



**A Blueprint for Action:
Coaching as a Tool for Building Leadership and Effective
Organizations in the Nonprofit Sector**

Prepared for



GRANTMAKERS
for EFFECTIVE
ORGANIZATIONS

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OVERVIEW OF THE COACHING & PHILANTHROPY PROJECT

At the start of 2005, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation initiated the Coaching and Philanthropy (CAP) Project. The goal of this Project was to assess the prevalence of coaching within the nonprofit sector and advance its application as a strategy for cultivating strong leadership and building effective nonprofit organizations.

Widely used within the private sector by corporate leaders, coaching is a partnership that provides organizational leaders with structure and support for reflection, learning, visioning, goal setting and accountability. The CAP Project grew out of a belief that coaching has much yet to offer the nonprofit sector and is an underutilized tool for advancing leadership skills and building effective and healthy nonprofit organizations.

This Project was undertaken as a partnership between three organizations: Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO), a community of grantmakers working to define grantmaking practices that improve grantee performance; BTW – *informing change*, a strategic consulting and evaluation firm dedicated to informing change in the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors; and Leadership that Works (LTW), a coaching and training firm that provides a wide range of leadership development services. With GEO serving as the lead organization of this work, BTW assumed responsibility for assessing the demand for and interest in coaching within philanthropy. LTW conducted interviews and documented case studies to ascertain the capacity of the coaching field to provide effective support and services to nonprofits; they also undertook a number of efforts to organize coaches and coaching schools to engage with nonprofits.

A key component of the CAP Project was a research effort that is summarized in “Coaching as a Tool for Building Leadership and Effective Organizations in the Nonprofit Sector”¹ and focuses on the following topics:

- The philanthropic sector’s support of coaching for nonprofit grantees;
- The nonprofit sector’s interest in and demand for coaching;

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¹ This document is available for download on the Grantmakers for Effective Organizations website (www.geofunders.org).

- The availability of coaches and the readiness of the coaching profession to provide services to nonprofits; and
- The value that coaching has added or has the potential to add to the leadership and organizational capacity of nonprofits and the nonprofit sector.

In November of 2005, BTW convened 11 individuals representing a cross section of philanthropy, coaching and nonprofit organizations, together with the Project Partners, to serve as the CAP Design Team. They were charged with reviewing the Project’s research findings and contributing their best thinking to move the practice of coaching in the nonprofit sector forward. Over the course of their day-and-a-half session, the Design Team engaged in a conversation about the “state of the field” and ways to encourage the inclusion of coaching as a tool within the broader context of nonprofit leadership and organizational development efforts.

This document summarizes and organizes the recommendations generated by the Design Team. It is a “*Blueprint for Action*” that provides a framework around which a strategic effort can be developed to advance the application of coaching as an effective nonprofit leadership and organizational development tool. This Blueprint was prepared with philanthropy in mind since foundations provide the financial support that enables nonprofits to purchase the technical assistance, training and resources they need to build more effective organizations.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

Forty-two percent of the foundations surveyed provide their grantees with funds for coaching. Foundations report many benefits of coaching for grantees, including:

- Providing an objective and confidential ear;
- Offering a time and place to reflect on practice;
- Helping in problem solving and providing accountability;
- Providing assistance with balancing work/life issues;
- Increasing job satisfaction;
- Improving relationships between executive directors and their boards;
- Enhancing the application of training to organizational practice; and
- Accelerating the pace of change within organizations.

This “state of the field” assessment also revealed a number of important findings that have implications for moving forward, including:

- Foundation staff lack clarity about what constitutes coaching and how it differs from other forms of technical assistance, consulting and leadership support;
- Foundations are more likely to provide grants to support coaching if foundation staff or trustees have experienced a coaching relationship themselves;
- Many foundations view coaching as a supplement or enhancement to larger leadership and/or organizational development efforts;
- There is little research on how nonprofit coaching impacts leaders and organizations;
- The coaching field lacks cultural diversity and competencies; and
- There is a need for coach training programs that address the unique nature of nonprofit organizations.

✓ Launch Phase II of the Coaching Project

The Design Team's priority recommendation is the need for a Phase II of the CAP Project. Phase II should build the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors' knowledge about effective coaching and its impact, promote the value of coaching, and expand the sources of information available to foundations and nonprofits about coaching. The overall aim of Phase II is to establish coaching as an effective and ubiquitous tool within the nonprofit sector *as part of larger leadership development and organizational effectiveness capacity building strategies*.

The Design Team identified that the next phase of work needs to more intentionally include nonprofit leaders who have benefited from coaching as a leadership and capacity building tool. Phase II should be led by an organization with credibility in the field of philanthropy, with knowledge about the tools of organizational effectiveness and leadership development and experience in forging connections and healthy relationships between philanthropy and nonprofits. While this lead organization would "house" Phase II, the Design Team identified the need for a cross-sector collaborative to guide the work. The collaborative as a whole should include organizations with expertise and knowledge of philanthropy, nonprofits and the coaching field. The Design Team was also unanimous that cultural competency and diversity related to coaching needs to receive high priority and attention throughout all aspects of the work.

Phase II of the CAP Project should be designed to accomplish different but compatible goals for each of the key stakeholder fields:

- **For Nonprofits** – To increase the sector's understanding of how and when coaching is an effective leadership and organizational development tool so that nonprofit leaders are empowered with information that enables good decision-making.
- **For Philanthropy** – To build the sector's understanding of coaching as well as its value and contribution to cultivating stronger nonprofit organizations.
- **For the Field of Coaching** – To better connect the coaching "industry" with the independent sector and help the field place itself in the broader context of nonprofit leadership and organizational development resources.

By using a collaborative approach that involves key stakeholder organizations in governing Phase II, the effort is positioned to leverage knowledge, resources, needs and experience to ensure success.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTIONS

What follows are specific recommendations that came out of discussions at the Design Team Retreat. The recommendations fall into four areas of action: communications, knowledge development, training and expanding access to useful resources.

The Design Team agreed that the individual recommendations could be undertaken at varying times and to different extents, depending on available funds, interests and most importantly, opportunities.

✓ **Develop and Implement a Communications Plan**

Create target messages.

Develop messages designed for three specific target audiences:

- **For philanthropy** – that define the value of coaching and place it in a broader context of leadership and organizational development tools;
- **For nonprofits** – to encourage the use of coaches to advance nonprofit leadership and organizational effectiveness; and
- **For the coaching field** – to encourage the profession to orient practice toward the unique needs of the nonprofit sector as well as the wide diversity of backgrounds and cultures of the individuals in executive leadership roles.

Use common language.

Generate common definitions that enable effective coaching practice and distinguish coaching from other kinds of leadership development and capacity building tools.

Share testimonials and stories.

Collect stories from influential leaders and credible spokespeople who represent both the foundation and nonprofit fields. Tell the stories of coaching successes through case studies and individual profiles, with the names of individuals, organizations and foundations attached.

Disseminate research findings.

Publicize the availability of the CAP research findings especially to the foundation community. Consider developing a two-page brief that highlights the main findings and/or extrapolating and disseminating findings that are of relevance to each target audience.

✓ **Build Knowledge**

Identify and develop tools to enable good decision-making.

Identify the resources and tools needed by nonprofits and foundations that would facilitate their ability to employ coaching as a leadership and organizational development strategy. The Design Team identified the following as needed resources:

- A set of fact sheets or lists of frequently asked questions that respond to the specific needs of different audiences (nonprofits, philanthropy and coaching);

- A tool to assesses the readiness of nonprofit leaders and organizations for coaching;
- A diagnostic instrument and decision tree to help ensure a good fit between a coach and a nonprofit leader; and
- A tip sheet on the qualities and background to look for in a coach, such as training, orientation, nonprofit experience, cultural competencies and certification.

Conduct and share evaluations of nonprofit coaching.

Encourage, support and collect evaluations of coaching as a strategy for nonprofit leadership and organizational development. Since there is a dearth of evaluations of nonprofit coaching, it is especially important that evaluations assess the effectiveness of coaching on nonprofit leaders and their organizations and incorporate clear definitions of the type and nature of coaching provided. These efforts should include different coaching models to help foundations and nonprofits identify appropriate models for specific needs.

Facilitate dialogue and learning.

Sponsor gatherings of foundation staff as well as nonprofit leaders to discuss the benefits of coaching and share examples of where and how coaching has made a difference in the performance of organizations and their leaders. Support opportunities for reflection and learning (virtual and in-person) within and across sectors about how and to what end coaching is being used by nonprofits. Document these discussions and disseminate widely.

Introduce more nonprofit and foundation leaders to the benefits of coaching.

Give nonprofit and foundation leaders “tastes of coaching,” for example through coaching demonstrations, brief “curbside coaching” sessions at foundation and nonprofit conferences and group coaching experiences that are part of other professional development programs (e.g., executive director trainings and peer support groups).

✓ **Increase Training Opportunities**

Train nonprofit leaders who receive coaching to coach others.

Develop a cadre of nonprofit leaders with coaching skills. This could take place through small group coaching, peer-based coaching or one-on-one coaching. Training efforts for this purpose could be part of an existing effort, such as an add-on component for executive directors who receive coaching, or stand-alone initiatives, such as coach training for executive directors who want to coach members of their staff.

Build coaches’ capacity to work effectively in the nonprofit sector.

Identify and promote coach training models and internships that can be used to provide nonprofits with pro bono or low cost coaches-in-training and by coaching schools to provide students with exposure to the nonprofit sector. Explore ways to build coaches’ multicultural awareness and competencies and to support the coaching profession’s efforts to attract individuals from a wide range of cultures and communities.

✓ **Develop Resource and Referral Capacity**

Establish a clearinghouse.

Develop an inventory of existing coaching-related resources and tools as well as an ongoing capacity to identify, organize and make available new resources and tools as they come into practice. The first step in the process of developing such a clearinghouse is to scan the environment for resources that already exist and determine how best to either link with those resources or consolidate them to enable easy access for targeted audiences. In order for a clearinghouse to have sustained value, it will need continued attention and management after the initial data collection, including ongoing updating and publicity.

Disseminate resources.

Disseminate key coaching resources through existing mechanisms. Where possible, utilize existing professional gatherings, publications and listservs to promote awareness and understanding of nonprofit coaching—for example, presentations at key field conferences (e.g., GEO and Council on Foundations); articles in nonprofit, foundation and coaching publications; and teleconference educational sessions such as those already offered by Leadership That Works.

Facilitate coach referrals and matching.

Offer nonprofits and foundations assistance in identifying and selecting coaches. Utilize existing efforts that match coaches and nonprofit leaders, such as the Coaches' Alliance for Social Action's internet-based matching service.

Develop and share different funding models.

Clarify the costs of coaching, including the range of costs for different types of coaching, so that coaches, nonprofits and foundations know what to expect. Research and publicize innovative and creative ways to fund coaching (e.g., as a benefit in a nonprofit executive director's compensation and benefits package). Articulate the reciprocal benefits of nonprofit-coach relationships, such as what the nonprofit world can offer to coaches in lieu of full fees, what coaches receive personally when working with nonprofit leaders and how coaches contribute to building the coaching profession overall when working within the relatively new markets of nonprofits and philanthropy.

CONCLUSION

In the world of the independent sector, foundations and nonprofits depend on one another. Foundations look to their nonprofit partners to deliver programs and services that meet the needs of communities and solve important social problems. Nonprofits look to their foundation friends to provide financial support that enables them to carry out their mission-related work. To the extent that a nonprofit is high functioning, able to maximize efficiencies and deliver on its promise, the benefits accrue both organizationally and across the community as a whole.

It is within this frame of reference that the fields of nonprofit leadership development and organizational effectiveness have grown by leaps and bounds over the last decade. And it is within this frame of reference that coaching is emerging as a powerful tool for nonprofits. As the CAP Design Team considered the underutilized potential of coaching, they became convinced that there is a need to promote and expand its application across the sector. This Blueprint for Action is presented as a platform from which to launch that work.

For More Information ...

If you are interested in providing support to Phase II or if you would like more information about the Coaching and Philanthropy Project, please contact:

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Copies of Coaching and Philanthropy documents are available on the GEO website – www.geofunders.org.