



Strengthening Nonprofit Leaders to Enhance Organizational Capacity

The Fund for Leadership Advancement

PREPARED FOR:

The James Irvine Foundation

PREPARED BY:

BTW informing change

Kim Ammann Howard • Regina Sheridan • Sheila Nickolopoulos

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	i
About the Fund for Leadership Advancement	1
Findings	5
Participating Organizations and Their Strategies	5
Key Impacts of Grants	9
Key Factors Contributing to Positive Impacts	18
Program Design.....	18
Grantee Characteristics.....	20
Effectiveness of Strategies	23
Implications and Considerations	29
Program Design.....	29
Assessment of Grantee Readiness	29
Project Development and Implementation.....	30
Building and Sustaining the Work.....	31
Conclusion	32
Appendices	33

Preface

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the staff at The James Irvine Foundation for their commitment to use evaluation to inform their grantmaking. In particular we would like to thank Martha Campbell, Vice President of Programs and Kevin Rafter, Special Assistant to the Vice President for Programs for their assistance in the evaluation of this program. We would also like to thank Irvine's program staff who assisted with this evaluation, specifically Jeanne Sakamoto, Latonya Slack and Anne Stanton. Special thanks go to Carol Gelatt, an experienced organizational consultant hired by Irvine to play an essential, guiding role in the goal-setting and accountability of each organization participating in the initiative.

We are grateful to those who agreed to be interviewed and/or surveyed for this effort; they contributed generously of their time, giving thoughtful consideration to our questions and information requests. We would also like to thank the three organizations that permitted us to profile their Fund for Leadership Advancement experience in this report.

BTW INFORMING CHANGE

At BTW *informing change* we are driven by our purpose of “informing change in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors.” We work collaboratively with our clients, providing strategic consulting services to inform organizational and sector effectiveness and learning. Our information-based services include the following:

- Program and organizational planning
- Theory of change development
- Evaluation
- Performance monitoring system design
- Applied research

We produce high-quality, easy-to-understand products that present useful information that can be readily applied to practice.

About the Fund for Leadership Advancement

INITIATION AND EVALUATION

The James Irvine Foundation initiated the Fund for Leadership Advancement program in 2005 based on the belief that the performance of a nonprofit organization depends in large part on the leadership capabilities of its executive director. The program offers individually tailored support to executive directors within the context of their day-to-day jobs for the purpose of developing their leadership capacities and increasing the effectiveness of their organizations.

A year after the launch of the Fund for Leadership Advancement, Irvine engaged BTW *informing change* to conduct a formative evaluation to examine the following issues:

- Specific strategies and resources used by grantees to advance their leadership and organizational goals
- Impact of Fund for Leadership Advancement support on participating executive directors
- Extent to which the Fund's leadership development supports bring about positive organizational changes
- Relative benefits and appropriateness of different resource levels and strategies in bringing about desired impacts

Over the course of two years, BTW interviewed, surveyed and reviewed materials from 20 grantees who participated in the first three Fund for Leadership Advancement cohorts. Within each grantee organization, BTW collected data from the executive director and one or two colleagues, specifically senior staff, board members, consultants and executive coaches. BTW also collected information from Irvine's Fund for Leadership Advancement program team. The quantitative and qualitative data gathered through these processes inform the findings in this report.¹

This report presents a brief description of the Fund for Leadership Advancement program, the evaluation findings and key implications of the findings for the Fund and other similar efforts.

¹ For a more detailed description of the evaluation methods, see Appendix A.

PROGRAM FEATURES

The Fund for Leadership Advancement is guided by the principles that effective leadership development support is flexible and customized and that executive directors should be able to access and integrate several leadership development strategies to suit their needs and interests. Awarded on a competitive basis, grants vary in size from \$35,000 to \$75,000. Applications are by invitation only from organizations in California that are active grantees of The James Irvine Foundation and representative of at least one of the Foundation's three program areas: Arts, California Perspectives and Youth. As of December 2008, the Fund has awarded a total of \$2.5 million in grants to 39 organizations.

Fund grantees must meet the criteria describing both their individual leaders and the organizations as a whole. These criteria are shown as "target population" in the program's Theory of Change (Exhibit 1). Grantees choose a combination of the program's recommended strategies: executive coaching, executive seminars, peer visits, organizational consulting and other types of supplemental consulting.² All participating executive directors also receive support from an initiative-wide organizational development consultant provided by the Foundation. While participants' stated goals and grant strategies vary, all aim to achieve some combination of the short- and long-term outcomes for individuals and organizations, which are also specified in the Theory of Change.

² Supplemental consulting refers to content-specific consultants who provided services that focus on one aspect of the organization such as communications, fund development and marketing. This type of consulting must be directly related to the grantee's stated FLA goals.

Exhibit 1
Theory of Change
Fund for Leadership Advancement Program Strategies and Intended Outcomes



Grant applicants begin to receive tailored support before they receive their awards with the guidance of the initiative-wide consultant. During the proposal period, the consultant helps executive directors determine their grant goals and choose specific Fund for Leadership Advancement strategies. During the grant period, regular check-ins with the initiative-wide consultant give executive directors opportunities to reflect on their grant experiences and adjust Fund activities as needed.

The Irvine's flexible approach to grant implementation applies to the design of the Fund for Leadership Advancement program in addition to the approach taken by individual grantees. To support the continuous improvement of the program, Foundation staff formed a cross-program team, which includes senior leadership, program officers from each of the Foundation's three funding areas and the initiative-wide consultant hired by Irvine. The Fund's program team meets regularly to provide updates and feedback on grantees' progress. This

³ The FLA program is interested in the following types of organizational inflection points: a recently completed strategic plan, with the organization now ready to, or in the process of, implementing that plan; a new infusion of significant resources and creation or expansion of programs; an organizational transition from one site to a multi-site operation; or new leadership that successfully completed a recent turnaround and positioning of the organization.

helps to maintain continuity between leadership development and core program grants to the same grantee organization. Program team meetings also provide opportunities for cross-program learning among the three grantmaking programs from which Fund participants are drawn.

Over time, this feedback loop has led to the fine-tuning of the Fund's programmatic tactics so that individual leaders and their organizations benefit as much as possible from the variety of supports available. For example, board members and senior staff of grantee organizations are now more involved in Fund for Leadership Advancement activities to ensure that individual leadership goals are more strongly linked to organizational priorities. In recognition of the amount of time needed to involve board members and senior staff more deeply, the Fund grant period was extended from 18 to 24 months, with more frequent grantee check-ins with the initiative-wide consultant.

Findings

Exhibit 2

Characteristics of Participating Organizations and Leaders

Budget	
Less than \$500k	5%
\$500k-\$999k	25%
\$1M-1.999M	25%
\$2M or more	45%
Staff *	
1-4 staff	10%
5-9 staff	35%
10-19 staff	35%
20+ staff	20%
Executive Directors' Years in Current Position	
2-5 yrs**	40%
5-10 yrs	30%
10-15 yrs	10%
15-20 yrs	20%
Executive Directors' Experience***	
New executive director	30%
Founder	30%

* Staff includes full- or part-time employees at the organizations and does not include volunteers or faculty members.

** None of the executive directors had fewer than two years experience in his/her role.

*** New executive director refers to leaders who have held their current position for five years or less and report that this is their first executive director role.

In this section, findings from the evaluation of the Fund for Leadership Advancement are presented as brief descriptions of participating executive directors,⁴ their organizations and the strategies that they undertook to reach their goals. This section also describes key impacts of the Fund for Leadership Advancement program on participants and their organizations. A subsequent chapter describes factors that seem to positively influence individual and organizational impacts.

Interspersed with the findings are profiles of three Fund grantees' specific experiences and impacts.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR STRATEGIES

Fund for Leadership Advancement grantee organizations in the first three cohorts were diverse in mission, focus, structure and size. Grantees included educational institutions, local performing arts groups, museums and social service organizations, with a wide range in organizational budgets and staff size (see Exhibit 2).

The participating executive directors represented a wide range of nonprofit experience. While all Fund participants were required to have at least two years of experience in the executive director role, the number of years they served in the position varied widely. About one-third of the group (30%) were founders of their organizations. About 30% reported being first-time executive directors, with five or fewer years' experience in their current role.

The Fund for Leadership Advancement program requires that grantee organizations recently have reached at least one type of inflection point, such as completing a strategic plan or establishing a new program, in their organizational growth and development, as shown in Exhibit 3. All but one grantee organization completed a strategic plan prior to participating in the program, and a few grantees updated their strategic plans during the grant period. Sixty-five percent of grantees had recently added or expanded programs. Forty-five percent had received an infusion of resources.

In addition to being at an organizational inflection point, grantees shared similar goals that included:

- Enhancing the leadership skills and capacities of the executive director

⁴ In this report, the term "participating executive directors" refers to the group of 20 executive directors and one chief operating officer participating in the evaluation of the FLA program; two executive directors co-led one grantee organization.

Defining Support

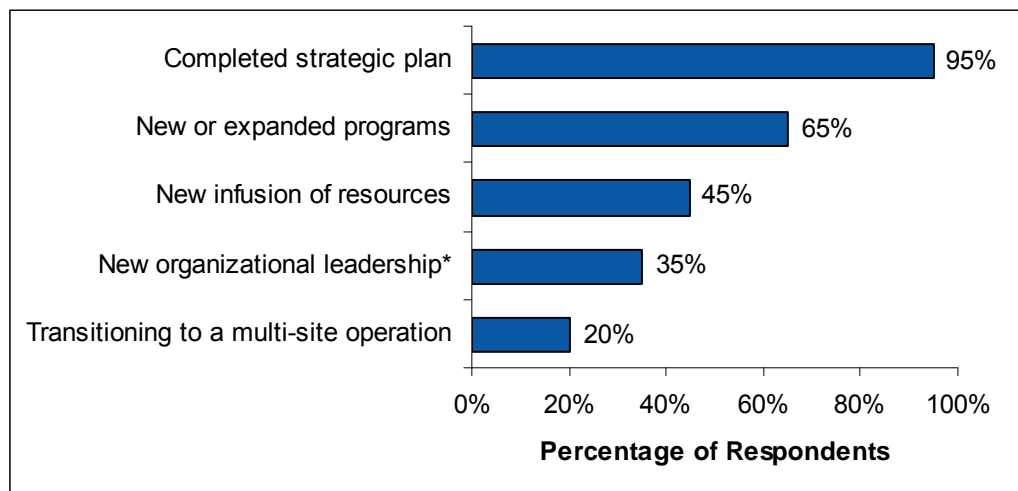
Executive coaching generally refers to the provision of one-on-one support, helping leaders to make more conscious decisions and actions with regard to their professional or personal lives.

Organizational consulting focuses more broadly on the whole organization. It typically involves working with executive leaders, senior staff and board members on structures, policies and procedures to improve the efficiency of the organization.

The relationship between coaching and organizational consulting and the blending that may occur between these two strategies are discussed further in the section of this report called “Effectiveness of Strategies.”

- Planning for the sustainable growth of programs, staff and organizational operations
- Strengthening the capacity of the organization’s board of directors and senior management team to give the executive director time to focus on external constituents and strategic direction
- Creating a clear and consistent voice across internal and external communications

Exhibit 3
Key Organizational Inflection Points at the Start of the Fund for Leadership Advancement Program
(n = 20)⁵

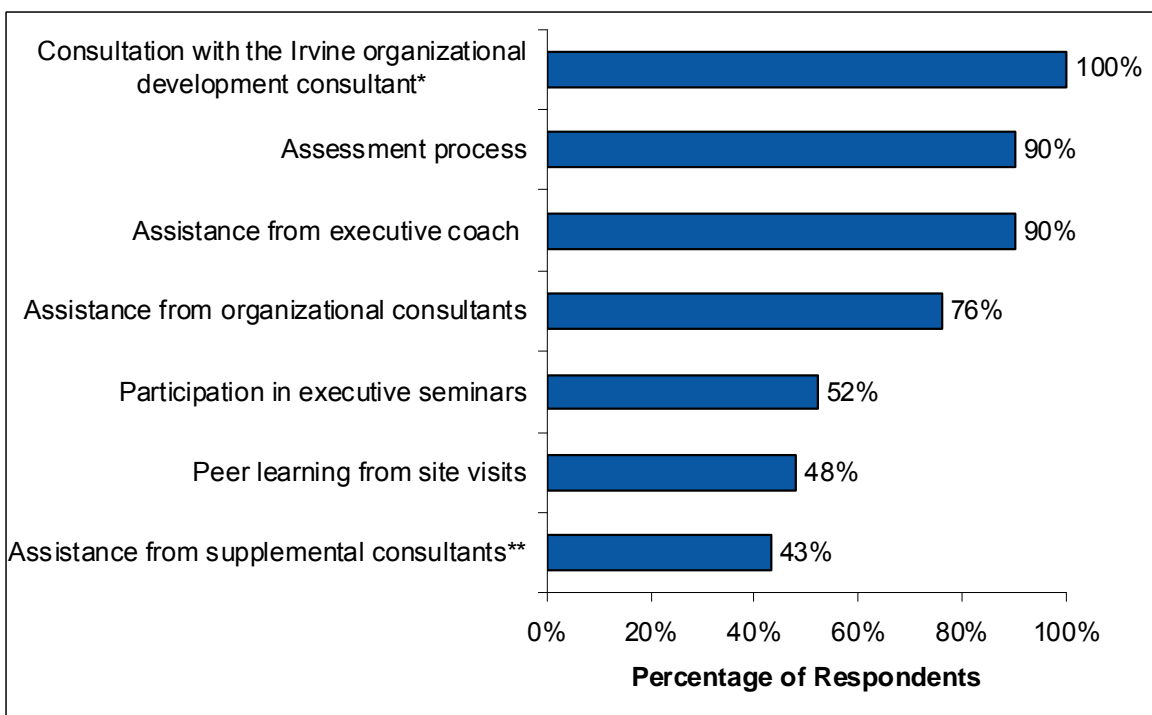


To accomplish their goals, grantees used a combination of strategies, as shown in Exhibit 4. On average, executive directors utilized five different Fund for Leadership Advancement strategies. As part of the program design, all executive directors worked with the initiative-wide consultant. Among the other strategies, those most commonly employed were executive coaching and organizational assessments. Many times an assessment process, while a distinct element of Fund grant activities, was part of another strategy such as working with an executive coach or an organizational consultant. About half of the executive directors chose to participate in either executive seminars, site visits to peer organizations, or both.

⁵ The inflection points are not mutually exclusive categories. The total percentages exceed 100% because some grantees were at more than one inflection point.

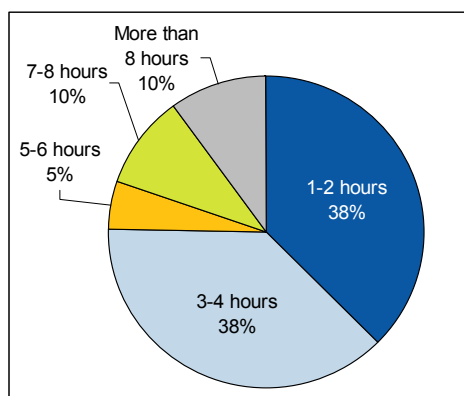
* “New organizational leadership” refers to organizations that had a recent change in executive leadership at the time of their grant application.

Exhibit 4
Types of Strategies Applied by Grantees
(n = 21)



The time executive directors spent pursuing their Fund for Leadership Advancement goals varied, as shown in Exhibit 5. Thirty-eight percent spent one to two hours per week on Fund-supported activities, another 38 percent spent three to four hours per week and 10 percent spent more than eight hours per week.

Exhibit 5
Time Spent on Fund for Leadership Advancement Activities Each Week
(n = 21)



* Grantees worked with the organizational development consultant during the proposal development and over the course of grant implementation.
** Supplemental consultants include content-specific consultants who provided services that focus on one aspect of the organization such as communications, fund development and marketing.

Setting Strategy, Sharing Leadership

In 2005, just five years after taking over as President of the Orange County Community Foundation, Shelley Hoss faced an important leadership challenge. The Community Foundation was in the midst of a period of rapid growth — its net assets had doubled within a three-year period, and the organization was launching the implementation of a new strategic plan focused on increasing the organization's visibility in the community. As Hoss describes it, "People knew about us by word of mouth but even those closest to the Foundation weren't well-equipped to tell [the organization's] story. There needed to be an intentional effort to help stakeholders become active ambassadors and spread the word, and I needed to lead that charge." However, adding more activities to Hoss' already full schedule seemed daunting, if not impossible. To implement the plan, Hoss would have to shift her internal responsibilities to make room for the increased external focus. Hoss, her board and her senior staff knew that this change would impact all of them.

The James Irvine Foundation awarded a Fund for Leadership Advancement grant in early 2006 to support Hoss and the Community Foundation as she changed her role. The Community Foundation's leadership team used grant funds to hire an executive coach. The coach began his work with assessments of Hoss and her senior management team, identifying leadership styles and strengths, as well as challenges that had an impact on how the team functioned. He worked with Hoss and the senior managers individually and as a team on organization-wide issues, such as revising specific roles and responsibilities of senior staff and making certain organizational practices more systematic.

With Fund for Leadership Advancement support Hoss was able to change the Community Foundation's leadership model from one driven by a charismatic leader to one characterized by shared leadership. She made adjustments to the senior team's roles and responsibilities and, in places where the organization didn't have the right people, she changed the staffing. A Community Foundation board member reflects, "The people who work for her had more capacity than was being utilized, and they have now moved up. We didn't add staff, but we were able to grow with better management. People are performing at a higher capacity. We have achieved sustainable growth without more overhead."

The board has shifted its work to focus more on strategic decisions, leaving operational activities such as grants analysis and investment management to the senior team. The senior team also interacts more with the board and are more visible at board meetings. In a board member's words, "While the new leadership model is guided by Hoss, it no longer depends on her." For example, both staff and board members agree that they feel confident making decisions without having Hoss involved in every committee meeting.

Hoss says she now coaches staff more than she manages them, in part because she is more upfront with expectations. "She had to delegate more and trust in that delegation to shift to an external focus," says one of the board members. These changes have also helped Hoss achieve a greater work-life balance, which was key not only for her job satisfaction but her sustainability as President. "Before, I was always struggling to keep up with professional and personal demands. Now I have gotten out of the intense operating role... I've reduced the time, energy and stress that I spend working, and I enjoy my work more."

Hoss has participated in a number of leadership development programs over the course of her career, and she says the Fund for Leadership Advancement is unique since grantees can tailor the grant to their specific needs and context. "The most meaningful element [of the Fund grant] was the ability to choose our own method," says Hoss. "It wasn't overly prescriptive. We had a coach who came to us and became embedded in the organization. This is very different from more traditional leadership programs where everyone receives the same type of support."

Two years after the end of the Fund grant, the restructuring of the senior team and the shift in Hoss' role continues to shape the way the organization works. The strategic plan, which was the impetus for the Community Foundation's Fund support, was considered to be three years of work, but Hoss and her team completed it in only 18 months, a significant accomplishment for the organization. Says Hoss, "I attribute this 100% to [Fund support] and the restructuring of our internal leadership. The coach was the means to do this, providing guidance and holding us accountable for what we had agreed to do because it is so easy to succumb to the tyranny of the urgent." The Community Foundation might have eventually reached the same outcome, but Fund for Leadership Advancement support clearly accelerated the process and ensured the best possible results.

KEY IMPACTS OF GRANTS

This section highlights the most significant individual and organizational impacts⁶ identified in executive director and colleague⁷ surveys and interviews. The exhibits show impact ratings reported by participating executive directors. Appendix B contains exhibits of all the individual and organizational impact ratings reported by both executive directors and their colleagues; it also includes a description of the quantitative analyses.

Summary of Impacts

Overall, executive directors and their colleagues reported significant improvements in the leadership and organizational capacities of Fund grantees. While the extent to which they reached their stated goals during the grant period varied, most participating executive directors and their organizations achieved their short-term outcomes and started to achieve or position themselves for longer-term impact.

For a few grantees, the positive changes were small enough to raise the question of whether the type of funding, or the timing of the grant, was an appropriate match. Although the reasons for minimal impact varied among these grantees, the number and intensity of their challenges were greater than those of other Fund grantees. Lesser impacts were attributed to many of the factors addressed in the next section. For individual Fund executive directors, these factors included lack of dedicated time and effort to achieve Fund goals, taking on too many Fund activities, difficult relationships between executive directors and board members and insufficient sharing of leadership with others, due to the executive director's own unwillingness to do so or lack of an effective senior team.

With Fund supports, organizations and individuals could more easily and efficiently achieve desired leadership and organizational effectiveness outcomes. In some cases, Fund supports enabled changes that would not have occurred otherwise (e.g., hiring a personal coach to establish balance between personal and professional responsibilities). In other cases, Fund for Leadership Advancement support accelerated changes that would probably have taken place over a longer time period (e.g., developing an effective senior team to support the executive director).

“Irvine was wise to allow us to define leadership development as both individual and organizational capacity. They were willing to let us invest in systems and board development as a way to empower individuals to take on a more effective leadership role. That was very helpful and allowed us to get as much impact out of the grant as we could.”

—Executive Director

⁶ Frequency of impacts is based on qualitative data referenced in the following manner: “some” refers to approximately one-quarter of respondents, “many” refers to approximately one-half of respondents and “most” refers to approximately three-quarters of respondents.

⁷ As noted in the methods section, BTW surveyed one to two colleagues per grantee organization. These colleagues included senior staff, board members, consultants and executive coaches.

Improvements reported in the participating executive directors' leadership capacities tended to be more significant than improvements observed at the organizational level. This is not surprising, given that a nonprofit's organizational improvements tend to follow enhancements in its executive director's leadership capacity, and organizational change processes typically take longer than those for individuals. For example, an executive director may have made significant improvements in his delegation skills that were visible to others within a few months; however, a board development process may require more time for others to observe results.

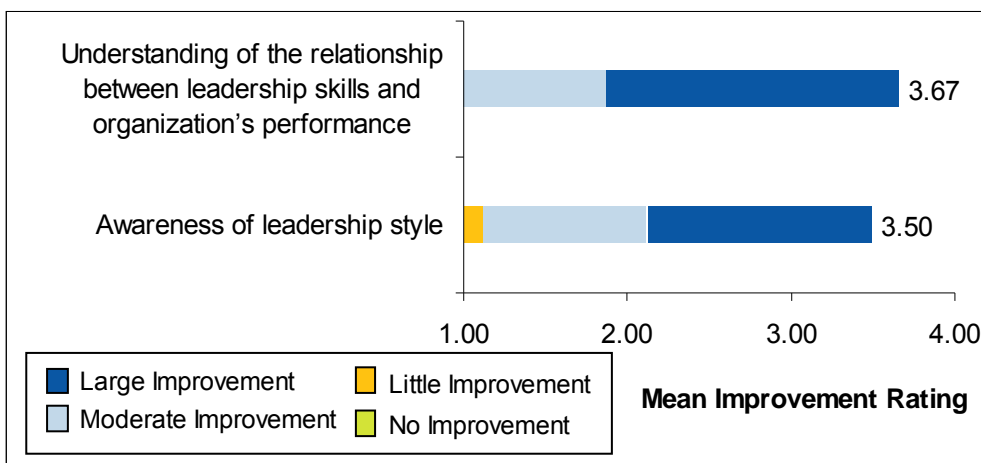
Individual Leader Impacts

Through Fund grant activities, executive directors gained knowledge and awareness about their own leadership styles and how leadership style impacts the effectiveness of their organizations (see Exhibit 6). Fund supports have been particularly useful in helping executive directors to understand their leadership styles more fully and make the leadership changes needed to attain desired organizational changes. For example, executive directors commonly recognized the need to delegate more internally in order to increase their focus on external issues. While this was not a new realization, through the Fund grant, executive directors were better able to visualize the specific steps they needed to take to do this. In addition to making organizational changes (e.g., reorganizing the senior staff structure, hiring new staff with specific expertise, providing staff development opportunities), executive directors worked to change aspects of their leadership styles, such as consciously avoiding becoming “bottlenecks” that slow workflow to their staffs.

“This grant helped the organization become more efficient, starting with me. I became more efficient with my board and staff because I use their time better.”

—Executive Director

Exhibit 6
Executive Director Improvement in Self-Knowledge and Awareness
 (n = 21)⁸



⁸ Respondents only rated improvement in each category if the area was a focus of their FLA-supported work.

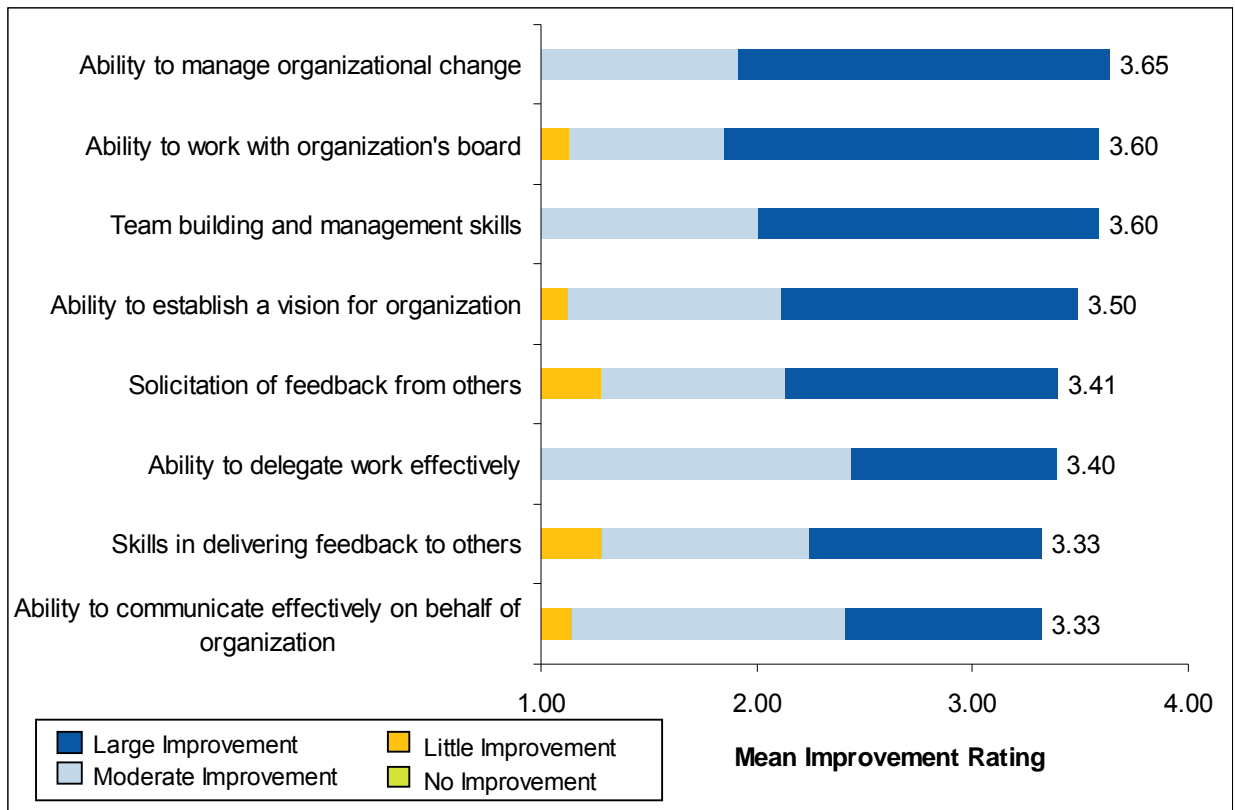
“Among staff, I’m seen less as the day-to-day problem solver and staff are assuming more responsibility for their jobs... I am now structuring conversations so that they are useful and help my staff think more strategically.”

—Executive Director

Participating executive directors reported a variety of enhanced leadership skills and capacities. A Fund for Leadership Advancement grant provided a unique opportunity to strengthen an executive director’s “soft skills” (e.g., social and relational attributes such as listening and team building) as well as the more traditional “hard skills” (e.g., task-oriented and results-driven skills such as strategic decision making and delegation).

Exhibit 7 shows key skill enhancements that executive directors realized through their Fund for Leadership Advancement grant. These changes helped executive directors become more strategic and better able to prioritize and implement short- and long-term goals and activities.

Exhibit 7
Enhancements in Executive Director Leadership Skills and Capacities
 (n = 21)⁹



⁹ Respondents rated improvement in each category only in areas of focus for their FLA-supported work.

Keeping Up With Growth

In 1996, when James Kass founded Youth Speaks, he set forth a bold vision for a “global movement of brave new voices bringing the noise from the margins to the core” and applying the talents of youths to combat illiteracy, alienation and silence. This vision quickly attracted supporters and participants. In 10 years, Youth Speaks grew to directly serve 45,000 Bay Area youth and influence an additional 250,000 youth through connections with 40 programs nationwide. With success came capacity challenges, and the young organization felt the pressures of unstable finances and a small staff. As executive director Kass reflects, “We grew rapidly but hadn’t figured out the structure.” The managing director, also a former board member, agrees: “Every dollar and ounce of energy went to programs. There was a huge growth spurt and Youth Speaks outgrew itself.”

At its 10-year mark, Kass recognized that the internal capacity of the organization needed more attention. The organization developed a strategic plan, a new vision and mission statement, restructured the board and conducted a financial analysis. The question was whether the organization could successfully reach the next stage of development. As the board chair says, “When an organization experiences such a high rate of program growth, it literally takes some external force and funding to create the space for the executive director and the leadership team to make the necessary adjustments. You cannot possibly deal with the day-to-day operations *and* plan for professional development, strategic planning and long-term sustainability when you are already stretched thin organizationally.”

A grant from The James Irvine Foundation’s Fund for Leadership Advancement in 2007 supported Kass and the organization in their transition from an energetic startup mode to a more strategic and thoughtful approach. Kass used the FLA grant to hire an executive coach, attend the Stanford Business Program for Nonprofit Leaders and conduct peer visits to other nonprofit sites. Throughout the grant period, Kass’ coach helped him to develop his leadership skills and shift his attention from day-to-day management to the mission and trajectory of the organization. Kass worked on board development, organizational strategy and fundraising. The executive seminar and site visits gave him a better understanding of successful nonprofit business models. Reflecting on the three strategies—coaching, executive seminar and site visits—Kass says, “Each [FLA] piece was equally important... without any one piece, my development would either have been stalled or not as complete.” Kass’ coach reflects how the FLA structure provided time for the executive director to focus on his own leadership: “It gave him permission to make it [his leadership development] a priority.” She notes the critical importance of this type of support given the isolation and many demands that executive directors often face.

In the relatively short 18-month FLA grant period, Kass dramatically shifted the organizational practices of Youth Speaks. He emerged from his FLA activities with a new approach to the organization’s leadership, which resulted in creating an executive management team and hiring Youth Speaks’ first managing director. Kass is pleased with these changes: “The transition has been great. I’m still the ED, but we have shared leadership. We are more aligned. We are all less isolated.” The board of Youth Speaks has also changed, doubling in size and increasing its involvement with the organization. The managing director says, “We have the best body of individuals on the board that we have ever had.”

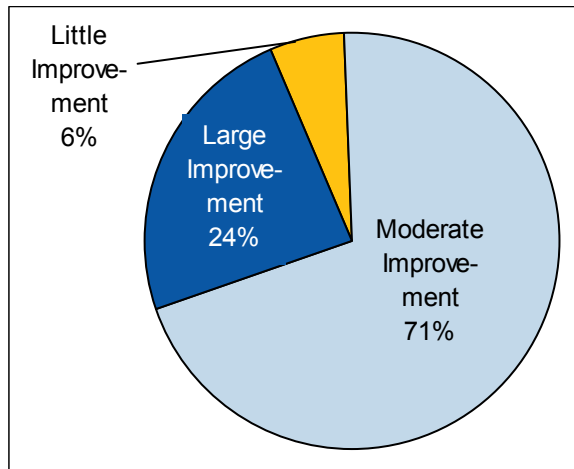
Most important to Youth Speaks, these changes did not hinder the creative, youth-centered culture of the organization. Since the organization is more grounded with a shared vision, stable programmatic growth is now possible. As Kass reflects, “There is more shared knowledge among the staff. They were always inspired, but now they are empowered.” Youth Speaks gives this credit to FLA. “We’ve been able to restructure how the work is done and evaluated, which has created a more integrated and flexible staff structure,” says Kass. “This gives younger staff more freedom to create what it is they are being asked to do, in a clearer vision and framework. [FLA] has led to fantastic ends for us. The organization and I are in a completely different, more mature and more effective place than we were before [FLA].”

“At the time of the [Fund for Leadership Advancement] proposal the [executive director] was experiencing some fatigue in his job. The positive results of the grant, the hiring of a Vice President and improved senior teamwork have combined to clear out [the executive director’s] fatigue and give him a renewed energy for his job and the organization.”

—Organizational Consultant

As a result of Fund grants, most executive directors reported higher job satisfaction, typically due to an improved work-life balance (Exhibit 8). Executive directors frequently described how Fund for Leadership Advancement supports helped them to balance their professional and personal lives in deep and sometimes difficult ways, resulting in “breakthrough” changes. These executive directors reported that they were re-energized in their work and felt less likely to burn out. For some, greater job satisfaction resulted from a change in their job responsibilities, such as shifting away from day-to-day management to focus on higher-level vision and strategy. While it is too soon to tell if these positive impacts will translate into higher retention of executive directors in their current positions or the broader nonprofit sector (a specified longer-term Fund goal), both the executive directors and their colleagues described immediate benefits. For example, colleagues reported that executive directors were easier to work with because they were less stressed, had established better boundaries and communicated more effectively.

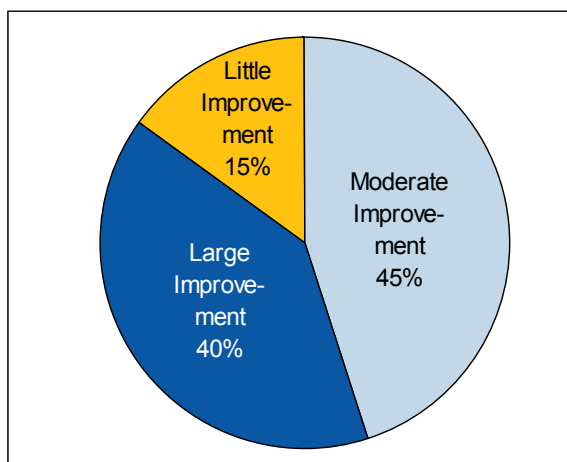
Exhibit 8
Improvements in Executive Director Job Satisfaction
(n = 17)



Executive directors reported greater access to relevant leadership and management contacts and resources (Exhibit 9). They described how Fund-supported activities such as executive seminars and peer organization visits connected them with like-minded professionals, offered different perspectives and gave them opportunities to learn from others’ experiences (e.g., visiting an executive director who runs an organization at a more mature stage). Some executive directors reported adopting specific models, tools and strategies as a result of networking opportunities (e.g., advocacy strategies, strategic planning models and processes). A few others met people during these networking opportunities whom they later hired as executive coaches or consultants.

Exhibit 9
Improvements in Executive Director
Access to Networks of Contacts and Resources

(n = 20)



“The networking with other directors [at the executive seminar] was interesting and I have stayed in touch with several colleagues from the program.”

—Executive Director

While most executive directors reported improved access to new contacts or networks as a benefit of their Fund-funded activities, executive directors typically did not use these connections in deep or ongoing ways. This was mostly due to time constraints rather than a lack of interest. Regardless of the degree of utilization, executive directors recognized the benefit of being able to access a network of peers and experts when needed. Many of the executive directors desired opportunities to learn from and leverage the experiences of other Fund for Leadership Advancement grantees. They saw potential benefits in formalizing a network of Fund grantees, a view that was also voiced by some consultants involved in the program.

Organizational Impacts

Fund for Leadership Advancement grants helped organizations distribute leadership among senior staff and enhance the effectiveness of senior teams, thereby allowing executive directors to increase their external focus (Exhibit 10). Grantees made changes to internal structures, policies and processes, and they shifted and clarified the roles and responsibilities of senior staff. A variety of mechanisms were used, including developing or revising job descriptions, hiring new staff, developing or realigning senior management teams, and changing direct reporting structures. Executive directors described how strengthening senior teams and distributing leadership responsibilities more broadly not only kept the operations running more smoothly, it helped them feel more confident about taking on additional external activities, such as cultivating high-level donors, connecting with constituents and communicating the organization’s vision with those outside of the organization.

Exhibit 10
Improvements in Grantee Organization Capacity and Function
 (n = 21)¹⁰



Fund for Leadership Advancement activities resulted in more effective boards by building a common sense of purpose and direction among board members (Exhibit 10). Many executive directors reported a significant investment of time in working with current and new board members to achieve vision alignment and improve board effectiveness. Fund-supported board activities included increasing board size, improving the skill set of board members, restructuring the board into committees, clarifying expectations and roles of board members and/or implementing board performance measures. Board-level changes typically took longer to implement than those among senior staff. This was due to a variety of factors including the infrequency in which board members met (e.g., quarterly), the time needed to recruit and orient new board members, the scale of board changes and lack of agreement or resistance to change among board members. For example, some board members who had served significant

¹⁰ Respondents only rated improvement in each category if the area was a focus of their FLA-supported work.

tenures were reluctant to acknowledge the desired shifts in the organization's lifecycle; in a few cases, these shifts resulted in board members leaving, either of their own accord or after being asked.

For some grantees, board issues took on greater importance than originally expected. Sometimes the decision to engage in board development came about as a result of Fund activities that initially focused more on the executive director and/or senior staff. Also, as grantee organizations advanced to new levels of organizational maturity, many executive directors realized that their boards should also elevate their levels of involvement and input around planning and advising. For example, one executive director observed how closely board members were working with staff on a day-to-day basis and, in response, implemented new reporting structures and clearer expectations about board involvement.

Executive directors and their colleagues reported enhanced capacity and better functioning of grantee organizations due to Fund supports. Eighty-six percent of the executive directors and 81 percent of their colleagues reported that the Fund for Leadership Advancement program was "very effective" at increasing the effectiveness of organizations by enhancing the leadership capacities of executive directors. Executive directors referenced tangible changes that took place in aspects of organizational development, such as more strategic actions, a more effective leadership team or a better aligned organizational vision (Exhibit 10). Most executive directors and their colleagues reported confidence that these changes would be institutionalized and that their organizations would continue to build on these successes following the completion of their Fund grant.

At the end of their Fund grants, most executive directors had not obtained significant new resources to advance their organizations' missions and goals. While some grantees thought that Irvine's support increased their credibility with other funders, which in turn supported fundraising activities and board growth, they voiced concerns about being able to secure these types of resources. New resources that were attributed to the Fund for Leadership Advancement tended to more directly assist executive directors in continuing or building on their Fund goals and included a variety of financial and in-kind support (e.g., unrestricted organizational funds, participation in other leadership initiatives and extended pro bono coaching; see Exhibit 11).

"[The Fund] opened dialogue and allowed me to reorganize the board with new committee structures. We now have committees that fit the needs and goals of the organization and the board is more proactive."

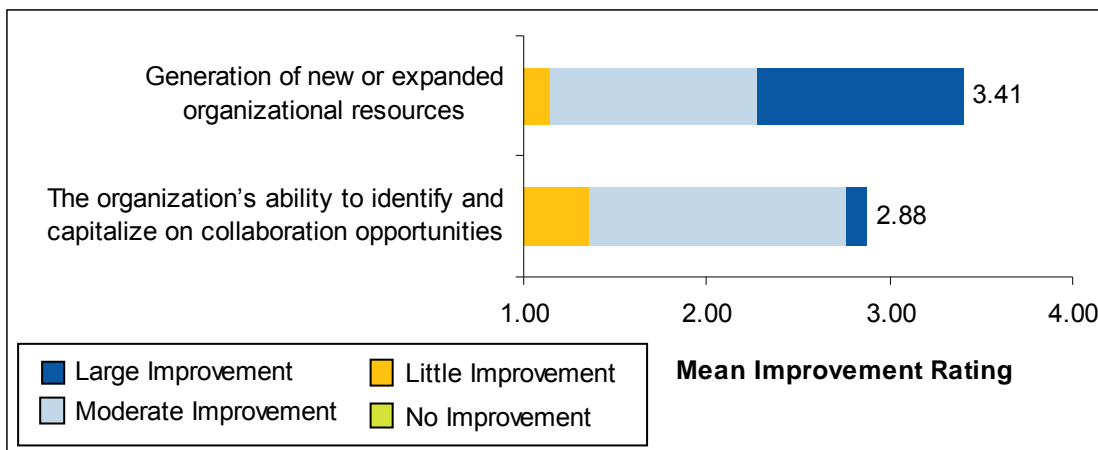
—Executive Director

"It has always been startling to me that foundations assume that they can get good programmatic results without investment in the people and the organizations that are delivering [the programs]. The program has been an unusual grant in my experience... This is a huge gift to the field."

—Executive Director

Executive directors were least likely to report significant improvements in identifying and capitalizing on collaborative opportunities as a result of the Fund for Leadership Advancement. In fact, among all of the areas of organizational improvements, this was the lowest-ranked type (see Exhibit 11). Although executive directors reported that the executive seminars and peer site visits provided venues to establish networking connections with other executive directors, this typically did not produce collaborations related to the organizations' work.

Exhibit 11
Improvements in Grantee Organization Access to
New or Expanded Organizational Resources and Collaborative
Opportunities
 (n = 21)¹¹



¹¹ Respondents only rated improvement in each category if the area was a focus of their FLA-supported work.

KEY FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POSITIVE IMPACTS

“I appreciated Irvine’s approach of, ‘You tell us what you think you need to grow.’ It was helpful to work with the [organizational development consultant] in the beginning of the grant and have a conversation about how to support my leadership. It made a dramatic difference for me as a leader and to the organization. We would not be in the same place we are now if not for this grant.”

—Executive Director

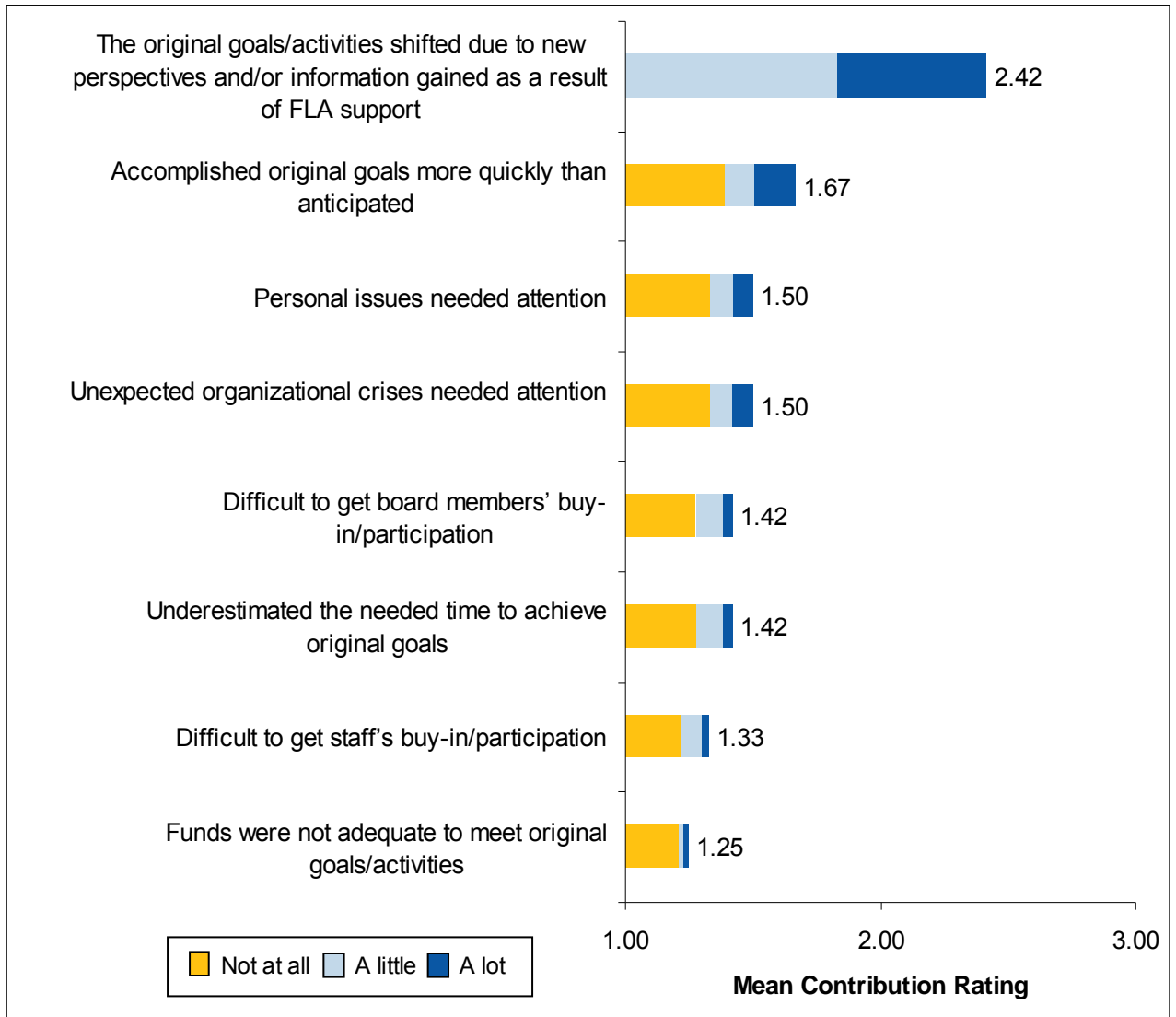
To determine which factors contributed to the greatest positive impacts, the evaluation team considered the various elements of the Fund for Leadership Advancement documented in the program’s Theory of Change (Exhibit 1). These elements include overall program design, criteria for grantees and the strategies that grantees selected and used.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Flexible strategies tailored to grantee needs and contexts supported success. From the proposal development phase through the grant period, the Fund for Leadership Advancement program allows customization to meet each grantee’s needs. While executive directors’ overall Fund goals remained the same throughout the program, 57 percent of the executive directors made changes to specific Fund activities, most commonly due to new opportunities, perspectives or information gained through their Fund support (see Exhibit 12). This intentional flexibility in the design of the Fund program allowed grantees to be responsive to relevant issues and opportunities that arose during the grant period. Furthermore, once executive directors became deeply involved in grant activities, they often broadened an activity’s focus, such as expanding individual executive leadership development to encompass the development of an entire leadership team, incorporating the board more deeply in restructuring efforts and shifting from improving one individual’s communication style to developing a more comprehensive communications strategy. A few executive directors decided to abort specific activities upon realizing that they had undertaken too many goals and/or needed to devote their attention to unforeseen issues such as staff transitions.

Exhibit 12
Factors that Contributed to Changes in Fund for Leadership
Advancement Goals/Activities

(n = 12)¹²



Built-in processes ensured focus, transparency and accountability, and balanced the program's flexibility. The support of the initiative-wide consultant helped to focus grant goals and provided a mechanism for accountability during the grant period. During the application process, it was very helpful for potential grantees to have this type of consultant's input due to the open nature of the grant, which was unfamiliar to most applicants. Mid-grant check-ins with the initiative-wide consultant gave executive directors opportunities to pause and

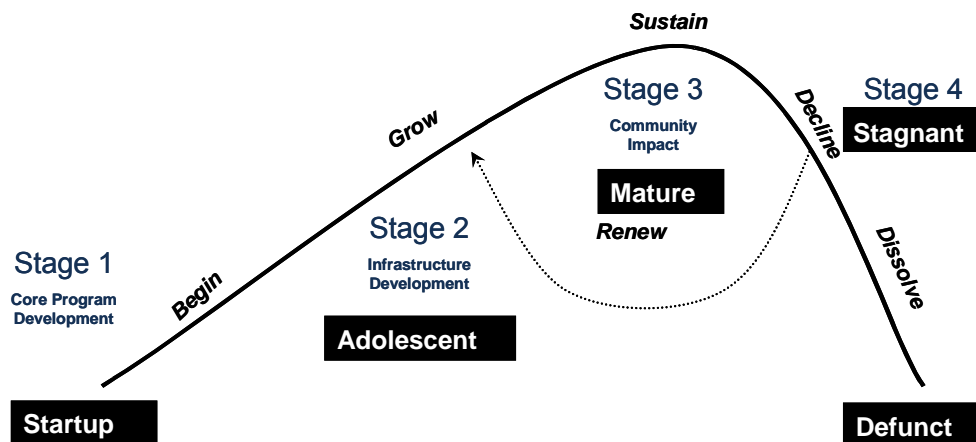
¹² Respondents answered this question only if they indicated that they made changes to their FLA goals or activities.

reflect on their experiences and progress to date, to revisit goals still awaiting completion and to make midcourse adjustments and refinements as needed. Certain Fund strategies undertaken by grantees also helped to establish a foundation for ongoing accountability, such as implementation of 360-degree reviews and improvements in internal reporting structures. Other Fund components, including executive coaches, consultants and grantee reports, aimed to achieve a balance of program flexibility and structure.

GRANTEE CHARACTERISTICS

The degree to which change took place in a grantee organization was highly influenced by the organization’s lifecycle stage. When the grants were funded, many Fund for Leadership Advancement grantee organizations had recently undergone significant growth or were on a quick growth trajectory. Many had an influx of new resources or programs or were in the midst of expansion. However, the extent of an organization’s readiness for change appears to be more important than the specific inflection point it was facing. The ability to manage change was influenced by where grantee organizations were in their lifecycles. As shown in the “Nonprofit Organizational Lifecycle Model” (Exhibit 13), nonprofit organizations follow a lifecycle of four distinct stages: startup, adolescence, maturity and stagnation.

Exhibit 13
Nonprofit Organizational Lifecycle Model¹³



¹³ Kessler, S., & Sherman, A. (2008). *Building Capacity at Each Stage of the Organizational Lifecycle*. Paper presented at the Nonprofit Congress 2008, Washington D.C.

Grantee organizations that experienced an inflection point while moving from adolescence to maturity, or those that were circling back in the lifecycle via a renewal phase, seemed to be the most capable of managing change and tended to benefit the most from a Fund for Leadership Advancement grant. These organizations had the stability to undergo intense restructuring (e.g., of their staff, senior team or board) while maintaining a relatively high level of organizational functionality.

Organizations that were in the process of moving from startup to adolescence were also impacted by Fund grants, but in a different way. During this stage, executive directors were still trying to strengthen programs and diversify funding sources. It was a time when these leaders were intimately involved in the development and management of the organization. These grantee organizations tended to focus on stabilizing the internal structure of the organization and were more likely to uncover latent crises within the organization, such as needing to restructure a board that was resistant to change. At this stage, Fund impacts were focused on improving executive director management skills, developing relationships with board members and strengthening communication with staff. These projects tended to impact the executive director more significantly than the broader organization.

In the adolescence stage, nonprofit organizations had established programs and were looking to expand their board, staff and revenue sources. At this stage, organizations commonly faced key inflection points, as defined by the Fund for Leadership Advancement Theory of Change (Exhibit 1). They undertook activities such as strategic planning and establishing internal policies and procedures to guide their growth. Fund program supports at this lifecycle stage helped executive directors to grow in their awareness of their own leadership styles, lead the process of hiring new staff and establish board and staff reporting structures.

Once organizations had senior staff in place and began to move to the mature lifecycle stage, some executive directors restructured their organizations and began sharing more internal leadership responsibilities with other senior staff members. Executive directors also tended to engage in intense board development to ensure that appropriate board members were in place to sustain the functioning of the organization. A Fund grant at this stage of development provided support for the difficult and time-intensive tasks such as reorganizing boards and shifting responsibilities among senior staff.

In a mature nonprofit — a high-functioning organization with strong programs, formalized internal systems and a strong board — the senior team could focus on sustaining the organization’s programs while the executive director shifted to an external focus (e.g., developing partnerships or alliances, reaching new constituencies).

“[Our executive director] realized that the organization was moving from a nascent stage to a rapidly growing organization in a short amount of time. We were half the size two years ago and then we doubled our employees. Now this organization has a lot of complexity that requires management skills that [our executive director] may not have possessed in the past.”

—Senior Staff Member

In general, organizations with more staff — particularly experienced senior management staff — realized greater impacts from Fund for Leadership Advancement grants. These organizations had more “absorptive capacity” to undertake organizational changes such as shifting the executive director’s role to a more external focus and establishing the organizational structure for greater leadership among senior staff and the board. In smaller organizations, as indicated by *number of staff* as compared to *budget size*, executive directors often lacked senior staff to take on some of their day-to-day organizational operations and management responsibilities; this affected executive directors’ ability to shift to a more external focus. While reasons varied, smaller organizations were also more likely to experience a departure of their executive director within the Fund grant period, which tended to slow or stall organizational impacts.

Higher levels of board involvement tended to result in greater organizational impacts. While board commitment was a prerequisite for a Fund for Leadership Advancement grant, grantee organizations achieved greater success when verbal or written commitment was accompanied by tangible involvement of board members. Board involvement typically extended the time it took a grantee to achieve its Fund goals, but it brought about more significant and broader-scale changes. This was especially important for certain types of changes such as increasing fundraising capacity and expanding the organizations’ reach and publicity.

As a result of the Fund for Leadership Advancement, grantees managed crises in a more proactive and effective manner. While the absence of crisis was a specific criterion for receiving the Fund grant, unforeseen crises did occur during grant implementation. Sometimes a crisis arose as a result of the grant (e.g., resistance of board members to resign); other times, the crisis emerged from an unrelated organizational issue (e.g., a lawsuit or bad publicity about a parent organization). While crises typically distracted organizations from their Fund grant activities to different degrees, they also provided timely opportunities to draw upon Fund supports, such as executive coaches and consultants, to help navigate these situations and extract useful lessons for the future.

In general, executive director tenure appeared to correlate with increased organizational impacts of Fund activities. Mid-career executive directors with about 10 to 20 years of professional nonprofit experience tended to embrace and experience change more easily than grantees later in their careers, especially those nearing retirement. Fund supports were particularly timely for first-time executive directors and those who were promoted to the position from within the organization, circumstances that were not always mutually exclusive. These individuals underwent unique challenges (e.g., higher learning curves, gaining acceptance from staff in their new role) and, at the same time, were well positioned for significant benefits (e.g., familiarity with the organization, openness to learning). Whether a Fund participant was the founding executive director of

“[I appreciate] the thoughtful attention to the specificity of the organization. It’s about the [executive director] articulating the context of the organization. The application process was really interesting for me. It’s hugely narrative, and emphasizes the [executive director]. ‘You have to write it through your lens.’”

—Executive Director

the organization did not appear to be a critical factor in the ability to successfully bring about organizational change.

Executive directors who continued to engage in active self-reflection and action during the grant period, regardless of the challenges that arose, tended to experience higher levels of success in meeting their goals. During the proposal development process, Fund participants were required to reflect on and describe their expectations of how the grant would enhance their individual leadership attributes and positively impact the capacity of their organizations. The change process, induced by the grant, frequently led to more challenges than anticipated, requiring dedication of time and persistence.

EFFECTIVENESS OF STRATEGIES

Executive directors found value in a variety of Fund for Leadership Advancement strategies, depending on their work styles and needs. As discussed earlier, executive directors utilized the strategies offered by the Fund to varying degrees. Across the strategies they employed, executive directors reported high levels of effectiveness. When asked which strategy most effectively helped them make progress toward their Fund goals, executive directors most frequently indicated that an executive coach and/or organizational consultant was most helpful (see Exhibit 14 on following page).

Factors that contributed to a less favorable rating of a strategy included a less than ideal match between executive directors and an executive seminar or a consultant (e.g., mismatched needs or expectations) and time constraints in fully participating in or applying the strategy (e.g., infrequent phone calls with a coach, distractions at seminars due to requests from the office). Sometimes these challenges prompted grantees to shift their planned strategies or alter their timelines. For example, one grantee developed a mentorship with a peer and decided to forego the planned executive seminar. Another grantee reduced the time spent with one of his Fund-supported consultants in favor of increasing time with another, more effective one.

Exhibit 14
Perceived Effectiveness of Fund for Leadership Advancement Strategies
in Making Progress Toward Grant Goals

(Rating scale ranges from 1 to 4, where 1 indicates “not effective” and 4 indicates “very effective”)¹⁴

Types of Activities	Percent Utilization	Mean Effectiveness Rating	Percent that Reported Activity as Most Effective
Assistance from executive coach	90% (n = 19)	3.95	52%
Assistance from organizational consultants	76% (n = 16)	3.81	14%
Consultation with the initiative-wide consultant during the proposal development process	100% (n = 21)	3.81	10%
Assistance from supplemental consultants *	43% (n = 9)	3.67	10%
Participation in executive seminars	52% (n = 11)	3.64	5%
Peer learning from site visits	48% (n = 10)	3.60	5%
Consultation with the initiative-wide consultant over the course of the grant period	100% (n = 21)	3.57	0%
Assessment process	90% (n = 19)	3.42	0%

¹⁴ Respondents were asked about the effectiveness of only the Fund for Leadership Advancement strategies that they utilized during their grant period.

* Supplemental consultants include content-specific consultants who provided services focused on one aspect of the organization, such as communications, fund development or marketing.

“I worked with the coach and she was a real pro and had a tremendous impact. She brought in a whole lot of good ideas and took [the executive director’s] leadership ideas from the [Fund-supported] seminar and helped him apply what he learned. This was when these things came together.”

—Board Member

“It can be isolating being the executive director. You can’t confide in others because no one is at your level. The coach provides a sounding board to be thoughtful and not break the confidentiality required in the [executive director] position.”

—Staff Member

The appropriate combination and sequence of Fund strategies allowed executive directors to experience synergy across strategies. For example, having a coach at the start of the project helped many executive directors to more effectively choose and plan site visits to peer organizations and/or executive seminars; coaches and consultants also helped Fund participants apply key learnings from these events. While peer site visits and executive seminars were commonly referred to as rejuvenating and inspirational, the greatest tangible impacts occurred for the executive directors who thoughtfully anticipated and chose what they wanted to gain from these experiences. Undertaking many strategies was sometimes problematic. For example, executive directors who selected three or more consultants had challenges finding enough time to manage and coordinate their efforts and deal with contradictory advice.

Coaching was a particularly effective strategy to help executive directors reach their Fund for Leadership Advancement goals. Although coaching was new to many of the executive directors, they welcomed it and considered it an invaluable support in a number of ways (in order of importance):

- Coaches provided one-on-one, confidential support in which executive directors could discuss personal and professional issues and receive objective feedback; this was especially valued by executive directors who felt isolated as leaders of their organizations and who had the desire to talk about issues that might not be appropriate to discuss with their senior staffs, board members or other colleagues in the field.
- The coach role served as a lynchpin of the Fund grant and helped to focus, coordinate and sequence Fund activities throughout the grant period; this was especially important for executive directors who pursued multiple Fund strategies. Coaching complemented the ongoing higher-level support that executive directors received from the initiative-wide consultant during the development and implementation of the grants.
- Coaches held executive directors accountable for making progress toward their goals.

Specific design elements that contributed to a successful coaching relationship included:

- Identification of a coach early on, with the availability of assistance in selecting a coach (e.g., background information on types of coaching, ways to find a coach, use of practice sessions to help ensure a good match)
- Allocation of an adequate portion of the budget for coaching to allow for coaching throughout the grant period
- Articulation, in writing, of specific coaching goals, expectations and format (e.g., determination of who is the client; confidentiality agreements; who

sets the agenda; assignment of homework; frequency, length and method of sessions)

- Regularly scheduled in-person or phone sessions to establish structure and accountability with informal email or phone communication on an as-needed basis
- Use of 360-type assessments among executive directors, senior staff and board members to inform coaching goals
- Clarification and communication about the purposes of the coaching engagement when coaching expands to board members and/or senior staff (e.g., awareness of who is the client, the terms of confidentiality and the degree to which individuals can develop their own personal coaching goals or need to adopt broader team/organizational goals)

Organizational consulting helped to link the executive director's leadership development to needed changes in the organization. Organizational development consultants focused on the leadership system of executive directors, senior teams and boards, and they helped executive directors identify staff and board issues related to organizational effectiveness (e.g., appropriate board roles given the current stage of their organization) and strategies to address these issues in timely and productive ways. Early in the program, during the first cohort of Fund grantees, it became apparent that this type of broad consulting approach — one that addresses organizational structure, systems and work processes — offered Fund grantees more value than consulting that focuses on specific content areas only (e.g., capital campaigns, fund development, communications, public policy).

“Blending [coaching and organizational consulting] was helpful to me because she knew what I went through on a day-to-day basis and how the board wasn’t as engaged as they could be organizationally.”

—Executive Director

Combining coaching and organizational development consulting was a particularly effective strategy for some grantees. One-on-one coaching with the executive director (and sometimes others) was, at times, more effective when informed by a thorough understanding of the needs and challenges of the organization — the context of the executive director’s work. Conversely, when an organizational development consultant worked across multiple levels of the organization (e.g., with individuals, teams and systems), he or she needed to work closely with individuals within the organization to implement desired changes. Since these two roles — coach and consultant — typically overlap, a blended or hybrid model of support has the potential to streamline startup time and coordination of consultants. This may be especially relevant for the Fund for Leadership Advancement program since it intends to connect individual leadership and organizational performance. Occasionally, combining the coach and consultant roles made less sense, such as when relationships between the executive director and board members were adversarial. In these instances, strong communication and coordination (e.g., sharing relevant goals and assessment information) between the coach and organizational development consultant was especially important. Since executive directors often use the terms “coach” and “organizational development consultant” interchangeably, it is important to clarify what is meant by each term upfront, regardless of whether the roles are filled by one person or several.

Cultivating Leadership for the Seasons

After Leslie Ito joined Visual Communications, an Asian Pacific American Media Arts organization, as Director of Project Development, she worked closely with the organization's executive director for two years. When the executive director unexpectedly passed away, the board of directors undertook an executive search but soon realized that the best candidate was an internal emerging leader who had been mentored by the executive director — Leslie Ito.

As a first-time executive director with minimal executive leadership experience, Ito quickly found herself working closely with the board and senior staff to develop a five-year strategic plan to realign the organizational structure and improve operating efficiency. Ito also wanted to “make a cultural shift in the organization from an executive director-driven organization to a greater partnership between the staff, board and executive director.” A 2005 grant from The James Irvine Foundation's Fund for Leadership Advancement helped her and the organization progress toward these goals.

Ito's Fund for Leadership Advancement experience began with the process of applying for the grant. Irvine's organizational development consultant helped her to assess and focus her ideas for Fund goals and activities. “I really appreciated the time that I spent with [the organizational development consultant] to build my proposal, as well as the periodic check-ins [throughout the grant],” says Ito. She used Fund for Leadership Advancement grant dollars to hire an executive coach and a board development consultant. Ito's coach conducted a 360-degree assessment of her skills and performance, gathering input from staff and the board. The results created a roadmap for Ito's leadership development plan, and her coach focused on specific areas highlighted in the assessment, such as becoming a more strategic communicator. With support from another funder, Ito attended a two-week executive training at Stanford University. Ito's Fund coach helped her set goals for the training and, afterward, apply what she learned: “I came away with new business practices that I was able to apply to the organization, including market analysis, negotiation skills and branding.”

Ito's coach and a board development consultant used a team approach to support Ito in her work with the board. Together they facilitated board retreats, which led to the creation of an executive committee, new board-staff workgroups, a board leadership transition plan and new organizational by-laws. They also worked with Ito to strengthen the internal structure of the organization by promoting and hiring key staff positions and instituting new job descriptions, formal performance reviews and monthly reporting systems.

As a young executive director, Ito feels the timing of her Fund for Leadership Advancement support was critical for her professional success, especially the executive coaching which helped her implement new systems and structures, enhance her own skills and build another layer of leadership in the organization.

During the Fund grant period, Ito announced that she was taking a leave of absence from her position. Visual Communications was able to extend its Fund for Leadership Advancement grant activities to provide coaching for its associate director, who stepped in as interim executive director. This was possible due to the intentional flexibility in the Fund's design to link individual leaders and the capacity of the organization as a whole.

Ito notes, “This grant was a wonderful opportunity to further develop the leadership on all levels of the organization. My leave provided an opportunity for the associate director to gain vital leadership skills, and the executive coaching helped him think strategically about how he developed those skills.” In 2007, when Ito carried her leadership skills into a new position as the director of grant programs at the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, the Fund for Leadership Advancement approved the reallocation of some grant funds to support an executive search. Most recently, Ito joined the California Community Foundation as the program officer for the arts. Her coach considers Ito's new position at the Community Foundation as one of the Fund grant's successful outcomes: “The program has impacts on both the organization and the individual. In addition to the positive changes for Visual Communications, the Fund for Leadership Advancement supports [a participant's] personal progression as a leader in the field... Visual Communications not only has a stronger organization but [the Community Foundation] has a stronger program officer.”

IMPLICATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

This section outlines implications of the Fund for Leadership Advancement experience to date to inform the Fund program team and others involved in the program. Some of the points made below have already been addressed through the program team's approach of continuous program refinements and will likely confirm decisions about the program's design and its implementation. This section also offers some thoughts for consideration as the Fund program team continues to learn from, reflect on and make refinements to the program.

Given the multiple challenges the nonprofit sector faces and the relative dearth of resources to enhance nonprofit leadership and organizational effectiveness, these implications also have relevance for other grantmakers, nonprofit leaders and consultants who undertake similar types of efforts.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Maintain the current range of funds and types of support to Fund for Leadership Advancement grantees. The \$35,000 to \$75,000 range of Fund grants seems appropriate for the scale and timeframe of projects and is complemented by both the core program support that grantees receive from Irvine and the ongoing support from the initiative-wide consultant. In rare instances, larger financial awards may be warranted (e.g., due to extensive involvement of senior staff).

Continue to balance flexibility with accountability to allow grantees to adjust Fund activities as needed. At the start of a grant, it is valuable to explicitly state (and periodically restate as relevant) that grantees can adjust Fund activities as the need arises (e.g., due to new knowledge, opportunities, crises). Encourage grantees to obtain input from coaches and consultants regarding significant challenges so that adjustments to grant activities can be made in a timely manner.

ASSESSMENT OF GRANTEE READINESS

Pay special attention to organizational characteristics when assessing the readiness of potential Fund grantees. While all of the organizational criteria in the Fund's Theory of Change (see Exhibit 1) are important, some nuances surfaced in the evaluation, as well as a possible new criterion for consideration (described in first bullet):

- Organizations moving from the lifecycle stage of adolescence to the stage of maturity manage change more effectively, as do mature organizations that are circling back to a renewal phase.
- Successful Fund for Leadership Advancement organizations have a leadership system in place at the start of their grants that includes the

active involvement of board members and/or senior staff and good working relationships between the board and executive director.

- The presence of at least a few experienced senior staff members is needed to enable the participating executive director to shift responsibilities and develop shared leadership.
- In addition to verbal or written commitments of support, the board of directors needs to be involved in the Fund's grant activities.

For organizations that are not ready to undertake a Fund for Leadership Advancement grant, consider other types of support that could position them for a future Fund grant. This could be especially beneficial for younger executive directors, organizations in early organizational lifecycle stages and smaller organizations with inadequate leadership systems for a Fund grant. These organizations could be given assistance from the initiative-wide consultant and/or small amounts of funding to address focused needs and position them for a future Fund grant. Supports could focus on addressing specific competencies of the leader such as management, financial or communication skills. Similar to Fund grants, these supports should complement other Irvine grants that these organizations receive (e.g., core program grants).

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Push grantees to plan for and pursue their Fund goals in ways that have proven to be most effective. In all cases, Fund goals should link the leadership work of the participating executive director to the organization's needs and goals and to a broader leadership system. To attain Fund goals, the following foci and processes appear to be important:

- Limit the number of strategies undertaken, especially in regard to working with consultants
- Sequence grant activities to allow startup time and facilitate synergy
- Utilize a coach or organizational consultant throughout the grant period
- Assess the pros and cons of combining the roles of organizational consultant and coach if both are desired
- Clearly articulate and plan for involvement of the senior team and board members in grant activities

Ensure that coaches and consultants understand the overall Fund for Leadership Advancement program goals and their clients' specific goals. Provide each coach and consultant with a brief description of the Fund program and a copy of their client's grant proposal. Although more time and resources are required to incorporate a kickoff meeting or conference call, such an occasion could provide a time to answer questions as well as an

opportunity for consultants and coaches to meet one another. It could also set the stage for other networking meetings among those involved in the Fund, as described in the following section.

BUILDING AND SUSTAINING THE WORK

Encourage peer learning and support across the network of Fund for Leadership Advancement grantees. A variety of mechanisms (e.g., periodic grantee gatherings, a listserv, teleconferences to address specific issues) could be used to connect participants. A peer learning network could also benefit the work of Fund coaches and consultants, whether they take part in a separate venue or join in peer learning with grantees. To assess the desire for peer learning or networking, solicit input from potential participants about their specific needs, priorities and interests. If a decision is made to move forward with a peer learning network, articulate the purpose and focus of networking activities as well as the expectations for participants.

Help grantees position themselves to sustain the positive impacts of their grants. Require grantees to address sustainability within their Fund goals and activities. This could include the institutionalization of new practices or accountability systems to track progress. Work with grantees to consider ways to link their Fund for Leadership Advancement grants to other funding streams as well as to their core program grants from The James Irvine Foundation. Prompt executive directors to view their shift to an external focus as an opportunity to secure additional resources. Help grantees find ways to collaborate with other individuals or organizations so more parties benefit from one another's strengths and experiences (e.g., shared expertise, economies of scale).

When it makes sense, assist executive directors in their thinking about how to strategically utilize other networks to address their specific needs for learning, guidance and support. These leaders may find value in networks introduced to them through executive seminars and peer site visits or other identified networks such as executive director peer groups. The initiative-wide consultant, executive coaches and other consultants could provide guidance regarding which networks to access for which purposes. Networking resources and decisions about using them should be addressed prior to the end of the grant period to help ensure that grantees benefit from them over the long term.

CONCLUSION

Over its first three years, the Fund for Leadership Advancement program has helped to strengthen participating nonprofit leaders and build the capacity of their organizations.

Too often, nonprofit organizations focus disproportionate attention on the growth and success of their programs and services, risking the organizational and leadership capacities needed to sustain them. The James Irvine Foundation Fund for Leadership Advancement program helps to avoid or address these situations. Its structure helps nonprofit leaders access the time, resources and accountability they need to address core aspects of their own leadership — advancing their professional development and the effectiveness of their organizations. The nonprofit sector could benefit from a broad replication of this program.

Appendices

Appendix A: Evaluation Methods

Appendix B: Survey Impact Data Analyses

Evaluation Methods

This evaluation of the Fund for Leadership Advancement program focused on the program's first three cohorts. BTW *informing change* collected data through a variety of methods including quantitative surveys and qualitative document reviews and interviews. During the evaluation period, BTW gathered information from a total of 20 organizations: seven organizations in the 2005 Pilot Cohort, five organizations in the 2006 Round One Cohort and eight organizations in the 2006 Round Two Cohort. Data requests were made of grantee organizations approximately one month following the completion of their grant. BTW worked in coordination with Fund staff to develop and approve all data collection instruments. Copies of these tools are available by contacting BTW *informing change*.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

BTW conducted a systematic analysis of background documents for the first three cohorts. These materials included documents submitted by grantees, a grant proposal and final grant report, as well as written notes from the initiative-wide consultant's check-in calls with grantees at a midpoint and in the final period of their grant. BTW synthesized information from these documents and prepared a summary for Fund executive director and colleague interviews.

The Fund program team held internal staff meetings periodically throughout the evaluation period to review information to date and make shifts or changes in Fund programming. BTW reviewed notes from these meetings, as well as other relevant background materials (e.g., Fund proposal guidelines, program description) to understand the program, including the ways in which it changed over time.

GRANTEE AND COLLEAGUE SURVEYS

BTW developed two separate survey protocols for participating executive directors and their colleagues. Fund staff reviewed, contributed to and approved these surveys for distribution. BTW administered surveys to the executive directors at all Fund grantee organizations¹⁵ through an online program and achieved a response rate of 100% (n = 21). Each executive director then identified two colleagues who could best speak to their organization's Fund for Leadership Advancement grant experience. Colleagues included board members, senior staff, executive coaches and/or consultants. BTW gathered names and contact information and sent a second survey to these 40 identified colleagues, 37 of whom completed the survey, for a response rate of 92%.

¹⁵ Although there were 20 organizations in the sample, one organization had a co-CEO leadership structure; as a result, the survey was sent to both executive directors to complete, bringing the total number of surveys completed among executive directors to 21.

GRANTEE AND COLLEAGUE INTERVIEWS

BTW, with contributions from Fund for Leadership Advancement staff, developed two protocols for the executive director and grantee colleague interviews. The interview protocols were designed to obtain in-depth information about the grantees' strategies, accomplishments and challenges from varying perspectives. Utilizing these protocols, BTW conducted 45- to 60-minute interviews with 17 executive directors and 32 colleagues.¹⁶ In two cases, BTW interviewed only one colleague from an organization due to scheduling conflicts and availability. BTW used the respondents' survey data and the organizations' summary report to guide the interview and probe deeper in the most relevant areas. The resulting interview notes were analyzed and used to develop common themes and programmatic suggestions.

GRANTEE PROFILES

In consultation with Fund staff and the initiative-wide consultant, BTW selected three grantee organizations to profile in this evaluation report. The team decided to focus the profile on specific grant activities, processes and impacts that highlight evaluation findings. BTW conducted additional interviews and email follow-up with selected executive directors and their colleagues.

FUND FOR LEADERSHIP ADVANCEMENT STAFF MEETINGS

BTW facilitated interim meetings twice during the evaluation period to review evaluation findings to date. In November 2007 and August 2008, BTW prepared interim evaluation findings memos. Fund staff reviewed and reflected on these findings and discussed real-time implications for their programming.

LIMITATIONS

Since the evaluation relied on self-reported data from participants, efforts were made to assure that no findings rest on the perspective of one informant alone but rather emerge as themes from different respondents. Although experience suggests that data collection efforts captured participants' genuine perceptions, thoughts and experiences, it remains important to note that in a study such as this, there may be an overall response bias — that grantees are generally pleased with the funding they have received and, despite the assurance of confidentiality and encouragement of candor, believe that responding positively is important to consideration for future funding. Also, while interviews included questions about the impact of Fund grants specifically, the degree to which grantees distinguish Fund for Leadership Advancement-funded work from other similar types of work supported by other sources was not always clear.

¹⁶ In the pilot cohort, BTW and Fund for Leadership Advancement staff decided to interview only a sample of executive directors (n = 4) and their colleagues (n = 8).

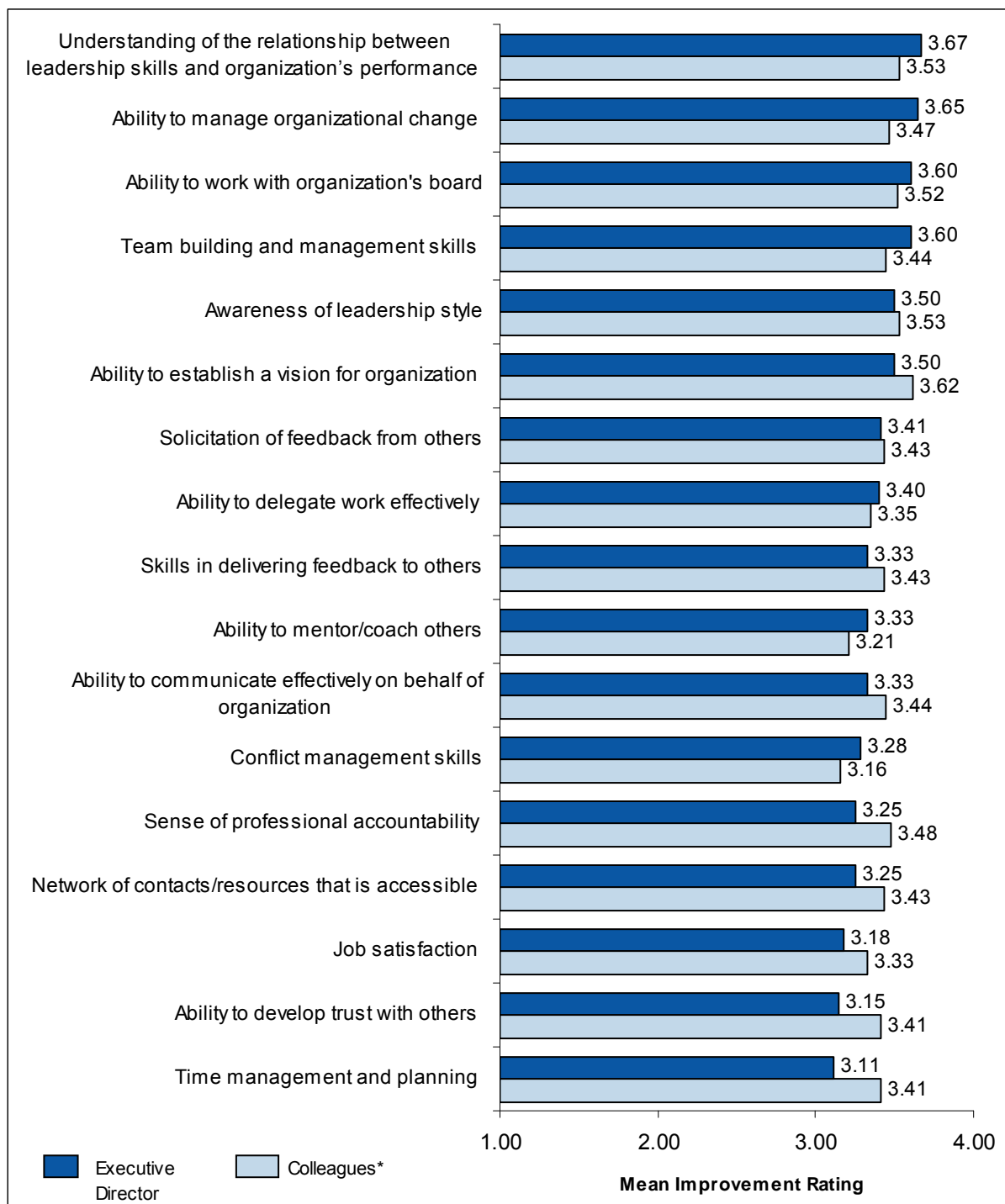
Survey Impact Data Analyses

BTW *informing change* conducted additional analyses on the individual and organizational survey impact data to determine whether respondents' impact ratings varied according to a number of different factors.

First, BTW compared the participating executive directors' mean impact ratings to colleagues' mean ratings for the entire survey sample and then for respondents within each grantee organization. Colleagues included board members, senior staff, executive coaches and consultants who were familiar with the Fund for Leadership Advancement grant goals and activities. The aggregate data is shown in terms of reported individual improvements (Exhibit 15) and organizational improvements (Exhibit 16). When examining responses from those within grantee organizations, BTW found that, as a whole, executive directors' ratings were similar to their colleagues' mean ratings, with few significant discrepancies. That is, there was not a statistically significant difference between individual and organizational improvement ratings among executive directors and their colleagues. For a small set of organizations, there were inconsistencies in the perceived focus areas of the executive director's Fund-supported work. In these cases, colleagues may have rated impact in areas that the executive director indicated were not a focus of Fund support.

Second, BTW assessed the differences in impact ratings given by colleagues in various professional roles (board members vs. staff members vs. executive coaches/consultants). Overall, respondents' professional roles did not have a statistically significant impact on the mean ratings of individual or organizational impacts. Although the differences were not statistically significant, board members tended to rate executive directors' individual improvement levels slightly higher as compared to staff members. This may be in part due to the different working relationships that board and staff members have with executive directors; staff tend to work more closely with executive directors on a regular basis.

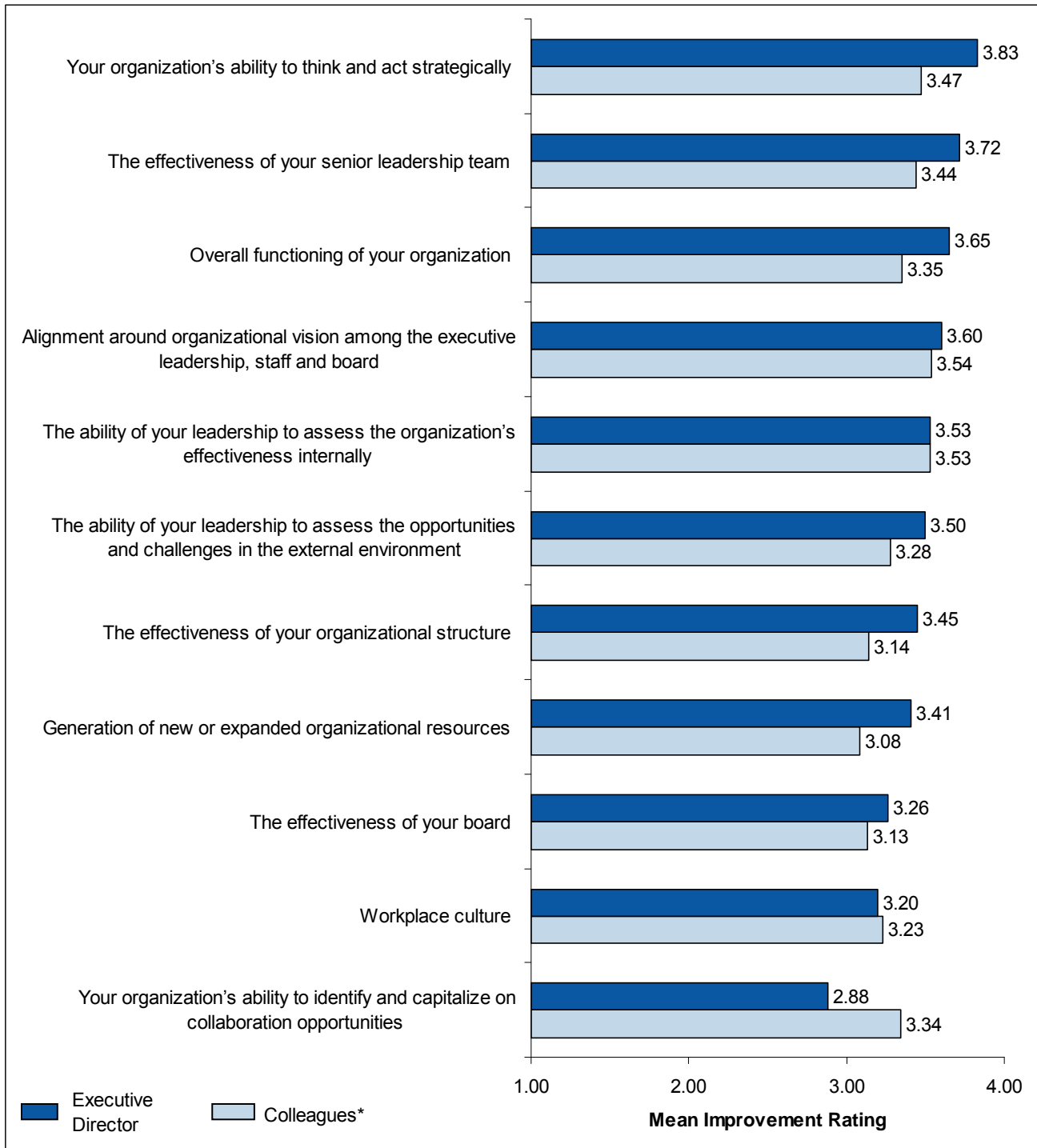
Exhibit 15
Individual Level Fund for Leadership Advancement Impacts
 (Executive directors, n = 21 and Colleagues n = 37)^{17*}



¹⁷ Respondents rated only improvement in each category if the area was a focus of the grantees' Fund for Leadership Advancement-supported work.

* Colleagues include board members, senior staff members, executive coaches and consultants.

Exhibit 16
Organizational Level Fund for Leadership Advancement Impacts
 (Executive director, n = 21 and Colleagues, n = 37)^{18*}



¹⁸ Respondents rated only improvement in each category if the area was a focus of the grantees' Fund for Leadership Advancement-supported work.

* Colleagues include board members, senior staff, executive coaches and consultants.