

The Fieldstone Effect

A PROGRAM EVALUATION PREPARED FOR THE FIELDSTONE FOUNDATION

CONDUCTED BY THE
CASTER CENTER FOR NONPROFIT AND PHILANTHROPIC RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO



THE FIELDSTONE FOUNDATION



“My definition of leadership has changed since joining the Fieldstone Leadership Network. I now understand how leadership effectiveness can affect all levels of the agency's performance. With this knowledge, I understand the impact and thus the need, to develop strong staff that is capable and confident in their positions.”

It has been said that nonprofits rely on two resources to fulfill their mission: money and leadership.¹ While funding can be hard to come by, effective leadership can be even more elusive. In particular, research has substantiated the numerous barriers associated with recruiting, developing, and retaining nonprofit leaders.² Recognizing this, the Fieldstone Foundation offers leadership development primarily to senior management of nonprofit organizations in San Diego and Orange County, California. The Foundation's three priorities are to (1) strengthen nonprofit leaders, (2) increase nonprofit organizational capacity, and (3) sustain a vibrant professional network. These goals are accomplished through a variety of comprehensive program offerings designed to build, deepen, and sustain leadership development. Programs of the Fieldstone Leadership Network include: Crossroads and Turning Points, Executive Learning Groups, Coaching, Fieldstone@4 networking events, and Leadership Retreats.

Crossroads & Turning Points

An executive management and leadership series designed to offer timely, cutting-edge research on relevant issues facing the social sector with expert practitioner, state-of-the-art information and tools, and experience-based collective wisdom from colleagues.

Learning Groups

A six-month program to learn state-of-the-art nonprofit management models while working through specific issues of each member's organization, Learning groups provide a unique and confidential environment to learn and develop relationships with others in the sector.

Executive Coaching

A year-long program that pairs nonprofit executives, one of whom has been trained as a consultative coach, in a confidential, one-on-one peer relationship in a series of monthly meetings and conversations. Coaches help to empower coachees to accomplish specific leadership goals and resolve organizational problems.

Fieldstone @4

Often referred to as “community living rooms” the Third Place is a concept that models a cooperatively-run space for social interaction, learning and fun. Each Fieldstone@4 gathering is a forum to lead discussions, join conversations, brainstorm together, or be rejuvenated, inspired and supported by peers.

¹ Tierney, R. (2006, Summer) The leadership deficit. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*

² Simms, D., Milway, K., & Tager, C. (2009). Finding leaders for America's nonprofits: Executive summary. *The Bridgespan Group*. Retrieved from <http://www.bridgespan.org/Publications-and-Tools/Hiring-Nonprofit-Leaders/Hiring-Strategy/Finding-Leaders-for-America-s-Nonprofits.aspx#.UYloCrXvt8E>

Recognizing the serious work nonprofits do to better the community, the purpose of the Fieldstone Leadership Network is to provide leadership training and learning opportunities that build and deepen personal and professional relationships among nonprofit leaders so they are better able to collaborate, problem solve, and support each other as they work.

Individuals in the Fieldstone Leadership Network often participate in multiple Fieldstone programs. As depicted in Table #1, participation is concentrated in Southern California. To provide some context, in Orange County, there are more than 3,000 nonprofit organizations employing more than 43,000 professionals, while in San Diego, there are more than 9,000 nonprofit organizations employing more than 75,000 nonprofit professionals.

TABLE #1: PARTICIPATION IN THE FIELDSTONE LEADERSHIP NETWORK

	Crossroads & Turning Points	Executive Learning Groups	Coaching	Fieldstone@4	Leadership Retreats
Orange County, CA	1243	350	121	316	67
San Diego, CA	264	404	136	349	84
Salt Lake City, UT*	40	167	31	0	7
Total	1547	921	288	665	158

In the fall of 2012, The Fieldstone Foundation engaged the University of San Diego’s Caster Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research to conduct an evaluation of the Fieldstone Leadership Network (FLN). As part of the evaluation process, all members were invited to provide their input via an online survey regarding their experience with the FLN. Surveys were sent to 649 individuals and a total of 320 valid responses were received, representing a 49% response rate. Responses to this survey are detailed in the report that follows and clearly indicate that The Fieldstone Foundation is delivering on its mission priorities and is serving a critical leadership development function in the nonprofit sector.

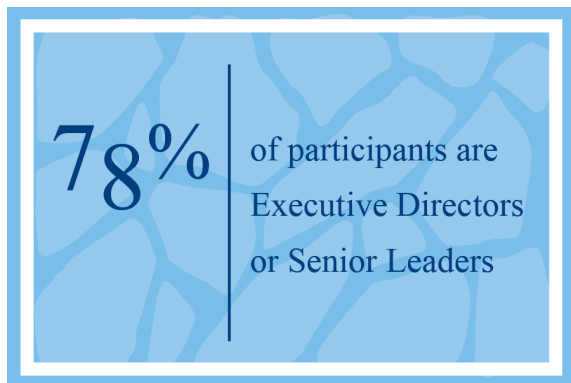
*Programming is no longer being offered in Utah.

Fieldstone Leadership Network Participants

In the U.S., the nonprofit organizational landscape is rich with a variety of organizations varying greatly in purpose and size. Similarly, participants in the FLN represent organizations with budgets ranging from \$5,000 to more than \$1 billion. FLN members* represent all of the top ten subsectors identified in the IRS National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities. The most predominant subsectors represented in the FLN, however, are Human Services (36%), Arts, Culture and Humanities (16%), Education (15%), and Health (10%). This distribution is consistent with The Fieldstone Foundation's funding priorities.

Participants overall are an experienced, educated group of individuals, having between one and forty-five years of experience in the nonprofit sector. More than half (51%) have greater than fifteen years of experience. Forty-two percent have between six and fifteen years of experience and only 6% have five years or less. The majority have higher education, such as a bachelor's degree (42%), master's degree (46%), or a doctorate or law degree (7%).

Seventy-one percent of participants are female and 29% are male. While the network has served individuals from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, a majority of the participants (85%) are white, non-Hispanic. Interestingly, in the first six years of the FLN, almost 100% of participants were white, non-Hispanic. In recent years, however, minorities made up a greater percentage of incoming participants (up to 36% per year).



The majority of the individuals (78%) in the network are either Executive Directors or Senior Leaders such as chief operating officers and program directors. Almost all of the respondents are proud to be nonprofit professionals (95%), hoping to remain in the nonprofit sector for as long as possible (98%). Overall, these individuals indicate that they take the time to reflect upon their professional identity (86%)

and are committed to developing talent within the sector (79%).

**Because of the high response rate, data from the survey has been used to describe the Network.*

These individuals are also clearly committed to their involvement with the FLN. Many who participated in the first FLN activities in 1994 are still active. Participants largely indicate that they receive good advice from the Network (88%) and that members of the Network can be trusted (95%). Participants indicate that they would discuss their involvement with the Network with a potential employer or funder (87%) and that they would recommend a friend or colleague to apply to the FLN (98%). In some cases, data show that members have elected to hire or collaborate with other members.

The Network participants are pursuing additional professional development opportunities; however, their choices appear to be limited. Many participants attend workshops (74%) or have pursued a certificate or credential (16%). Only 10% have pursued a degree since joining the FLN.

Strengthening Nonprofit Leaders

One of the core priorities for The Fieldstone Foundation is to strengthen nonprofit leaders. Based on this evaluation, The Fieldstone Foundation is accomplishing this goal by (1) developing leadership attributes, such as confidence, accountability and integrity, (2) developing leadership skills, and, subsequently, (3) increasing the leaders' performance.



The majority (66%) of FLN participants indicate that they use knowledge gained from the FLN every week and an additional 28% percent use this information monthly. Sixty-six percent indicate their understanding of leadership has changed as a result of their involvement with the FLN. This change has occurred in a variety of ways, many of which are documented throughout this report.

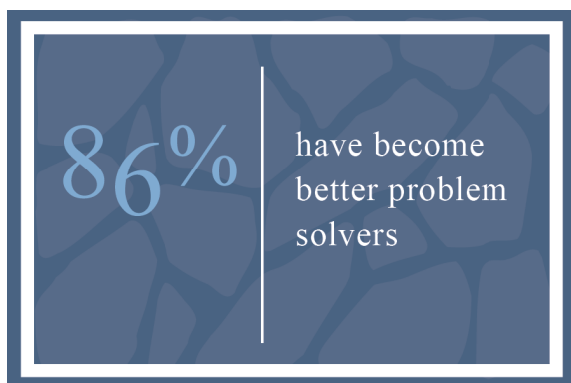
“Fieldstone has enabled me to tackle the founder’s syndrome, plan past my tenure as the founder/CEO, complete high level professional strategic planning, become more open to sharing what I know with others, be grateful for what I have, and yet not be complacent to stop trying for moving to scale.”

DEVELOPING LEADERS' ATTRIBUTES

As reported by the participants, the FLN has built their self-awareness as a leader (94%), given them confidence as a leader (90%), and made them more accountable as a leader (79%). Members feel connected to a trusted network (80%) which has given them access to other trusted leaders (90%) and are more likely to ask for help (74%). The FLN has helped participants to operate with integrity (76%) and see a problem more holistically (79%).

“At one time I would have assumed that leadership would have meant that one had to be at the front of the line, standing in front of the group, as it were. Today, I understand that leadership comes from the passing on of ideas, motivations, inspiration, creating the sense of a team, etc. and that the leader of the group may not be obvious at first glance at all. Leadership inspires, encourages and applauds the growth and leadership of others in the organization.”

“I have a much more holistic and compassionate approach to leadership. Fieldstone helped me practice starting where people are.”



DEVELOPING LEADERS' SKILLS

The FLN also develops participants' leadership skills. For example, participants agree that as the result of participation, they have learned how to build trusting relationships (79%), set priorities (76%), and delegate appropriately (80%). They also have become better problem solvers (86%), critical thinkers (82%), and self-directed learners (68%).

“[When] funding unexpectedly decreased, difficult decisions had to be made. They had to be carefully explained, demonstrating a clear sense of direction for the organization, commitment to the mission, and support of the staff. It was critical for everyone to be clear about priorities and to be open to on-going communication throughout the agency [in order] for us to weather the storm. Knowing how to prioritize and not take on other people’s work were valuable lessons I learned from my Executive Learning Group and then applied in this situation.”

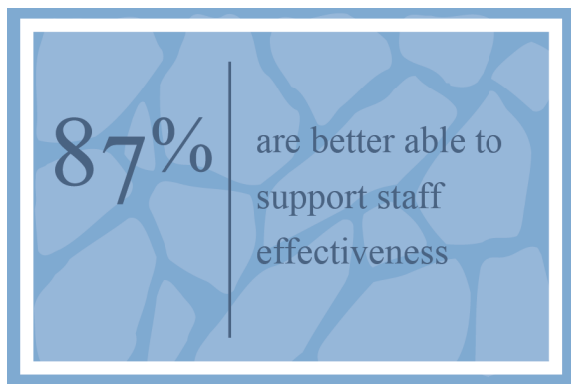
INCREASING LEADERS’ PERFORMANCE

Leaders who participate in the FLN overwhelmingly indicate that their performance has improved. Eighty-eight percent indicate that the FLN has enhanced their impact as a leader. Specifically, they believe they now make better decisions (75%), are more strategically agile (79%), and can better work with others to address problems (84%).

“As a part of our local government’s fiscal crisis and the impact on our organization’s funding levels, I was able to rise to the challenge of providing the needed assurances to staff and [was] motivated to develop contacts and support for the organization outside [of] our traditional means. We are now on the path of reorganization and have developed new supporters for a future direction.”

Increasing Organizational Capacity

Participants indicate their personal leadership development through the FLN has positively affected their organization's development in three key areas: (1) staff management, (2) effectiveness, and (3) governance. Almost half (44%) of survey respondents have observed other staff members in their organization participate in the FLN. Those individuals believe that the personal leadership development of the other staff persons had a positive impact on their organizations' development in the above key areas.



STAFF MANAGEMENT

Staff management is the primary area in which the FLN increases organizational capacity. Eighty-three percent of participants report having improved staff management. To illustrate, members have been able to build better organizational infrastructures (80%) and improve their ability to support staff effectiveness (87%). Furthermore, respondents are now better able

to communicate across generations (49%), and have been able to develop future leaders from within their organization (73%).

“I used to feel that ‘telling people what to do’ was leadership. I now know that it is about helping people discover for themselves what to do and the best way to do it.”

*“I moved from leading by telling my directors the correct course of action and guiding them to make the ‘correct’ decisions to **leading them by providing all relevant information as well as my recommendation for action while leaving the decisions up to them.** As a result, although they make mistakes, they ‘owned’ their decisions and became more courageous.”*

MISSION EFFECTIVENESS

Mission effectiveness is the second most cited area of improvement as the result of participation in the FLN. Eighty-three percent of participants indicate that the Network has increased their ability to fulfill their organizations' mission. For instance, participation in the FLN has improved funder relationships (49%) and increased the nonprofit's ability to have a positive impact in the communities served (73%). Also worthy of note, many have noted that their nonprofits have had influence on broader issues, not just within the organization (59%), and had an enhanced impact on the nonprofit sector as a whole (61%). This indicates that leadership development extends beyond respondents' organizations and subsectors, demonstrating a positive impact on the nonprofit sector as a whole.

“I have developed into a more strategic manager, thinking long-term, building coalitions, and expanding our impact.”

“Several of our programs were redesigned, with a focus on the mission and successful treatment for clients as the goal. This was made possible as the result of the leadership strategies learned from The Fieldstone Foundation.”

GOVERNANCE

The FLN does not specifically offer training on board governance. However, 64% percent of participants have noticed an improvement in this area. This may be related to the connection between leadership and governance. Participants have been able to promote positive relationships between board members (56%), create a learning environment (80%), and lead change initiatives (73%).

“I was able to strategically work with a board president and a board of directors who did not understand their role. I helped educate them, got them onboard to support the organization financially, and weeded out those that shouldn't have been board members but were more suited to be committee members.”

“At a pivotal board meeting last spring, I did something different that made a positive difference in the outcome of the meeting. Instead of assuming that 1) most of the board members were already in agreement with the action plan I was to present or 2) I could easily talk them into becoming so, I deconstructed the arguments pro and con with my staff and a professional facilitator, making sure I understood them and could see them from both sides. Then I prepared and practiced the presentation of ideas that would drive the action plan. Outcome: unanimous agreement on the plan of action and resources proposed leading to dramatic growth in our fundraising performance over the last six months resulting in enhanced pride of affiliation for most board members.”

Building a Network

The results of this evaluation demonstrate that the FLN fosters the development of nonprofit leaders and increases FLN members’ organizational capacity. These outcomes seem to be largely the result of a trusted, vibrant network created by the FLN. Additionally, this network supports nonprofit leaders and has improved collaboration within the nonprofit sector overall.

“I did not expect to develop such a close, supportive (professional) relationship with several of the members in my program. This relationship has helped me to continue to learn and develop long after the ‘formal’ program has ended.”

THE VALUE OF A NETWORK

As one participant wrote, *“It is well known that the job of ED is a lonely one.”* According to participants, the value of the FLN exists primarily in the strength of the network. Specifically, the majority of benefits received have been derived from one-on-one relationships, meetings with two or more colleagues, and networking at events.

“The best part is that I have built a trusting small network of fellow CEOs who I utilize to help me make good decisions and who offer support.”

The value of the FLN among members extends beyond the structured time shared during Learning Groups, retreats, or trainings. When faced with a professional challenge, members of the network are likely to call or meet with a member of the Network (65%) or solicit support or advice at a Fieldstone networking event (47%). Members were asked to recall a time when they had given support to another member during the past year. The vast majority could recall offering information (82%), emotional support (77%), professional influence (62%), or resources (44%). Members also recalled times when they had received support from the network, including information (80%), emotional support (77%), professional influence (44%), and resources (35%). These findings speak to the reciprocal nature of the network.

“The Fieldstone Leadership Network gave me access to other leaders of similar organizations. I found that we were often dealing with similar situations but the way we approached them were very different.”

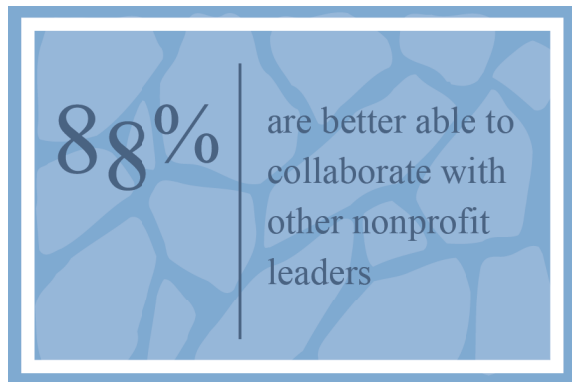
The FLN also promotes the value of collaborative problem solving. More than 82% of members report having personally learned as the result of helping someone else to solve a problem. Yet, this type of learning is not a one-way process. As the evidence suggests, learning through the FLN is more reciprocal in nature with (94%) of members reporting an increase in their capacity to learn from others working in organizations different from their own.

“After participating in the program, [I] developed a strong relationship with a colleague in the class that led to a multi-year, multi-NGO collaboration with federal funding to support the partnership.”

Participants also recalled times when they had confronted a professional challenge by drawing on a problem solving method learned during a Learning Group (72%) or referring back to knowledge gained during a Fieldstone retreat or training (81%).

BEYOND THE NETWORK

“The experience of learning how other nonprofit directors lead has given me a great appreciation of different leadership styles. This has helped me be more effective in collaboration.”



The FLN has improved participants' ability to collaborate with other nonprofit leaders beyond the Network (88%). The majority now think about the nonprofit sector as a sector, rather than solely focusing on their subsector (88%). Furthermore, they report having a strong sense of how the various subsectors are intertwined (84%). This has helped participants to collaborate with organizations similar to their own (66%) and different from their own (67%), as well as to lead change initiatives (73%).

Future Growth

Approaching its 20th anniversary, the FLN has reason to congratulate itself. It is clearly accomplishing its mission and providing a valuable service to the nonprofit sector. As with any endeavor, there are always opportunities for future growth.

INCREASE MEMBERSHIP DIVERSITY

The FLN has an opportunity to reach out to and serve additional populations. First, as noted earlier in this report, the FLN is currently reaching a greater percentage of racial and ethnic minorities than during its initial years. This trend is important and should continue. Secondly, it was suggested that The Fieldstone Foundation should offer a “middle ground” workshop which would target professionals who were neither emerging nor executives. Perhaps there is an opportunity to create a third learning group cycle for this population. Finally, an idea was offered for The Fieldstone Foundation to create a network specifically for nonprofit consultants.

STRENGTHEN CAPACITY BUILDING

The results of this evaluation further demonstrate that the current value of the FLN is largely based on the relationships developed and sustained through participation. However, many members indicated that they would appreciate additional training opportunities. Topics requested include: board governance, board fundraising/gifts, strategic planning, staff professional development, building a business plan, social media, fundraising, financial education, collaboration, program development, conflict management in the workplace, and changes to tax law.

One member suggested that The Fieldstone Foundation “take the show on the road” and offer problem-solving learning groups to individual nonprofit organizations and teams. This could be delivered as a fee-for-service enterprise by which The Fieldstone Foundation could create a potential revenue stream.

PROMOTE CONTINUAL INFORMATION SHARING

The FLN communicates frequently with members via email and social media. In fact, FLN members have come to rely on this as an important source of information for professional development, job opportunities, and resources. It is important to continue to use these platforms to share timely, relevant information and opportunities. It is important to make sure that the majority of information

shared is relevant to all members, and not just specific to one geographical area. For example, the FLN may consider offering an equal number of San Diego and Orange County specific events. The FLN should also continue highlighting members' innovative programs/initiatives and facilitating high level dialogue with recognized thought leaders, as well as providing members access to new ideas and perspectives.

Conclusion

The FLN clearly delivers on its promise to build, deepen, and sustain the leadership of nonprofit organizations in San Diego and Orange Counties. This study found that the FLN's continuum of programs help strengthen nonprofit leaders, increase nonprofit organizational capacity, and sustain a vibrant professional network. As a result of strengthened leadership, more nonprofits are able to achieve their goals and make a lasting difference. The findings from this evaluation illustrate the extent to which the FLN undergirds the critical work of nonprofits in Southern California.



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*For more information regarding The Fieldstone Foundation Leadership Network,
please refer to their webpage at www.fieldstonefoundation.org.*