2024 Leadership Development and Capacity Building Survey and Focus Group Results

In the summer of 2024, The Lake County Community Foundation (LCCF), with input from partners, surveyed nonprofits across Lake County and conducted a focus group to understand the sector's most pressing leadership and capacity-building needs.

LCCF received 103 survey responses with a 95% completion rate. The full survey results are below, or you can find an executive summary, **here**.

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.

Key themes that emerged in the survey include:

FUNDRAISING: Fundraising support and education 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.

WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT & RETENTION: Workforce is a significant issue in Lake County's nonprofit sector as organizations are struggling to recruit and retain qualified candidates.

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.

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.

MULTI-YEAR FLEXIBLE FUNDING: Nonprofits need multi-year grants and flexible, general operating support to ensure they can better anticipate funding needs and provide livable wages and benefits.

THE LAKE COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
Growing Philanthropy. Building Community.

1200 University Center Drive, Suite 333, Grayslake, IL 60030 • 847.377.0520 • lakecountycf.org

ORGANIZATIONAL NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

1. **What are your top three most significant challenges as an organization?**
   Answered: 101, Skipped: 2

   FUNDRAISING SUPPORT
   Finding grant opportunities, competition for dollars, diversification of funding

   STAFF RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT NEEDS
   Turnover rate, finding and retaining high-quality staff, the urgent need to build a pipeline of emerging leaders reflective of the communities they serve

   SUPPORT FOR CAPACITY BUILDING
   Keeping pace with rising demand for services, the need for additional physical office space, developing and implementing robust systems to measure and demonstrate impact, policies and procedures, strategic planning

2. **What, besides funding, does your organization need to achieve its goals over the next 2–3 years?**
   Answered: 101, Skipped: 2

33%	**STAFFING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION** Respondents mentioned they need additional staff to support their organizations' growth, a qualified workforce pipeline and the ability to attract and retain talent.
23%	**BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS** Respondents stated that they need strong partnerships with the community, other nonprofit organizations and/or government entities; organizations are looking for increased community involvement and support and a space for thought partnership with other nonprofits.
21%	**LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT** Respondents shared that they need leadership development support including: • Shared spaces for learning and professional development opportunities (for both staff and board) • Professional growth and leadership development opportunities to facilitate promoting within • Board, staff and volunteer training in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), so there is a stronger understanding of the people and communities served
20%	**ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE** Respondents stated that they need support around organizational processes and systems including: • Shared services for human resources, administrative support and case management systems • Guidance on nonprofit organizational structuring

3. What types of opportunities (beyond funding) can we provide to support your work and organizational growth?
Answered: 102, Skipped: 1

TRAININGS OR WEBINARS ON VARIOUS TOPICS
- Grant writing classes
- Role facilitation and team building
- DEI training for staff, board and volunteers
- AI training
- HR management

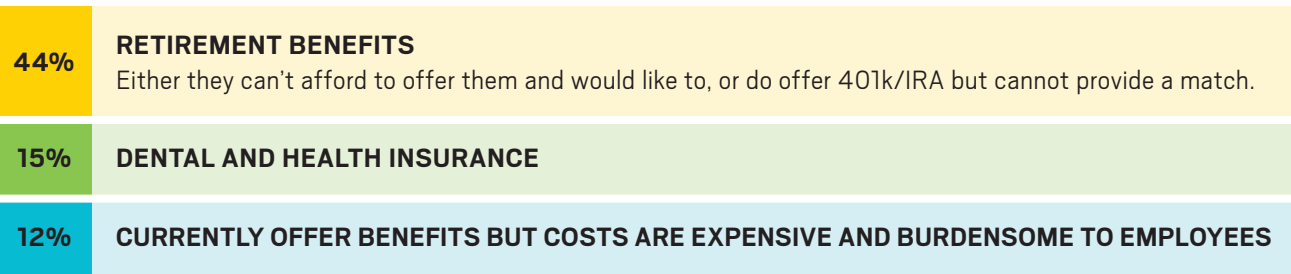**NETWORKING AND CONNECTION TO FUNDERS AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS**
- Connections to other mission-aligned organizations
- Inviting organizations to connect with funders on a specific topic, not just for presentation but for brainstorming and thought partnership

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
- Supporting the professional development of both staff and board
- Leadership development for BIPOC staff
- Leadership training in board development and organizational change
- Leadership cohorts (i.e. executive directors, development staff)

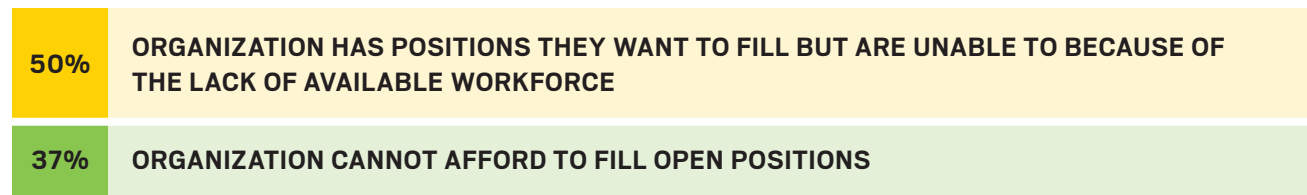**4. What benefits (healthcare, dental, vision, retirement, etc.) would you like to provide your employees but haven't been able to?**
Answered: 97, Skipped: 6

44%	**RETIREMENT BENEFITS** Either they can't afford to offer them and would like to, or do offer 401k/IRA but cannot provide a match.
15%	**DENTAL AND HEALTH INSURANCE**
12%	**CURRENTLY OFFER BENEFITS BUT COSTS ARE EXPENSIVE AND BURDENSOME TO EMPLOYEES**

5. What are your organization's staffing needs?
Answered: 101, Skipped: 2

50%	**ORGANIZATION HAS POSITIONS THEY WANT TO FILL BUT ARE UNABLE TO BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF AVAILABLE WORKFORCE**
37%	**ORGANIZATION CANNOT AFFORD TO FILL OPEN POSITIONS**

6. What types of back-office support is your organization interested in?
Answered: 102, Skipped: 1

55%	**DEVELOPMENT STAFFING**
42%	**HUMAN RESOURCES STAFFING**
34%	**FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING STAFFING**
21%	**AUDITOR**
20%	**JOINT PURCHASING OPPORTUNITIES (i.e. office supplies, etc.)**
16%	**INSURANCE (i.e. directors and officers insurance)**

Other/Comments: IT electronics support, legal, marketing/public relations, building maintenance, safety/security

STYLE OF LEARNING

7. How would you like programming presented?
Answered: 101, Skipped: 2

56%	**HYBRID**
25%	**IN-PERSON**
19%	**VIRTUAL**

8. What models would be most useful for your organization? (Select all that apply)
Answered: 101, Skipped: 2

78%	**SMALL GROUP COACHING ON A PARTICULAR TOPIC**
53%	**ONE-ONE-EXECUTIVE COACHING**
53%	**PEER COHORTS** Common feedback: peer cohorts would be helpful if they covered specific topics each session rather than being open-ended
38%	**GOOGLE GROUP/LISTSERV**

9. What affinity groups are most appealing to you and your organization? (Select all that apply)

Note: This ranking question asks respondents to compare items to each other by placing them in order of importance from (1) Very Appealing, (2) Appealing, (3) Fairly Appealing, (4) Slightly Appealing, and (5) Not Appealing. An average ranking is calculated for each answer choice, showing the most preferred answer choice. Four affinity group choices were listed for this question. Percentage to the left includes the sum of "very appealing" and "appealing" for each answer choice.

Answered: 101, Skipped: 2

		1	2	3	4	5
86%	**EXECUTIVE OR MID-LEVEL LEADERSHIP**	52.00%	34.00%	9.00%	2.00%	3.00%
78%	**OUTCOMES AND MEASURING IMPACT GROUP**	49.48%	27.84%	11.34%	8.25%	3.09%
68%	**EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION GROUP**	44.33%	25.77%	13.40%	9.28%	7.22%
56%	**RACIAL GROUPS**	31.52%	26.09%	20.65%	11.96%	9.78%

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

10. **When considering professional and leadership development opportunities, please rank the following from most important to least important.**

    Note: This ranking question asks respondents to compare items to each other by placing them in order of importance from (1) Most Important, (2) Important, (3) Fairly Important, (4) Slightly Important, and (5) Not Important. An average ranking is calculated for each answer choice, showing the most preferred answer choice. Seventeen professional and leadership development opportunities were listed for this question. The following are the top 5 answers ranked as (1) Most Important.

    Answered: 96, Skipped: 7   Number of times the choice was ranked (1) Most Important

18%	BOARD RECRUITMENT AND MANAGEMENT	17
14%	ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TRAINING (How to harness it for grant writing, ethics, etc.)	13
12.5%	STRATEGIC PLANNING	12
9%	DATA AND IMPACT (Creating, measuring and tracking outcomes)	8
7%	FUNDRAISING (Strategy/Planning)	6

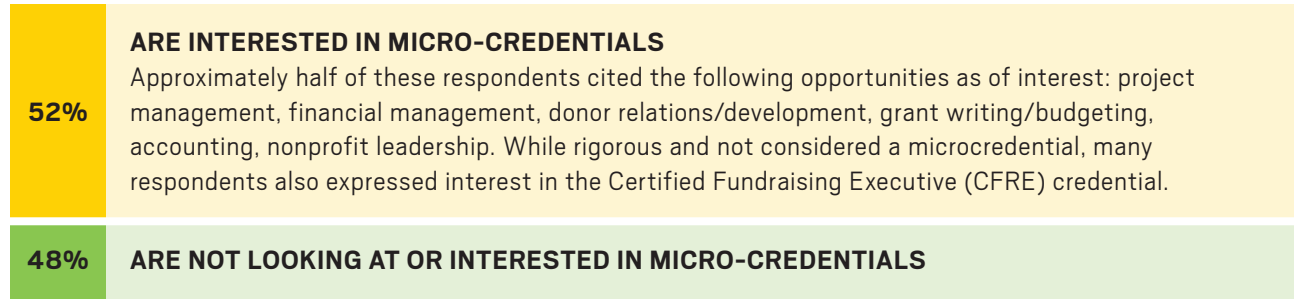11. **What types of infrastructure needs does your organization need? Check all that apply.**
    Answered: 101, Skipped: 2

35%	FACILITY SPACE
31%	DOCUMENTATION OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
27%	BENEFITS Healthcare, dental, vision and retirement plans were referenced most often
25%	CRM SOFTWARE
16%	FINANCE/ACCOUNT SOFTWARE PROCESSES

12. Are you or your organization currently looking into or interested in pursuing micro-credentials for professional development? (i.e. project management, financial management, etc.)

Note: Micro-credentials are defined as short-term learning experiences that certify a professional's knowledge, skills and experience in a specific area. These credentials can be a flexible and targeted way to help people develop skills for their professional growth.

Answered: 95, Skipped: 8

52%	**ARE INTERESTED IN MICRO-CREDENTIALS** Approximately half of these respondents cited the following opportunities as of interest: project management, financial management, donor relations/development, grant writing/budgeting, accounting, nonprofit leadership. While rigorous and not considered a microcredential, many respondents also expressed interest in the Certified Fundraising Executive (CFRE) credential.
48%	**ARE NOT LOOKING AT OR INTERESTED IN MICRO-CREDENTIALS**

13. What kind of support do you need to be an equity-forward institution?

Note: LCCF defines an equity-forward institution as an organization that considers how historical and systemic factors disproportionately affect historically disinvested communities and works towards assessing resources, opportunities and access (i.e. An organization provides services in a culturally relevant and linguistic manner, staff and/or board of directors are reflective of the community it serves).

Answered: 75, Skipped: 28

Themes that emerged from this question included:

EQUITY TRAINING FOR STAFF, BOARD AND VOLUNTEERS

OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AND COLLABORATE WITH ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS COMMITTED TO RACIAL EQUITY

RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY NEEDS

14. What type of resources and opportunities from Chicago would you like to see come to Lake County?

Answered: 69, Skipped: 34

PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

- Learning from a wider circle of nonprofits with missions that align
- More cross-county collaboration (think tank)
- Unifying and incentivizing nonprofits to collaborate for funding opportunities
- Finding creative opportunities to increase awareness of the community's needs, and opportunities to collaborate on solutions.
- Gatherings to discuss social policy and program needs

LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

- **Latino Policy Forum's Multicultural Leadership training**
- **Alternatives Emerging Leaders Fellowship**
- Additional training like executive education program from Northwestern, but for mid and upper-level leaders
- Anything from Vu Le and Xavier Ramey (great approaches to honest and transparent fundraising and DEI)
- Support for transitions of leadership; support for nonprofits to conduct searches

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- Accompaniment-funded services (i.e. **Taller de Jose in Little Village**)
- Online legal chat/references (**IL Legal Aid Online**)

FOCUS GROUP THEMES & TAKEAWAYS

Coinciding with the survey, LCCF staff also convened a group of 10 local nonprofits, which included organizations of various sizes and populations served, to provide in-depth feedback about leadership development and capacity building needs of Lake County's nonprofit sector. The following include key themes and takeaways from that discussion:

FUNDRAISING
- A revolving loan fund is needed. Nonprofits need bridge loans when state and/or federal payments are delayed or when unexpected circumstances arise so they can successfully navigate without service disruption.
- Education about how to manage government grants and the importance of cash reserves is desired.

WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT & RETENTION
- Closer collaboration with local colleges to address the workforce issue in the County.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
- Board management is a significant issue. The sector needs to help potential board members understand what board service looks like and training for emerging board members is needed.
- Shared core competencies of emerging leaders across the sector are desired.
- Mentorship is a significant demand for leaders — in that process, it is critical to help leaders self-evaluate. Local mentors need to be vetted to ensure quality control.

NETWORKING & THOUGHT PARTNERSHIP
- Peer cohorts are highly recommended, including middle management and executive directors, to discuss issues like retention (ex: what types of benefits do you offer, how many days off, etc.)
- Equity education is vital—at the board level and beyond.
- DEI support is needed - particularly the process-oriented pieces of operations (language in handbook, board code of conduct, etc.)

CAPACITY BUILDING
- One-time workshops are not helpful. Human resource workshops (how to do reference checks) and finance workshops were valuable in the past. It would be helpful if these types of workshops were offered consistently.

FOSTERING A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE
- A culture shift needs to happen in the Lake County nonprofit sector in terms of competition vs. collaboration. There is significant competition for funding amongst the nonprofits. Leaders are weary of this and are looking for ways to meaningfully partner and collaborate with other organizations. Participants expressed that they need help implementing strategies about how to work with other organizations and also cited that funding for team building is needed.
- Meditation and restorative practices for nonprofits are needed.

MULTI-YEAR FLEXIBLE FUNDING
- Funders need to provide:
  - Additional funding to support living wages and benefits
  - Multi-year grants and easier application processes
  - Opportunities to sit down with nonprofits and have open discussions rather than require lengthy application processes

THE LAKE COUNTY
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
Growing Philanthropy. Building Community.