



**LEADERSHIP
ACADEMY**



Building Nonprofit Leaders

A Decade of Partnership
with American Express

Our Point of View,
Research, and Solutions

Introduction

Forces in politics, economics, and society constantly affect nonprofit organizations working on the front lines of enhancing the quality of life of the communities they serve. Nonprofit leaders need leadership skills to effectively manage the countless issues, personalities, and challenges they will encounter, and funders expect that organizations will be run by strong leadership. Lack of development and growth opportunities are often cited by nonprofit employees as a reason for why they leave their nonprofit organization. Given the high costs of employee turnover in dollars, productivity, and effectiveness, nonprofits have enormous incentive to focus on development.

As part of its strong commitment to philanthropy and learning, American Express teamed up with the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) in 2008 to confront the talent crisis head on and train emerging nonprofit leaders in the skills they need to move up, take on new responsibilities, and lead their organizations into the future. The result was the American Express Leadership Academy (AELA)—a program designed to address the special challenges nonprofit leaders face. To date, this partnership has hosted more than 130 programs across 12 countries, training more than 4,300 nonprofit and social sector leaders.

To commemorate the 10-year anniversary of our successful partnership with the American Express Leadership Academy, CCL embarked on an in-depth research project to better understand the leadership competencies needed for the nonprofit sector. To date, our experts have analyzed 12 years (2008–2020) of AELA participant 360-degree feedback ratings from the Benchmarks® for Managers™ assessment, which consisted of over 1,100 self-reported ratings and over 11,000 observations by bosses, direct reports, peers, superiors, and other colleagues. Across all rater categories there was consistent agreement on the top 5 most important competencies for leaders in the nonprofit sector.

Our research found that the top **5 most important competencies** for nonprofit leaders are:



Confronting Problem Employees

Acts decisively and with fairness when dealing with problem employees.



Change Management

Uses effective strategies to facilitate organizational change initiatives and overcome resistance to change.



Decisiveness

Prefers quick actions in many management situations.



Taking Initiative

Takes charge and capitalizes on opportunities.



Leading Employees

Delegates to employees effectively, broadens employee opportunities, acts with fairness toward direct reports.

Understanding the key competencies leaders in the nonprofit sector need is only half the equation. To build the field, we also wanted to understand where these leaders excel, and where (according to their raters) they need to develop to be more effective. The analysis also uncovered competencies where nonprofit leaders need the most development. The **top 5 areas for development** are:



- Change Management** | Uses effective strategies to facilitate organizational change initiatives and overcome resistance to change.
- Confronting Problem Employees** | Acts decisively and with fairness when dealing with problem employees.
- Decisiveness** | Prefers quick actions in many management situations.
- Taking Initiative** | Takes charge and capitalizes on opportunities.
- Leading Employees** | Delegates to employees effectively, broadens employee opportunities, acts with fairness toward direct reports.

In a recent survey, we asked our AELA alumni to reflect on the nonprofit sector more broadly and forecast key leadership challenges they will face. Our analysis identified several key themes about the major external forces influencing the success of nonprofit leaders (resources, career growth, political climate, talent) which could be most influenced by better preparing them to lead.

The most significant **leadership challenges of tomorrow for nonprofit leaders** include:

- Change management
- Talent management
- Innovation
- Promoting collaboration
- Marketing and communication
- Leveraging technology

Despite these challenges, AELA alumni leaders are still highly motivated and feel more equipped to lead, particularly after their experience with the Leadership Academy created by American Express and the Center for Creative Leadership. The program design focuses on these key challenges and incorporates CCL's research-based content on how to hold effective talent conversations with employees, influence people over whom they have no authority, and lead transformational organizational change. One-on-one personalized coaching and action plans also promote lasting impact. **AELA participants report better self-awareness, an improved capacity to learn, and gains in their ability to adapt, with 93 % reporting they felt confident in their ability to apply these new skills to improve the success of their organization.** Our collaborative partnership and long-term engagement with nonprofit leaders in this program has amplified our knowledge about nonprofit sector leadership challenges and enhanced our solutions for addressing them.

“The landscape in which nonprofits operate is changing, and it’s not yet clear what that new landscape is. Today’s nonprofit leaders need to operate in uncertainty, be able to explore untested approaches, and confidently lead through change management.”

Our Solutions

CCL's Societal Advancement team has decades of experience partnering with nonprofits to design, deliver, and evaluate leadership development efforts. Our solutions range from training programs for emerging, mid-level, and executive nonprofit staff to providing development opportunities for next-generation social sector leaders.

Frontline/New Leader Training

Nonprofits, like their corporate counterparts, often promote highly successful individual contributors to management roles without providing the necessary leadership development. CCL's solutions for frontline leaders help bridge this gap.



Frontline Leader Impact - A highly interactive, virtual experience that helps first-level managers develop a basic understanding of the competencies necessary for success, and a common leadership language among their peers. Frontline Leader Impact transforms participants into leaders by developing 6 critical competencies.



Lead 4 Success[®] - Using CCL's time-tested approach, the Lead 4 Success program moves leaders from average to high-performing by developing the 4 fundamental skills (self-awareness, learning agility, influence, and communication) in a robust training experience representing the essence of our proven leadership content.



CCL Boost[™] **For New Leaders** - An online tool based on CCL research that equips new managers with the leadership skills, confidence, and support needed to effectively transition into a management role. It provides 6 flips or tactics that new managers can use while on the job to attain immediate success in their new role.

Better Conversations Every Day[™] (BCE)

No matter the size of your organization, BCE helps build coaching skills, drive social impact, and create lasting change at scale. BCE's impact transcends that of a typical coaching skills program. It's for everyone and every single conversation — from the front desk to the corner office.

This scalable coach training for leaders creates a common mindset, skillset, and language and equips your people with the expertise, tools, and motivation to break down silos and bring your strategy to life.

Executive Team Development

Executive Team Development: The ability of your Executive Team to work together effectively may be the single most critical element in your organization's success. Partner with our experts in Senior Leadership Team Development, who can assess and improve executive team dynamics. Our proven, research-based guidance will help align your leadership and culture with your strategy and priorities.

Custom Leadership Development for Nonprofit Leaders & Organizations

Custom Programs: We can partner with you to help you make investments in your leaders that give you and your community the greatest possible return on investment. Our work is exceptionally thorough and focused on your needs. With a combination of leadership analytics, talent diagnostics, 360-degree assessments, and other instruments, we can do a deep dive into your leaders, your culture, your organizational priorities, and your employee engagement levels to help inform your investment in nonprofit leadership training.

DISCOVERY FRAMEWORK

Clarifying the discovery goals

From selecting the appropriate portfolio of learning assets to achieving organizational transformation, the scope of the discovery process varies according to your organization's needs and goals

Framing insights and challenges

We generate actionable insights for the development of a range of leadership solutions, customized for your organization



Design the approach

Using a streamlined approach, minimizing time and effort while maximizing insight, we design the discovery process with the right questions, target audience, and methods in mind

Facilitate the process

We guide you through the discovery process in a way that builds support and increases organizational readiness

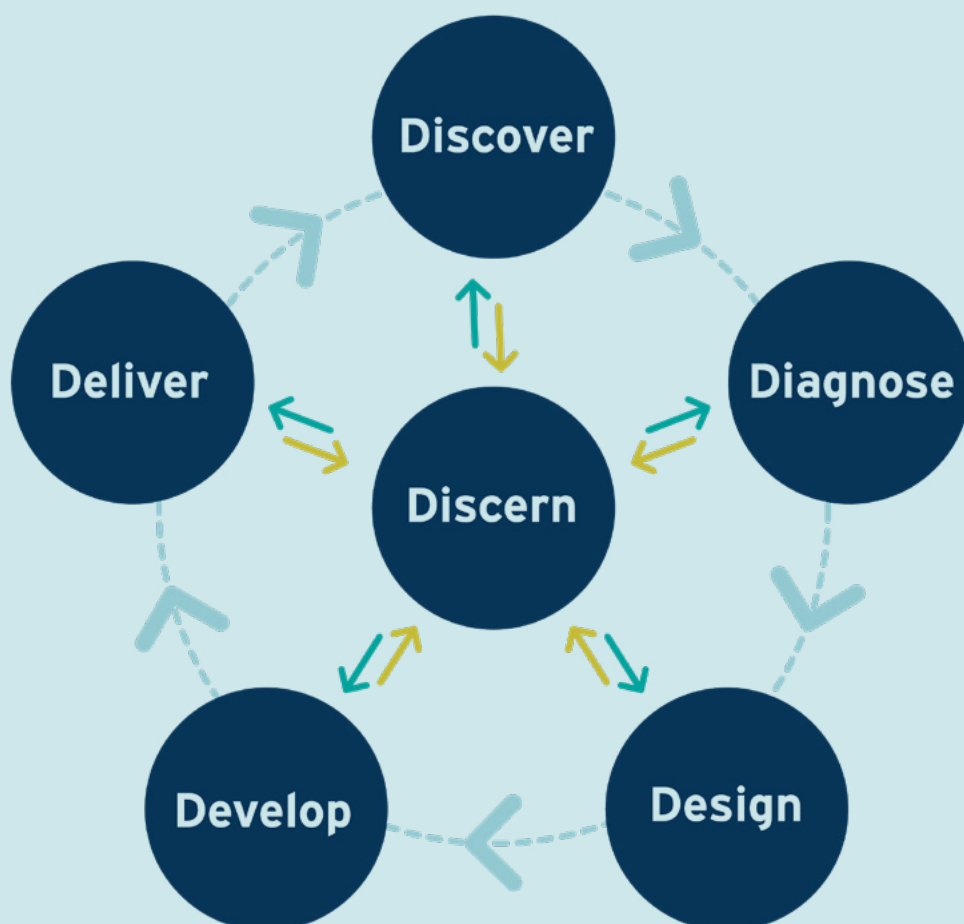
Equity, Diversity & Inclusion: We bring our decades of human-centered expertise and our understanding of intergroup challenges (social identity, outgroups, discrimination, privilege), and are ready to partner with you to craft custom solutions for your organization's specific context. Our evidence-based REAL™ framework focuses on helping leaders make the leap from awareness to meaningful action and sustainable culture change, to support equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace.

Evaluation Services: All programs incorporate evidence-based measurement and evaluation. We prioritize the collection of relevant data through our Culture Assessments, Climate Surveys, and Leadership Team Assessments, which are incorporated into the classroom experience so you leave with a clear understanding of how to improve outcomes.

How We Partner

CCL's client relationship process is built around understanding you. Our goal is to create solutions, insights, and impact that improve education. With each partner, our approach is consistent, but the outcome is one-of-a-kind. The D6 process is the basis for designing our leadership solutions and collaborating with you. Our methods of communication during the design process will range from face-to-face design meetings, design review webinars, weekly project team conference calls, and any other individual conversations needed to assure success.

- **Discover** your organizational challenges and context
- **Diagnose** your leadership need and outcomes
- **Design** your customized initiative
- **Develop** the detailed design and materials
- **Deliver** your solution
- **Discern** the impact



Contact Us

Your Business Partner will rally a team of solution designers, project managers, evaluation experts, and other skilled individuals, to begin planning your initiative.

Contact us, and the process can begin. Let's create results that matter.

Additional Resources



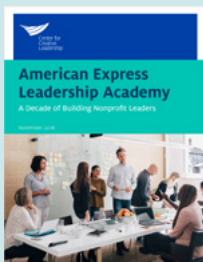
WHITE PAPER

[Confronting Wicked Problems: 5 Strategies for Reimagined Leadership in the Social Sector](#)



CASE STUDY

[McKnight Foundation: Leveraging leadership in Community Agriculture](#)



EVALUATION REPORTS

[American Express Leadership Academy: A Decade of Building Nonprofit Leaders](#)



WEBINAR

[Intentional, Inclusive, & Interdependent: Creating Effective Leadership in the Social Sector](#)



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