for Nonprofit Management and the College of Lake County Foundation to present the Lake County Nonprofit Leadership Development Program for emerging leaders.
- Continuation of LCCF Leadership Development Priority Area grants.

## CAPACITY BUILDING

- Fundraising support:
  - Launch a series on fundraising strategies and best practices.
  - Build out a comprehensive section on the LCCF website with capacity building resources and templates.
- Continuation of the current [Resilia](#) cohort.
- Continuing the partnership with Vernon Area Public Library and GiveNKind to provide a quarterly networking and education series on specific topics.

## NONPROFIT CULTURE

- Offering of restoration practices (meditation, yoga, etc.) to support the mental health of nonprofit leaders.
- A panel discussion and/or workshop series on how to foster greater collaboration and meaningful partnerships.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### FUNDERS

Funders play a key role in the success of nonprofits and their ability to efficiently work toward their mission. Based on survey and focus group feedback, our recommendations for local funders include:

- Providing additional unrestricted funding to support competitive salaries and benefits.
- Providing consistent funding for high quality leadership development and capacity building opportunities.
- Funding capital improvements to enhance organizations' infrastructure.
- Providing multi-year grants and easy application processes, offering organizations stability and continuity.
- Support for staff burnout including funding wellness programs and mental health for staff, supporting policies and practices that promote a healthy work-life balance, professional development and programs like retreats.

### NONPROFITS

LCCF is committed to providing relevant, quality leadership development and capacity building opportunities to Lake County's nonprofits. Our goal is to have this program informed directly by the organizations we serve, so we ask that our partners continue to provide us with ongoing feedback, ideas and thought partnership about how to best serve them.

### INTERESTED IN COLLABORATING?

Please reach out to Emily at [emily@lakecountycf.org](mailto:emily@lakecountycf.org) if you have a need or an idea that you'd like to discuss. In partnership with other funders, nonprofits and the community, we hope to help create a more thriving and equitable nonprofit sector.



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