

Who is Successfully Building Nonprofit Capacity?

The Fieldstone Foundation

Grantmaker works with partners to strengthen leadership for the social sector in two counties in California.

Quick Grantmaker Stats

Type of funder	Private foundation
Geography/Issue Area	San Diego and Orange counties, California
When founded	1983
Total assets (as of FY 2013)	\$4 million
Annual giving (as of FY 2013)	\$250,000
Number of staff	3
Website	www.fieldstonefoundation.org
Brief description of the program/practice being discussed	Continuum of programs aimed at building leadership skills and connections among nonprofit leaders.

1. Describe the situation or practice.

Originally established by a home-building company based in California, The Fieldstone Foundation has made leadership development a cornerstone of its mission. The foundation’s Leadership Network offers a continuum of programs designed to improve the capacity of nonprofit leaders and their organizations in Orange and San Diego counties in California.

In the wake of the Great Recession, the company that established the Fieldstone Foundation ceased operations in California. Although the company and the foundation had been under separate management, Fieldstone had always been supported by the profits of the Fieldstone Group of Companies — and now it had to decide if it would continue its work independently. The foundation contracted researchers at the University of San Diego to conduct focus groups and other research to assess the value of its work and possibilities for sustaining that work.

After the researchers reported that the foundation was having a positive impact, especially in the area of supporting nonprofit leaders, the board decided Fieldstone would continue as an independent entity focused on

leadership development for the sector. The Fieldstone Foundation currently operates its Leadership Network with a range of nonprofit and foundation partners, including the United Way of Orange County, the Orca Fund at the San Diego Foundation, the Westreich Foundation, Gumpert Foundation and the Orange County Community Foundation.

2. What have you tried to do differently?

The Fieldstone Foundation's Leadership Network offers a continuum of programs to provide training and learning opportunities to nonprofit leaders, while supporting them to build and deepen personal and professional relationships. Programs are available at little or no cost through the support provided by the Fieldstone Foundation and its funding partners. Key programs include:

Crossroads and Turning Points

This is a seminar series where nonprofit executives come together for a couple of hours or a half-day at a time. The focus: working with colleagues and expert practitioners and consultants to explore important issues facing the sector, as well as information and tools for leading their organizations to better results.

Executive Learning Groups and Coaching

These are groups that meet monthly over a period of six months to take a deep dive into important topics in nonprofit management and leadership. Conversations are guided by expert facilitators and use real case studies and cutting-edge research to allow participants to explore common issues from board development to team building, as well as to build trusting relationships among each other. The foundation also offers a year-long coaching program where executives who have graduated from the learning groups are trained by the foundation then paired with nonprofit leaders.

PEERS Fellowship

The Fieldstone Foundation and a group of business entrepreneurs and executives called the PEERS Network teamed up to create this fellowship program based on an entrepreneurial framework. The program offers an opportunity for a nonprofit executive director to work with an executive coach, attend a leadership development program at Stanford, Harvard or another institution, and work with a mentoring group of PEERS Network members for one year.

Fieldstone@4 Networking Events

Every quarter, the Fieldstone Foundation provides space for nonprofit leaders to gather informally in a place in their community. As the foundation describes

the program on its website, “Each Fieldstone@4 gathering is a forum to lead discussions, join conversations, brainstorm together, or be rejuvenated, inspired and supported by your peers. It is an open canvas for the Fieldstone Learning Community to design and use as part of its personal and community leadership development.”

Leadership Retreats

In cooperation with the Center for Courage and Renewal in Seattle, the Fieldstone Foundation organizes an annual leadership retreat for nonprofit executives and emerging leaders participating in the foundation’s Leadership Network. The 2014 retreat, held in Santa Barbara, provided an opportunity for nonprofit leaders to recognize the importance and power of one’s stories and how they influence leadership capacity.

Clare Rose Sabbatical Program

Based on a similar program at the Durfee Foundation, the Clare Rose Sabbatical is a partnership between the Fieldstone Foundation and the Clare Rose Foundation. The program offers up to four nonprofit executive directors individual stipends and covers expenses of up to \$40,000 to travel, reflect or otherwise renew themselves in whatever manner they propose.

“At Fieldstone, we strive to provide those places and pathways for critical connections to occur naturally so that nonprofit organizations can continue to lift up and improve our world with efficiency, effectiveness, and a generosity of spirit.”

— Janine Mason, Executive Director

3. What has been the result?

At last count, more than 1,500 individuals had participated in Fieldstone Leadership Network programs since the program’s inception in 1994. In an evaluation by the University of San Diego’s Caster Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research in 2012, two-thirds of participants said their understanding of leadership changed as a result of the network. Two-thirds also said they use knowledge gained through their participation in the network every week, while an additional 28 percent said they use this information monthly.

“Fieldstone has enabled me to tackle founder’s syndrome, plan past my tenure as the founder/CEO, complete high-level 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,” said one survey respondent.

The University of San Diego researchers concluded: “The [Fieldstone Leadership Network] 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 [network’s] continuum of programs help strengthen nonprofit leaders, increase 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.”

4. What are your key insights from doing the work?

According to Executive Director Janine Mason, the Fieldstone Foundation has learned three key lessons about how best to support leadership in the social sector. These lessons are:

- The leadership capacity of a nonprofit executive plays a critical role in the organization’s overall ability to fulfill its mission.
- Nonprofit leaders require a trusted cohort of fellow professionals to be a resource and ally in their work.
- Nonprofit leaders need multi-generational and cross-sector learning opportunities to expand their perspectives and manage staff effectively.

These lessons guide the strategic priorities for the Fieldstone Leadership Network, which are illustrated in the graphic below:

