

BRAINERD FOUNDATION LEADERSHIP SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

This **Leadership Self-Assessment Tool** is designed to help you evaluate your organization against some best practices in the leadership of nonprofit organizations. Since the inception of the Brainerd Foundation, our aim has been to support our grantees as they build their organizational capacity. We recognize that some of the capacities listed below (especially in "Level Four" and even "Level Three") may prove daunting and perhaps not appropriate as short-term goals for newer organizations or groups with few staff and modest budgets. Moreover, not all of these capacities may generate the same level of priority within a particular organization. Regardless, we hope it can provide fodder for internal discussion about the effectiveness of your organization and opportunities for support of your capacity aspirations.

Important note: The Brainerd Foundation Leadership Self-Assessment Tool is a derivative product of the Capacity Assessment Tool created by McKinsey and Company for Venture Philanthropy Partners (www.vpppartners.org) and published in *Effective Capacity Building for Nonprofit Organizations* (2001). Special thanks is owed to the generosity of Venture Philanthropy Partners, Social Venture Partners, and the Marguerite E. Casy Foundation for allowing us to capitalize on their materials and expertise in compiling this instrument.

1. SUPPORTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR LEADERSHIP

| Capacity Elements | LEVEL ONE: Clear need for increased capacity | LEVEL TWO: Basic level of capacity in place | LEVEL THREE: Moderate level of capacity in place | LEVEL FOUR: High level of capacity in place | Input capacity rating in this column |
|---|--|--|--|--|---|
| Institutional Support for the CEO/Executive Director | CEO/ED assumes multiple roles without training or positional support from staff or board; no formal job description; expected to "do it all"; compensation not linked to challenges of the position or benchmarks; benefits insufficient | CEO/ED has a written job description, some staff support, and some guidance from the board; compensation is "livable"; basic health and other benefits available | CEO/ED treated as a professional with sufficient staffing support and authority from the board, reasonable compensation and benefits package; renewal and professional opportunities encouraged and used; networking, mentoring, and peer support are pursued and utilized | CEO/ED's compensation package is commensurate with performance and responsibilities, regional benchmarks, and organization's values; ample professional development and renewal opportunities made available and used by the CEO/ED; mentorship, coaching and peer networking actively employed by the CEO/ED and encouraged by the board; broad and appropriate authority delegated to the CEO/ED by the board; staffing ample to support organization and CEO/ED | |
| Board Supervision of the CEO/Executive Director | Board does not carry out and/or lacks clear understanding of basic responsibilities around hiring and supervising the CEO/ED | Board carries out and understands basic responsibilities of hiring and supervising the CEO/ED; CEO/ED performance reviews conducted periodically | Board carries out and clearly understands responsibilities of hiring and supervising the CEO/ED; board co-defines and monitors CEO/ED's performance targets | Board defines and monitors CEO/ED performance targets, reviews salary for appropriateness, and is attentive to CEO/ED's professional development | |

2. FOCUSING BOARD LEADERSHIP

| Capacity Elements | <p style="text-align: center;">LEVEL ONE: Clear need for increased capacity</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">LEVEL TWO: Basic level of capacity in place</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">LEVEL THREE: Moderate level of capacity in place</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">LEVEL FOUR: High level of capacity in place</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Input capacity rating in this column</p> |
|---|---|--|--|---|---|
| <p>Board Strategic Direction</p> | <p>Overall lack of commitment to or understanding of and/or disagreement over organization's mission/vision; no formal process for reviewing mission/vision, strategic planning, or monitoring program performance against mission</p> | <p>General agreement on mission, but vision may not be formalized; infrequent discussion of mission/vision or program performance against mission; little active involvement in mission/vision review or strategic planning beyond approving periodic staff-driven plans</p> | <p>Board members share common commitment to and understanding of mission/vision, which they frequently refer to during strategic discussions; formal process for board's active involvement in reviewing mission/vision, strategic planning, and setting goals to monitor program performance against mission</p> | <p>Complete buy-in on mission/vision, which drive major strategic discussions; well-documented process to facilitate board's regular review of mission/vision, active involvement in strategic planning, and cooperation with staff on setting goals to monitor program performance against mission</p> | |
| <p>Board/Staff Balance of Leadership</p> | <p>Board provides little direction, support, or accountability to staff leadership; no clear process for developing or selecting board leadership; board not fully informed about major organizational matters; too narrowly engaged or prone to micro-management; disagreement about appropriate level of board engagement; low level of understanding of leadership roles and responsibilities; little participation in outreach for the organization</p> | <p>Board provides some direction, support, and accountability to staff leadership and is informed about most organizational matters; informal process of developing and selecting board leadership; board input on most major decisions is sought and valued; occasional disagreement on the distinction between board-level and staff-level decisions; members understand most leadership roles and responsibilities, including the need for participation in outreach for the organization</p> | <p>Board provides direction, support, and accountability to staff leadership and is informed about all major matters; its input is actively sought and valued; process in place for selecting effective board leaders; some cultivation of future leaders; full participant in major decisions with clear understanding of distinction between board and staff decisions; clearly understands leadership roles, responsibilities, and engagement with staff leadership; members are effective ambassadors for the organization</p> | <p>Board provides strong direction, support, and accountability to staff leadership through clear goals and policies; acts as a strategic resource; process in place to identify, develop, and select effective board leaders; communication between board and staff leadership reflects mutual respect, awareness of appropriate roles and responsibilities, shared commitment, and valuing of collective wisdom; board actively supports CEO/ED's leadership development and proactively engages in outreach to build organization's reputation</p> | |

2. FOCUSING BOARD LEADERSHIP (continued)

| Capacity Elements | LEVEL ONE: Clear need for increased capacity | LEVEL TWO: Basic level of capacity in place | LEVEL THREE: Moderate level of capacity in place | LEVEL FOUR: High level of capacity in place | Input capacity rating in this column |
|--|--|---|--|---|---|
| Board Composition & Commitment | Limited diversity of fields of practice and expertise; drawn from a narrow spectrum of constituencies (nonprofit, academia, corporate, government, etc.); not reflective of the community served; little or no relevant experience; limited capacity to donate financially; low commitment to organization's success, vision and mission | Some diversity in fields of practice and expertise including some of the skills and experience needed by the organization; membership represents a few different constituencies (nonprofit, academia, corporate, government, etc.); some representation of community served; moderate capacity to donate financially; moderate commitment to organization's success, vision, and mission | Good diversity in fields of practice and expertise including most of the skills and experience needed by the organization; membership represents most constituencies (nonprofit, academia, corporate, government, etc.); make-up generally reflects organization's stakeholders and community; good capacity to donate financially or connect to other donors; solid commitment to organization's success, vision, and mission | Broad variety of fields of practice and expertise drawn from all relevant constituencies (nonprofit, academia, corporate, government, etc.); make-up closely reflects organization's stakeholders and community, includes functional and program content-related expertise, and high-profile names; proven track record of investing financially in the organization; outstanding commitment to organization's success, mission, and vision | |
| Board Development & Self Evaluation | Ad hoc process for recruiting and nominating new members; little or no attention to board composition; no official orientation or training for new board members; no policy on member tenure; little or no on-going training and skill development; board does not set goals for itself; little or no board discussion of its own performance; lack of assessment of individual directors results in retention of low performing members | Committee to recruit new members meets occasionally; some attention paid to board composition, but no formal assessment is done; informal new member orientation; loosely followed policy on member tenure; some on-going training and skill development; informal board self evaluation on some objectives, but no formal structure for setting goals and evaluating performance against them; informal assessment of individual directors may result in retention of low performing members | Development committee meets regularly to assess board composition and identify and recruit new members to fill specific gaps in needed skills or attributes; orientation held for new board members; well understood policy on member tenure; board conducts on-going training and skill development; regular performance evaluations against board-established goals in some areas (e.g., fundraising), but results not well utilized to formulate plans for improvement; board assesses individual director performance at the time of re-nomination | Development committee meets year-round; annual assessment of board composition results in targeted recruiting of new members with specific skills and attributes; formal process for new member orientation; written policy on member tenure; high level of commitment to ongoing training and skill development; formal process for performance evaluation against goals set by the board; results used to make improvements; formal process for evaluation of individual directors; no collective tolerance for low performing members; planning for officer succession and cultivation of a pipeline of new board leadership | |

3. BUILDING BROAD LEADERSHIP IN THE ORGANIZATION

| Capacity Elements | LEVEL ONE: Clear need for increased capacity | LEVEL TWO: Basic level of capacity in place | LEVEL THREE: Moderate level of capacity in place | LEVEL FOUR: High level of capacity in place | Input capacity rating in this column |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| Passion & Vision | Staff and board have low energy level and commitment; little continued attention to organizational vision | Staff and board have good energy level, visible commitment to organization and its vision | Staff and board are inspiringly energetic; show constant, visible commitment to organization and its vision; excite others around vision | Staff and board are contagiously energetic and highly committed; live the organization's vision; compellingly articulate path to achieving vision that enables others to see where they are going | |
| Recruitment, Development, & Retention of Staff | Standard career paths in place without considering managerial development; no or very limited training, coaching, and feedback; no regular performance appraisals; no systems/processes to identify new managerial talent | Some tailoring of development plans for brightest stars; personal annual reviews incorporate development plan for each staff person; some formal recruiting networks are in place | Recruitment, development, and retention of key staff is priority and high on CEO/ED's agenda; some tailoring in development plans for brightest stars; relevant training, job rotation, coaching/feedback, and consistent performance appraisal are institutionalized; well-connected to potential sources of new talent; frequent market analysis to ensure competitive compensation | Well-planned process to recruit, develop, and retain staff; individually tailored development plans for brightest stars; relevant and regular internal and external training, job rotation, coaching/feedback, and consistent performance appraisal are institutionalized; continuous, proactive initiatives to identify new talent; regular market analysis to ensure competitive compensation | |
| Performance as Shared Value | Employees are hired, rewarded and promoted for executing a set of tasks/duties or for no clear reason, rather than for their impact; decisions are mostly made on "gut feeling" | Performance contribution is occasionally used and may be one of many criteria for hiring, rewarding and promoting employees; performance data is used to make decisions | Employee contribution to social, financial and organizational impact is typically considered as a preeminent criterion in making hiring, rewards and promotion decisions; important decisions about the organization are embedded in comprehensive performance thinking | All employees are systematically hired, rewarded and promoted for their collective contribution to social, financial and organizational impact; day-to-day processes and decision making are embedded in comprehensive performance thinking; performance is constantly referred to | |

3. BUILDING BROAD LEADERSHIP IN THE ORGANIZATION (continued)

| Capacity Elements | LEVEL ONE: Clear need for increased capacity | LEVEL TWO: Basic level of capacity in place | LEVEL THREE: Moderate level of capacity in place | LEVEL FOUR: High level of capacity in place | Input capacity rating in this column |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| Diversity of Skills, Experience and Demographics | Staff, board and volunteers drawn from a narrow range of backgrounds and experiences; interest and abilities limited to present role; little ability to solve problems as they arise | Some variety of backgrounds and experiences; good capabilities, including some ability to solve problems as they arise; many interested in work beyond their current roles and in the success of the organization's mission | Staff, board and volunteers drawn from diverse backgrounds and experiences, bring a broad range of skills; most are highly capable and committed to mission and strategy; eager to learn and develop, and assume increased responsibility; | Staff, board and volunteers drawn from extraordinarily diverse backgrounds and experiences, and bring broad range of skills; most are highly capable in multiple roles, committed both to mission/strategy and continuous learning; most are eager and able to take on special projects and collaborate across divisional lines | |
| Diversity and Cultural Competency | Organization not easily able to adapt to the diversity and cultural context of individuals and communities served; little or no attention paid to the recruitment and promotion of staff that reflect the diversity of the community and constituents; no policies or training in place to support diversity or cultural competency | Organization sometimes able to adapt to the diversity and cultural context of individuals and communities served; periodic attention paid to the recruitment and promotion of staff that reflect the diversity of the community and constituents; some policies in place to support diversity and/or cultural competency; occasional staff training | Organization able to adapt to the diversity and cultural context of individuals and communities served; attention paid to the recruitment and promotion of staff that reflect the diversity of the community and constituents; policies and procedures in place that support diversity and cultural competency; most staff receive training to increase awareness of and support diversity and cultural competency | Organization clearly recognizes the connection between diversity/cultural competency and achieving its mission; able to adapt well to the diversity and cultural context of individuals and communities served; recruitment and promotion methods ensure that staff members (at all levels) reflect the diversity of the community and constituents; policies and procedures in place to support diversity and cultural competency; all staff regularly participate in training to increase awareness of and strengthen practices in supporting diversity/cultural competency | |

4. ENSURING SUFFICIENT SUCCESSION PLANNING

| Capacity Elements | LEVEL ONE: Clear need for increased capacity | LEVEL TWO: Basic level of capacity in place | LEVEL THREE: Moderate level of capacity in place | LEVEL FOUR: High level of capacity in place | Input capacity rating in this column |
|--|--|--|---|--|---|
| Dependence on CEO/Executive Director | Very strong dependence on CEO/ED; organization would cease to exist without his/her presence | High dependence on CEO/ED; organization would continue to exist without his/her presence, but likely in a very different form | Limited dependence on CEO/ED; organization would continue in similar way without his/her presence but areas such as fund-raising or operations would likely suffer significantly during transition period; no member of management team could potentially take on CEO/ED role | Reliance but not dependence on CEO/ED; smooth transition to new leader could be anticipated; fund-raising and operations likely to continue without major problems; senior management team can fill in during transition time; one or more members of management team could potentially take on CEO/ED role | |
| Planning for Succession | No plans in place; expected or unplanned transition is met with anxiety, fear and confusion | Minimal discussion and worst-case scenario planning for unplanned and sudden CEO/ED departure; need for more extensive planning recognized by some staff and board | Widely recognized support for succession planning at both the staff and board level; regular discussions around implementation of systems and cross-training to prepare for unplanned or expected transition; some policies in place and roles identified | Planning for CEO/ED succession includes explicit steps for the transfer of leadership and roles for board members and other staff to share/assume/delegate leadership; discussion of interim leadership includes evaluation and possible redesign of the position and job description; search process in place for recruitment, hiring and orientation of the new CEO/ED; support of planning for board officer succession and cultivation of a pipeline of new board leadership | |

5. MANAGING EFFECTIVELY ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION

| Capacity Elements | LEVEL ONE: Clear need for increased capacity | LEVEL TWO: Basic level of capacity in place | LEVEL THREE: Moderate level of capacity in place | LEVEL FOUR: High level of capacity in place | Input capacity rating in this column |
|---|---|---|--|---|---|
| Staff Performance Goals | Targets are non-existent or few; targets are vague, or confusing, or either too easy or impossible to achieve; not clearly linked to aspirations and strategy, and may change from year to year; targets largely unknown or ignored | Realistic targets exist in some key areas, and are mostly aligned with aspirations and strategy; may lack aggressiveness, or be short-term, lack milestones, or mostly focused on "inputs" (things to do right), or often renegotiated; staff may or may not know and adopt targets | Quantified, aggressive targets in most areas; linked to aspirations and strategy; mainly focused on "outputs/outcomes" (results of doing things right) with some "inputs"; typically multiyear targets, though may lack milestones; targets are known and adopted by most staff who usually use them to broadly guide work | Limited set of quantified, genuinely demanding performance targets in place in all areas; targets are tightly linked to aspirations and strategy, output/outcome-focused (i.e., results of doing things right, as opposed to inputs, things to do right), have annual milestones, and are long-term in nature; staff consistently adopts targets and works diligently to achieve them | |
| Staff Personal & Interpersonal Effectiveness | Staff members fail to show respect for others consistently, may be openly judgmental or critical; have difficulty influencing without using power, limited charisma or influence; limited curiosity about new ideas and experiences | Staff members earn respect of others, take time to build relationships; have presence, able to influence and build support using limited communication style; accept learning and personal development opportunities that arise | Staff members are respected and sought out by others for advice and counsel; have strong presence and charisma; use multiple approaches to gain buy-in, appreciate the impact of their words or actions; seek new learning and personal development opportunities | Staff members viewed as outstanding "people persons"; use diversity of communication styles, including exceptional charisma, to inspire others and achieve impact; continually self-aware, actively work to better themselves; outstanding track record of learning and personal development | |
| People & Organizational Leadership / Effectiveness | All staff and managers have difficulty building trust and rapport with others; micromanage projects; share little of own experiences as developmental/coaching tool | All staff and managers are responsive to opportunities from others to work together; express confidence in others' ability to be successful; share own experience and expertise | All staff and managers actively and easily build rapport and trust with others; effectively encourage others to succeed; give others freedom to work their own way; give people freedom to try out ideas and grow | All staff and managers constantly establishing successful, win-win relationships with others, both within and outside the organization; deliver consistent, positive and reinforcing messages to motivate people; are able to let others make decisions and take charge; find or create special opportunities to promote people's development | |

5. MANAGING EFFECTIVELY ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION (continued)

| Capacity Elements | LEVEL ONE: Clear need for increased capacity | LEVEL TWO: Basic level of capacity in place | LEVEL THREE: Moderate level of capacity in place | LEVEL FOUR: High level of capacity in place | Input capacity rating in this column |
|------------------------|---|---|--|---|---|
| Decision Making | Decisions made largely on an ad hoc basis by the CEO/ED and/or whomever is accessible; virtually all decision making authority is centralized in one or two people; divisions of roles and responsibilities among team members are neither formalized nor clear | Process for management team's decision making often breaks down and not always inclusive; management team authorized, but unlikely to make key decisions in CEO/ED's absence; most roles and responsibilities among team members are not formalized | Clear, inclusive systems for team decision making but decisions are not always appropriately implemented or followed; all roles and responsibilities among team members are formalized, but may not reflect organizational realities | Clear, formal lines/systems for decision making that draw upon expertise and input of all team members; roles and responsibilities among team members are formalized, clear and compliment each other | |

6. ADVANCING ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

| Capacity Elements | LEVEL ONE: Clear need for increased capacity | LEVEL TWO: Basic level of capacity in place | LEVEL THREE: Moderate level of capacity in place | LEVEL FOUR: High level of capacity in place | Input capacity rating in this column |
|---------------------------|---|--|--|---|---|
| Impact Orientation | Executive director and board focused purely on social impact; financials viewed as an unfortunate constraint; fail to deliver impact consistently; delay decision making; reluctant to change status quo; mandate rather than lead change; little ability to solve problems as they arise | Executive director and board focused on social impact with some appreciation for cost-effectiveness when possible; constantly deliver satisfactory impact given resources; promptly address issues; understand implications and impact of change on people | Executive director and board see financial soundness as essential part of organizational impact, together with social impact; focus on ways to better use existing resources to deliver highest impact possible; have a sense of urgency in addressing issues and rapidly move from decision to action; develop and implement actions to overcome resistance to change | Executive director and board guide organization to succeed simultaneously in dual mission of social impact and optimal financial efficiency; constantly seek and find new opportunities to improve impact; anticipate possible problems; have a sense of urgency about upcoming challenges; communicate compelling need for change that creates drive; align entire organization to support change effort; staff are frequent source of ideas and momentum for improvement and innovation | |