

Evaluation of Leading for Impact®





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Executive Summary

Overview

[Leading for Impact®](#) (LFI) is a capacity building program for nonprofit executive teams developed and implemented by The Bridgespan Group (Bridgespan). LFI aims to help nonprofits increase their impact by honing strategy and improving executive team performance. As of March 2022, LFI has worked with 373 nonprofits across the United States, with budgets totaling over \$5B, to help executive teams increase their organization's impact through interactive classroom sessions, real-world team-led projects, and intensive support from Bridgespan coaches.

While Bridgespan conducts ongoing program evaluation with active LFI cohorts, the longer-term impact of the program was an area of interest for further exploration. In early 2021, Bridgespan contracted [Harder+Company Community Research](#) to conduct an evaluation of LFI with the goal of understanding the lasting impacts of the program on organizational outcomes as well as the leadership capabilities of individual participants. This evaluation explored the areas of inquiry using a mixed methods approach, which included an online survey and interviews with LFI alumni.

Key Findings

Participant Satisfaction

- Overall, LFI alumni were **highly satisfied with their program experience**, even years after they completed the program. Respondents reported an overall net promoter score (NPS) of 45%, which is comparable to NPS's collected at 6-month and 18-month evaluations (51% and 56%, respectively).
- Learning **to apply tools and frameworks** was often noted as the most **valuable aspect of the program experience**, and alumni continued to leverage them post-program. Respondents frequently cited that the tools and frameworks taught and applied in LFI were, and continue to be, useful and applicable to their current organizational operations.
- While LFI alumni had **overall positive experiences in the program**, **critiques surfaced** related to the type and intensity of supports provided, the level of peer engagement, and additional considerations around equity. Based on an analysis of 226 open-ended survey responses, respondents highlighted the desire for LFI to offer 1) deeper implementation support, 2) deeper coaching support, 3) more peer engagement, and 4) more equity-focused content.

Impact on Individual Participants

- LFI supported the development of organizational leaders by **building their knowledge and skills**. Most respondents (93%) agreed that "LFI helped [them] build capabilities, knowledge, and/or skills that supported [their] development as individual leader[s]".
- LFI's **learnings continued to be relevant** and support leader's work post-program – even for those who participated 5+ years ago. Most

respondents (88%) agreed that they have applied things they learned in LFI to their own work in the last year, which indicates the power of the lessons, tools, and experiences that LFI offers.

- LFI **empowered and instilled confidence** in some leaders. Some interviewees reported that participating in the program helped them grow with respect to owning their leadership roles and being confident in their knowledge, skills, and capabilities.
- LFI shows **promise for positively impacting leaders' career trajectories**, especially leaders of color. Respondents reported varied perceptions on the extent to which participation in LFI improved their career trajectory. While the largest percentage of respondents (45%) reported LFI had a positive perceived impact on their career trajectory, a considerable percentage (40%) responded neutrally, and BIPOC leaders agreed with this statement more compared to white leaders.

This finding is encouraging given the program's increasing focus on serving leaders of color, which includes active recruitment of organizations led by people of color and deepening of the equity-focus in coaching and classroom curriculum, thereby creating a powerful, supportive, and relevant place for BIPOC leaders to learn and grow.

Impact on Strategy, Executive Team Effectiveness, and Organization

- Overall, LFI generated **sustained improvements in strategic clarity** for organizations. Most respondents (86%) reported that LFI helped their organization gain greater strategic clarity. When comparing the post-program average to the data collected through LFI's 6- and 18-month evaluation efforts, respondents continued to rate this item highly – even years later.
- LFI had a **lasting impact on executive team capacity** and effectiveness. Over three-quarters of respondents (79%) agreed that LFI supported improvements in their executive team's effectiveness, and this is consistent with 6- and 18-month evaluation benchmarks.
- LFI supported **lasting improvements in some organizational operations**. Respondents who noted improvements in organizational performance shared perspective on what types of operational improvements they think have resulted from participating in LFI, which include internal processes are more efficient (74%) and organizational cultures were strengthened (59%).

Impact on Ultimate Social Outcomes

- LFI supported improvements in organizational performance **across organizations of varying sizes and types**. Overall, more than three-quarters of respondents agreed that participation in LFI helped improve their organization's performance (77%), and levels of agreement were consistent across organizations of different budgets and types.
- LFI played a role in **supporting the ability** of some organizations to **increase their external impact** in tangible ways. Most respondents shared that LFI supported greater strategic clarity and improved executive team effectiveness – thus improving organizational performance (77%).
- For those respondents who believed LFI supported improvements to their

external outcomes, **the largest percentage** (41%) identified this as supporting **improved client outcomes**. Increases in awareness and support for key issues that organizations care about emerged as the second most common type of increase in external impact (42%), followed by more clients served also emerged as a top improvement (31%).

It is worth noting that, among some survey respondents and interviewees, it was difficult to identify tangible changes that participation had on their ultimate social outcomes for legitimate reasons. First, some respondents and interviewees noted LFI was potentially just one of many factors that supported increases in external impact, and it would be difficult to draw a direct connection between participation and ultimate outcomes. Second, many participants noted that, aside from perception, it is difficult to concretely measure their external impact, let alone identify the extent to which it has increased, remained the same, or decreased since participating

Evaluation Key Insights

The following synthesizes the evaluation findings into a few brief insights. These insights are general conclusions from the external evaluation team's perspective, based on the data collected, about LFI's longer-term impact on executive teams and their organizations.

- LFI created an important venue for executive teams to learn about and collaborate on key issues, and this experience had lasting impact on perceived organizational performance.
- The program's strength is in the cumulative experience of classroom sessions, applied team projects, and coaching supports, and the resulting insights generally stayed with teams long after the experience ended.
- While LFI was most impactful with respect to its stated outcomes (strategy, organization, and team effectiveness), the experience came with additional benefits for individual leaders that continued post-program.
- Organizations of all sizes and types can benefit from LFI, however consideration to timing, executive team capacity, and contextual factors is important to maximize its impact.

Concluding Remarks

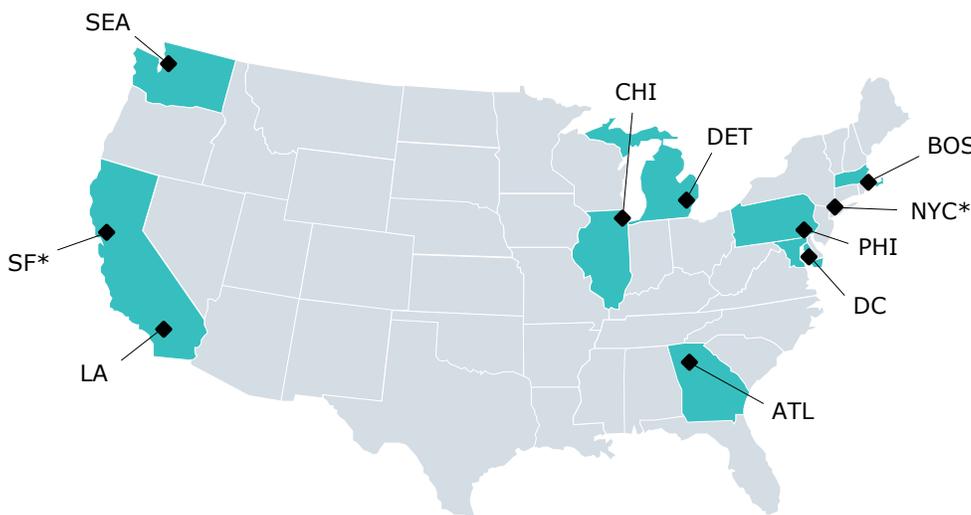
The Bridgespan Group's commitment to providing nonprofit organizations across the country with high-quality capacity building supports has, generally, resulted in improved performance for most of the participants and organizations this evaluation reached. Findings also show that LFI empowered executive team members to lead with new or improved knowledge, skills, and confidence. While LFI has room for growth and will undoubtedly evolve over time, this evaluation found that LFI serves an important function in the nonprofit capacity building space – helping organizations “lead for impact”. ✦

Introduction

[Leading for Impact®](#) (LFI) is a capacity building program for nonprofit executive teams developed and implemented by The Bridgespan Group (Bridgespan). LFI aims to help nonprofits increase their impact by honing strategy and improving executive team performance. As of March 2022, LFI has worked with 373 nonprofits across the United States, with budgets totaling over \$5B, to help executive teams increase their organization’s impact through interactive classroom sessions, real-world team-led projects, and intensive support from Bridgespan coaches.

LFI launched its pilot cohort in San Francisco in 2012 with five nonprofits. Over the last 10 years, LFI has fully expanded to more than eight metropolitan cities across the country and has reached over 400 executive teams and more than 2,200 nonprofit leaders. In recent years, Bridgespan has also launched [The Bridgespan Leadership Accelerator](#), which is a series of online, project-based, self-study programs with activities to help nonprofit executive teams build and apply critical strategy and leadership skills. These programs build on LFI by adapting the curriculum in an innovative format that has the potential for a much broader reach.

Figure 1. LFI Cities, 2012-Present, Pilot Cities*



LFI’s design draws on adult learning theory, which posits that adults learn best by doing¹. Over the two-year period, executive teams participate in an interactive classroom series comprised of six full-day workshops that span a variety of topics from setting strategy to leading organizational change. In tandem, executive teams complete projects that apply classroom learning to develop solutions for critical organizational issues they are experiencing. Bridgespan also provides each executive team with individualized coaching throughout the program to guide them as they work together on important issues.

About the Evaluation + This Report

While Bridgespan conducts ongoing program evaluation with active LFI cohorts, the

¹ [The 70-20-10 Rule for Leadership Development](#). Center for Creative Leadership, November 2020.

LFI’s National Reach

Atlanta, GA | 2014-2018

40 nonprofits

Boston, MA | 2017-2021

54 nonprofits

Chicago, IL | 2017-2022

66 nonprofits

Detroit, MI | 2019-2023

40 nonprofits

Los Angeles, CA | 2020-2024

50 nonprofits

New York, NY | 2012-2013

5 nonprofits, pilot city

Philadelphia, PA | 2021-2025

50 nonprofits

San Francisco, CA | 2012-2014

10 nonprofits, pilot city

Seattle, WA | 2016-2020

50 nonprofits

Washington D.C. | 2016-2020

52 nonprofits

longer-term impact of the program was an area of interest for further exploration. In early 2021, Bridgespan contracted [Harder+Company Community Research](#) to conduct an evaluation of LFI with the goal of understanding the lasting impacts of the program on organizational outcomes as well the leadership capabilities of individual participants. The evaluation's areas of inquiry include:

- **Impact on Individual Participants.** To what extent did individual team members experience growth in leadership capabilities, knowledge, and skills from participation in LFI? Did participation in LFI positively affect the career trajectories of individuals? If so, in what ways?
- **Impact on Strategy and Organizations.** To what extent did participation in LFI lead to improved strategic clarity? Did participation in LFI support lasting improvements in strategic direction and organizational operations? If so, in what ways?
- **Impact on Executive Team Effectiveness.** To what extent did participation in LFI lead to more effective executive teams? Did participation in LFI support lasting improvements in organizational and team effectiveness? If so, in what ways?
- **Impact on Ultimate Social Outcomes.** To what extent did executive team participation in LFI support organizations' mission achievement? If so, in what ways did the program impact organizations' ability to achieve their ultimate social outcomes?

This evaluation explored the areas of inquiry using a mixed methods approach, which included an online survey and interviews with LFI alumni. The survey included open- and closed-ended questions to understand what survey respondents believed to be the lasting impact of executive team participation in LFI on its organization's strategy, operations, and ultimate social outcomes. While LFI is a team-based program, questions to gain insight into whether participation leads to improvements in leadership capacity of individuals were also included. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of LFI participants to further inquire if LFI supported increased organizational performance, and if so, what program elements were most powerful in driving those improvements, as well as feedback about the positive aspects of the program and areas of opportunity.

This report synthesizes and triangulates all the data collected in this evaluation to describe LFI's lasting impact on organizations and their executive teams. It begins with describing respondents' reflections on their program experience (i.e., program satisfaction). This report then describes LFI's impact on individuals, followed by strategic and organizational improvements, executive team improvements, and finally, impact on ultimate social outcomes. Lastly, considering Bridgespan's commitment to growth and continuous learning, areas of strength and opportunity are noted throughout.

Note: This report describes findings from the evaluation of the standard two-year LFI program model (not including the Leadership Accelerator) which has evolved significantly over its lifespan. #

Survey Sampling Metrics

- **281** survey responses were analyzed (n=281)
- **6** LFI cities were represented
- **~23%** of LFI's alumni roster participated in the survey
- **98%** of respondents completed the entire survey
- **84%** of respondents completed the classroom sessions and both projects
- **16%** of respondents completed the classroom session and the first project, but left their organization before the second project
- **12** LFI alumni were interviewed

Participant Satisfaction with the LFI Experience

LFI aims to create a meaningful engagement for executive teams and one in which individual participants reflect on as being a valuable experience. Survey respondents were asked to reflect on the totality of their experience and report their satisfaction post-program and the extent to which they would recommend the program to a colleague. While LFI has collected and continues to collect satisfaction data from active cohorts, this evaluation sought to understand if program satisfaction changes as participants do or do not have opportunities to apply learnings or if satisfaction remains steady over time.

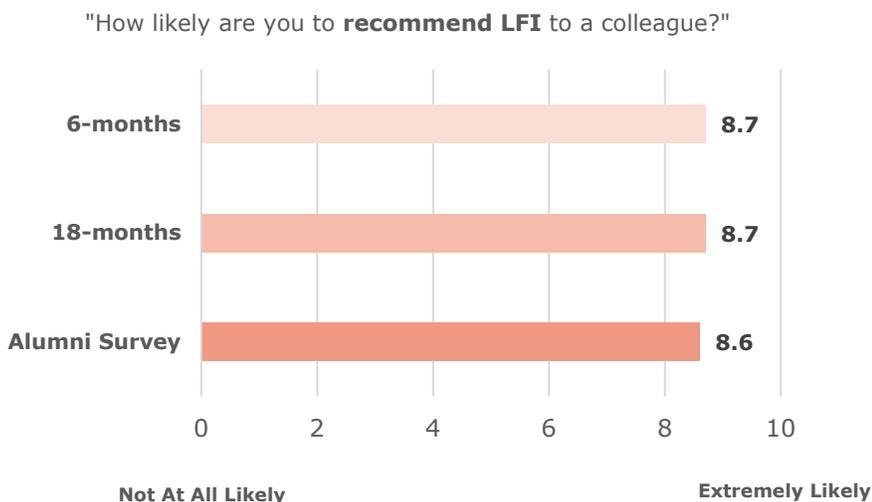
Overall Satisfaction with Program Experience

Respondents were asked to respond to the item, "How likely are you to recommend LFI to your colleagues now?" This item is the key indicator of satisfaction in LFI's ongoing program evaluation at 6- and 18-months, which allowed for comparison over multiple time points.

Overall, LFI alumni were highly satisfied with their program experience, which is consistent with data collected from active cohorts over time.

Respondents reported an average satisfaction of 8.6, which is comparable to satisfaction data collected at 6-month and 18-month evaluations (average of 8.7 for both points in time). This suggests that satisfaction with the LFI experience does persist over time.

Figure 2. Average Reported Satisfaction with LFI Over Time



90%

Percent of respondents who rated their **satisfaction with LFI** as a **7 out of 10 or better**.

Learning to apply tools and frameworks was often noted as the most valuable aspect of the program experience, and alumni continued to leverage them post-program. Respondents frequently cited that the tools and frameworks taught and applied in LFI were, and continue to be, useful and

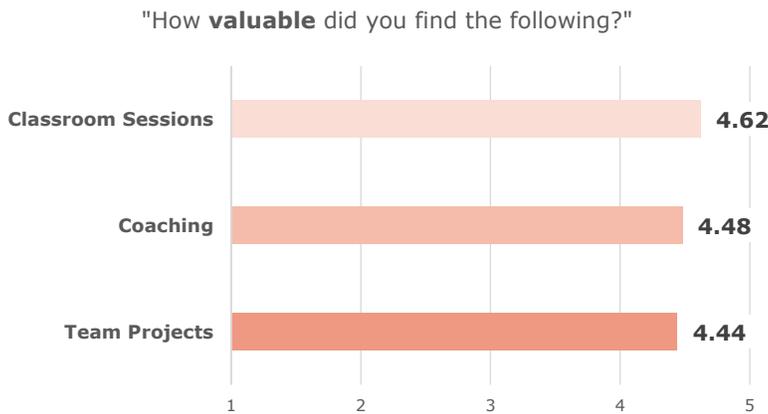
applicable to their current organizational operations. One interviewee noted, “Organizationally, we’ve been using the RAPID framework, it has helped us realize where the problem is – we do not have a clear decision-making process. So, [having the skills to identify] what the decision is and walking through [the RAPID prompts] has just been incredibly helpful. We still use the templates and [framework] slides.”

The Value of LFI’s Core Program Elements

In addition to asking respondents to reflect on their overall satisfaction with the program, they were also asked to reflect on the value of each of LFI’s core program elements: classroom sessions, team projects, and coaching from a Bridgespan consultant. Bridgespan also collects these data points for classroom sessions and team projects at regular intervals in evaluation with active cohorts at the 6- and 18-month mark.

Each of LFI’s core program elements were considered “valuable” and worked together to create an impactful experience. Generally, respondents rated individual program elements as having a value close to or more than 4.5 out of 5 – which lands about halfway between the scales anchor points of “somewhat valuable” and “extremely valuable”. Respondents also rated all program elements as having about equal “value”. While there were minor differences in averages, they were not significant. Classroom sessions were rated the highest, followed by coaching then team projects. According to one participant, “I think the classroom sessions were helpful, particularly because it required our team to be together in one place in a space that was not our workplace to focus. It was really a luxury, and we had a lot of discussion, and I think it was important that we did. The projects were also useful.”

Figure 3. Average Reported Value of LFI Elements Post-Program



Coaching from a Bridgespan consultant received relatively high levels of satisfaction with an average score of 4.48 on a five-point scale. This was supported by primarily positive feedback in open-ended responses about the personalized nature of coaching and the expertise of the coaches themselves. One respondent shared, “[Our] organization was going through some significant organizational challenges and a leadership transition, and the LFI coaches were a real asset in helping us navigate during that time.” Few critiques about executive team coaching surfaced in the open-ended responses. These mostly referenced the varying level of coaching experience and topical expertise with some coaches being more skilled, thus more effective, than others.

“I think overall it was a great experience. I’m glad that I did it and that we did it as a senior team. Like I said, the two biggest outcomes, I think that were useful for us was one, really coming together as a new senior team and figuring out how do we work together? How do we show up as a unit? That was super helpful. And two, I would just say, around personnel and support, we got a lot of useful insight.”

For me, I would say it was less about the curriculum and much more about the community of peers that LFI pulled together for us. Having the opportunity to network in those spaces was super useful, critical, and helped us make connections that ended up being like business leads later, which was cool. That’s really the value I see from the experience overall. We had a great consultant team, really enjoyed them as people, very personable. They were eager to help and support us.”

-LFI Alumnus

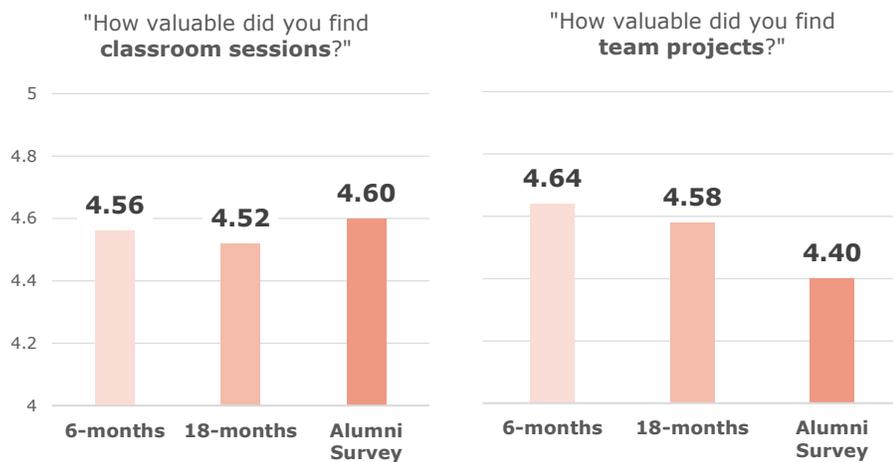
The perceived value of LFI’s classroom sessions and team projects persist post-program. While there are some relative differences in the reported average “value” of program elements over time, they are minor and do not translate to significant differences in a practical sense (i.e., the averages are still above 4, which indicates an absolute “high value” on a five-point scale). The value of classroom sessions increased slightly compared to reports at 18-months, which might be due to application of tools and frameworks presented in the classroom sessions to new situations and/or problems that the organization encounters post-program. One respondent noted that, “Several of the frameworks and real-world examples from the classroom sessions have been useful for thinking through our executive team’s point of view on strategic topics.”

“The coaching was extremely valuable. It provided support to help our team through the planning process and accountability to ensure that we followed through on implementation.”

-LFI Alumnus

The value of team projects decreases slightly compared to reports at 6- and 18-months, although not significantly. This suggests that projects completed in LFI, continue to have relevance and potential organizational impact even years after participation (see section “Impact on Strategy, ET Effectiveness, and Organization”). One participant reported, “As a member of the executive team, working collectively on the two capacity building projects, their design and implementation. Both projects have been embraced by [our organization] and remain a critical element of our practice.” No significant differences in perceived value emerged when viewing the data over time (across cohort years) or by cohort cities.

Figure 4. Average Reported Value of Program Elements Over Time



LFI’s Opportunities for Improvement

Finally, participants were probed to provide qualitative feedback about how the LFI experience could be improved related to program structure, content, and overall experience with the core program elements.

While LFI alumni had overall positive experiences in the program, critiques surfaced related to the type and intensity of supports provided, the level of peer engagement, and additional considerations around equity. Based on an analysis of 226 open-ended survey responses, respondents highlighted the desire for LFI to offer 1) deeper implementation support, 2) deeper coaching support, 3) more peer engagement, and 4) more equity-focused content. General themes and sub-themes related to areas of program improvement are listed on the next page.

Deeper Implementation Support (95 total responses)

Subtheme: Implementation/Ensuring Project Success

- "Help implementing and sustaining LFI concepts in organization in general and through turnover"
- "More content on implementation science"
- "Specific help ensuring LFI projects were effectively implemented"

Subtheme: Navigating the Pandemic/Change and Crisis Management

- "Particular support for navigating the specifics of the pandemic"
- "More content on navigating change"

Deeper Coaching Support (31 total responses)

Subtheme: Team Dynamics/Relationships

- "More help navigating inter-team dynamics"
- "Managing up to a dysfunctional CEO"

Subtheme: Executive Team Coaching

- "Desire for 1:1 coaching for whole executive team"
- "More content on navigating change"

More Peer Engagement (29 responses)

- "Desire to connect with and learn from others"
- "Desire for sustained relationships and ongoing check-ins"

More Equity-Focused Content (18 responses)

- "More overall [equity content]"
- "Focus on inclusive decision making"

With respect to equity specifically, approximately 67% of the responses about equity-focused content came from respondents who participated prior to 2018 (which account for 59% of all survey respondents), which might be an indicator that Bridgespan's expanded emphasis on equity and staff diversity in recent years has been successful.

Deeper coaching support, more peer engagement, and more equity-focused content also surfaced as themes in write-in responses in LFI's 6-month surveys from 2016-2021. This supports the idea that these are important areas for continued refinement. #

Key Learning: Maximizing the LFI Experience

Overall, respondents from organizations of all sizes and types reported that LFI was a valuable opportunity and "helped improve organizational performance". However, a minority of respondents shared considerations that they felt did not allow their teams to maximize the experience.

Bridgespan assesses "readiness" of executive team's based on several factors and should consider how to further support teams that might be experiencing the following to make the most of the experience.

Issues with timing, for example, participation amidst leadership turnover or significant organizational changes.

Lack of executive team capacity, such as the inability of team members to attend sessions, thus making it harder to garner buy-in to implement the team's projects.

Contextual factors, such as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to refocus attention to avoid disruptions to operations and programming.

Impact on Individual Participants

LFI was designed to be a team experience where executive team members convene to learn about and focus on important strategic and team effectiveness related issues. While the structure and content of the program is team-oriented, there are opportunities for individual participants to develop their leadership capacities, which was an important area of inquiry in this evaluation. To better understand whether LFI contributed to the growth of individual leaders, survey respondents were asked to reflect on the extent to which their participation impacted their leadership knowledge and skills, application of content to their own work, and impact on their career trajectory.

Development of Leadership Capacities

LFI supported the development of organizational leaders by building their knowledge and skills. Most respondents (93%) agreed that “LFI helped [them] build capabilities, knowledge, and/or skills that supported [their] development as individual leader[s]”. When prompted to elaborate on the types of knowledge and skills that were developed, respondents frequently named that the program supported their ability to view issues strategically and critically apply analysis and problem-solving techniques. An interviewee shared, “I think [participating in LFI] was helpful, especially when I think about the strategic thinking aspect of my role and of leadership. [It] pushed my ability to think about program design, evaluation and assessment, and decision making as a leader.” Respondents also frequently cited that LFI “gave them language” and exposed them to new tools to support team effectiveness – such as frameworks for facilitating meaningful and focused discussion as well as clear and effective decision-making processes.

LFI’s learnings continued to be relevant and support leader’s work post-program – even for those who participated 5+ years ago. Most respondents (88%) agreed that they have applied things they learned in LFI to their own work in the last year, which indicates the power of the lessons, tools, and experiences that LFI offers. In terms of content, participants across cohort years reported continued application of products resulting from their LFI projects as well as general frameworks, tools, and resources, even though LFI has evolved and improved over the years (see Figure 6).

LFI empowered and instilled confidence in some leaders. Some interviewees reported that participating in the program helped them grow with respect to owning their leadership roles and being confident in their knowledge, skills, and capabilities. An interviewee shared, “One of the biggest takeaways is just the confidence in who I am, what I can do, and what I can deliver to the organization. I think it [equipped] me with some great tools, but most importantly, just the confidence in who I am and what I could do.” A few interviewees and survey respondents also mentioned the potentially magnified effect LFI can have early in one’s leadership journey when leaders are still finding their style and growing into their roles – as one respondent shared, they “would have benefited from LFI earlier in [their] career.”

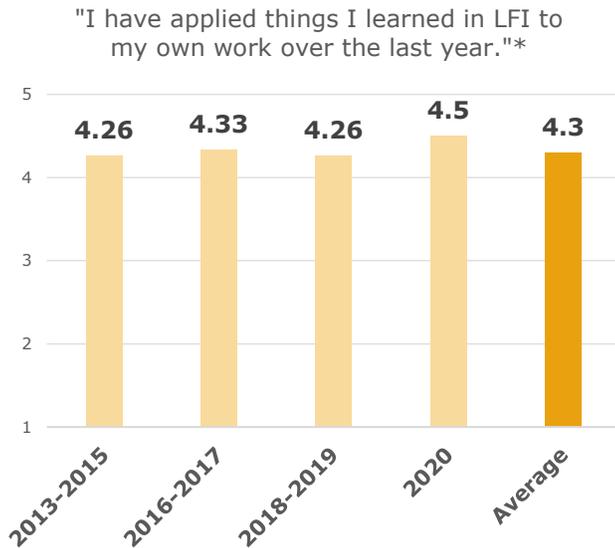
93%

Percent of respondents who agreed that **LFI supported their development as an individual leader**

“I do think LFI was helpful as a new executive to the site trying to figure out how to lead powerfully and create sustainable impact. Those broad skill sets were something that I think I walked away from the experience having. It was especially great just to be part of the cohort [and learning] from the [other] leaders.”

-LFI Alumnus

Figure 6. Average Reported Agreement by Cohort Year



*Generally, references Oct 2020 – Oct 2021, since survey responses were collected in Oct 2021.

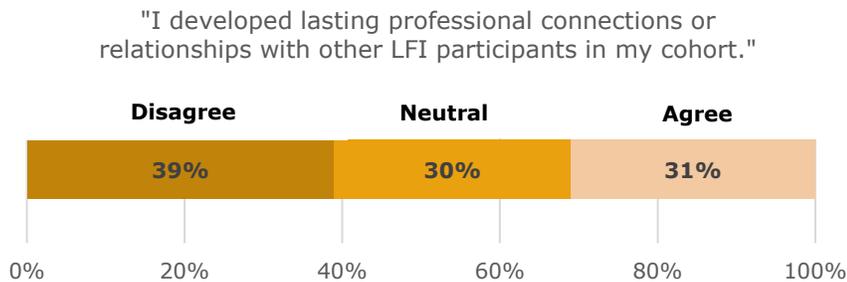
Expansion of Professional Networks

Nurturing connections and network building is an area of exploration/opportunity for LFI. Respondents’ experiences varied greatly in terms of developing professional lasting connections and relationships in the context of LFI – with large percentages of respondents either disagreeing or feeling neutral (39% and 30%, respectively). While respondents generally agreed that the cohort model enables a richer program experience (i.e., learning from other organizations and their experiences), many respondents did not make sustained connections with other cohort participants (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Percent of Participants at Varying Levels of Agreement

"I really valued the LFI experience. The most long-lasting outcome for me is that I remain in regular communication with the development cohort from my group, and it's expanded to include other development professionals."

-LFI Alumnus



Respondents also shared through the open-ended survey responses and interviews that they would have appreciated Bridgespan more intentionally nurturing this aspect of the experience (or at least creating venues/mechanisms for participants to keep connected post-program), for example, one respondent shared, "I wish the program had more deliberately encouraged networking/connections with others beyond the program". For those respondents that did make lasting connections, they reported finding it incredibly beneficial to connect with professionals in similar roles at other organizations or with organizations who share similar characteristics more generally. Bridgespan has considered ways for better supporting relationships

and network building within and across cohorts in the past, and it will likely remain an area for consideration with future cohorts.

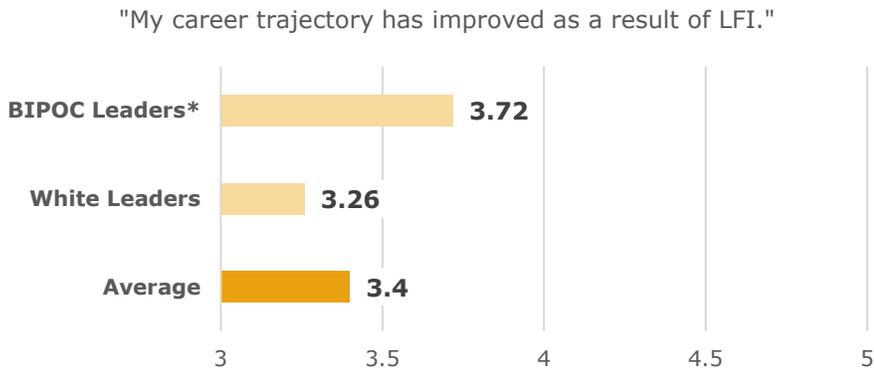
Impact on Career Trajectories

LFI shows promise for positively impacting leaders’ career trajectories, especially leaders of color. Respondents reported varied perceptions on the extent to which participation in LFI improved their career trajectory. While the largest percentage of respondents (45%) reported LFI had a positive perceived impact on their career trajectory, a considerable percentage (40%) responded neutrally. While shifting career trajectories is not necessarily an explicit focus or intentional outcome for LFI, black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC respondents) reported a significantly higher level of agreement ($p < 0.05$) with this sentiment when compared to white respondents. This finding is encouraging given the program’s increasing focus on serving leaders of color, which includes active recruitment of organizations led by people of color and deepening of the equity-focus in coaching and classroom curriculum, thereby creating a powerful, supportive, and relevant place for BIPOC leaders to learn and grow.

"I don't think [participating in LFI] tangibly [changed my career trajectory], but I think it made me better at my current job and made me grow in my role... But I do think [LFI provides] important information that has helped me in this role and that would help me in whatever my next role is, for sure."

-LFI Alumnus

Figure 8. Average Reported Agreement by Respondent Race/Ethnicity



*Statistically significant when compared to white leaders ($p < 0.05$).

Through open-ended survey questions and interviews, respondents and interviewees shared varied perspectives on what an “improved” career trajectory means to them. For example, a few respondents described tangible changes in position/responsibilities or promotion, but most others described it as increased leadership and professional capability that *could* lead to advancement in their current organization or with another organization. Better understanding the mechanism for improving career trajectories should be explored in future evaluations, since it certainly shows promise that many respondents perceived positive changes and growth with respect to their professional journey because of LFI. #

Impact on Strategy, Executive Team Effectiveness, and Organization

LFI aims to help executive teams become more strategic and effective in service of achieving their mission. Classroom sessions, team projects, and coaching are designed to teach participants new concepts, tools, and frameworks and exercise applied critical thinking skills and teamwork. LFI hypothesizes that organizations will become more efficient and effective in their operations, promoting a positive and equitable culture, and setting themselves up for growth and expansion in strategic ways because of participation. To better understand if and how participation in LFI resulted in sustained improvements to strategic clarity, executive team effectiveness, and organizational operations, survey respondents were asked to reflect on the extent to which the program supported their capabilities.

Impact on Strategic Clarity

Overall, LFI generated sustained improvements in strategic clarity for organizations. Most respondents (86%) reported that LFI helped their organization gain greater strategic clarity. When comparing the post-program average to the data collected through LFI's 6- and 18-month evaluation efforts, respondents continued to rate this item highly – even years later (see Figure 9). For context, about 60% of survey respondents began participating in LFI prior to 2018, which supports the notion that this perceived impact has persisted over time, especially since respondents across cohort years reported similar levels of agreement. Tangibly, many organizations referenced Intended Impact and Theory of Change models developed in the first team project, which have helped guide planning and decision-making about the strategic direction of the organization. One respondent noted, “strategic initiatives have remained focused, and growth has been steady” since participating in LFI.

LFI supported organizations’ ability to strategize in robust ways. To better understand the tactical ways in which LFI supported sustained improvements in strategic clarity, respondents were asked to reflect on how the program helped develop and strengthen specific strategic capacities. Two specific skills emerged as being promoted through gains in strategic clarity: planning for the future and improving and evolving existing program offerings (see Figure 9).

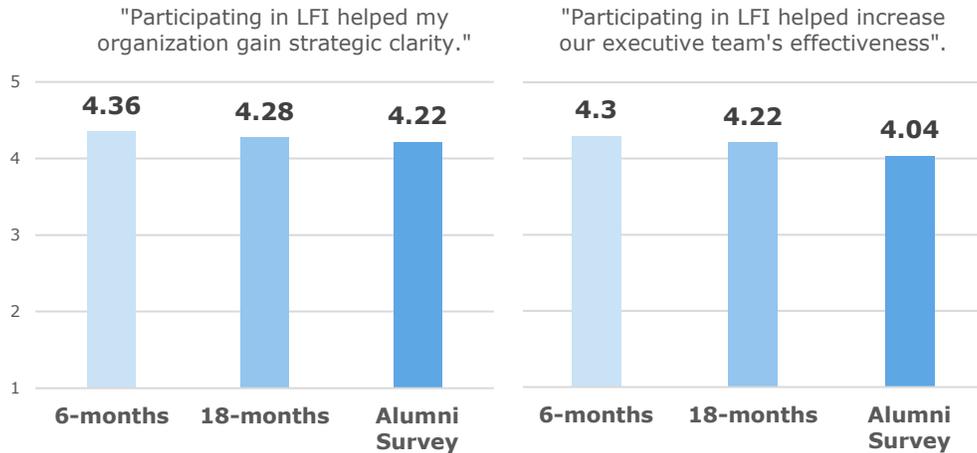
86%

Percent of respondents who agreed that **LFI helped** their organization **gain greater strategic clarity**

“Our work on developing the organizational theory of change has been the foundation of how we talk about our work to each other and the community. The theory of change has been incredibly useful in describing the work of our complex organization and is the bedrock on which our new strategic plan is being developed.”

-LFI Alumnus

Figure 9. Average Reported Agreement Over Time



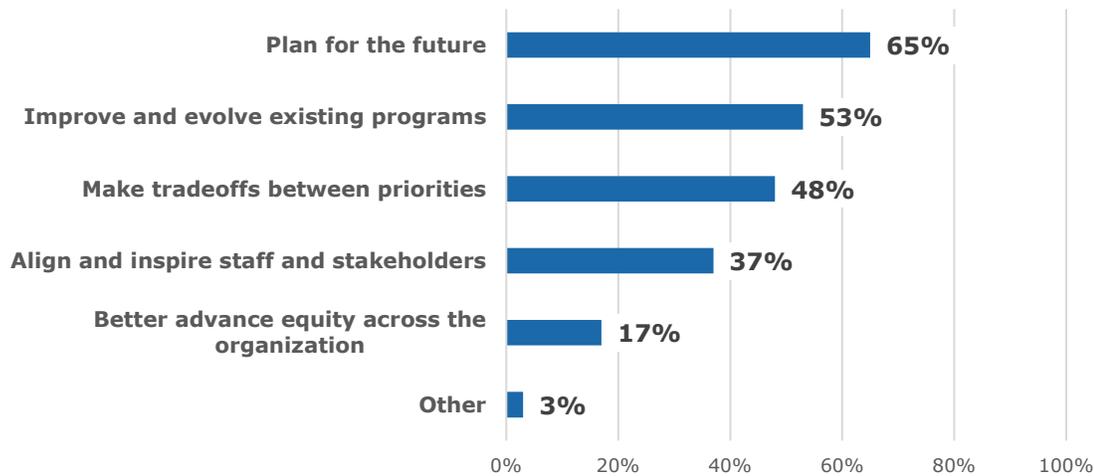
"Our work on developing the organizational theory of change has been the foundation of how we talk about our work to each other and the community. The theory of change has been incredibly useful in describing the work of our complex organization and is the bedrock on which our new strategic plan is being developed."

-LFI Alumnus

Of respondents who agreed that LFI helped achieve greater strategic clarity, 65% noted an increased ability to plan for their organization’s future. In some cases, respondents shared how lessons, projects, and coaching in LFI were directly applicable to newly commissioned strategic planning efforts as well as ongoing management and development of human and financial resources (i.e., plans for growth).

Figure 10. Percent of Respondents Selecting Options as "Most Important" Benefits

Top Ways LFI Supported Organizations via Greater Strategic Clarity



As a precursor to the strategic planning process, some respondents noted that improvements in strategic clarity occurred through honing the organization’s purpose and their commitment to their target population and outcome areas of interest, for example, “advancing education for youth of color.” This clarity supported teams’ abilities to tightly focus on identifying the strategies that would most directly generate the desired outcomes and to curate language for communicating purpose and commitments to external stakeholders. One respondent shared, “[My team was] able to clarify our target population, which had always been loose, and really focus on who we were really trying to serve, which in turn allowed us to focus our fundraising efforts more deeply.”

Improving and evolving existing programs was also noted by more than half of the respondents (53%) as a top way that LFI supported their work. In open-ended responses, respondents shared this occurred primarily in two ways: improving program quality (often done by leveraging assessment and evaluation methods) as well as working through issues of program alignment and assessing how programs and initiatives do or do not fit in the context of a strengthened theory of change and/or strategic direction.

Impact on Executive Team Effectiveness

LFI had a lasting impact on executive team capacity and effectiveness.

Over three-quarters of respondents (79%) agreed that LFI supported improvements in their executive team’s effectiveness, and this is consistent with 6- and 18-month evaluation benchmarks (see Figure 11). One respondent shared, “The Senior Team Effectiveness framework was extremely powerful. We gained tools that strengthened our effectiveness as a senior team, including developing behavioral norms, strategic priorities, and structures to advance our work, templates for forward thinking, more strategic leadership team meetings, and strategic guidance for defining roles and responsibilities for the CEO and ED. These were invaluable tools that have strengthened our effectiveness as a team.”

“We [created] a tool that we can use for evaluation and program planning purposes that builds criteria for impact and sustainability. We have used this information for strategic planning, budgeting, comparisons to other programs, and evaluation measures for auditing purposes.”

-LFI Alumnus

Figure 11. Percent of Respondents Selecting Options as “Most Important” Benefits



When respondents were prompted to think about what competencies resulted from increased team effectiveness, two things emerged as clear front runners: team’s ability to focus on the right issues and ability to make decisions more effectively (66% and 49%, respectively – see Figure 11). This increased capacity, according to open-ended responses, transformed the way respondents’ teams functioned by helping them make the most of limited time they have together as well as implement clear decision-making processes, which for many were unclear and lacked language prior. One interviewee shared, “I think LFI supported [our leadership team] because it allowed us to not get bogged down with things that, in many cases, didn’t matter. It allowed us to realize that with our leadership team, there are things that we talk about and things [we] don’t, and we now understand [the difference]. [Having] that focus, I think, was critically important for us.”

79%

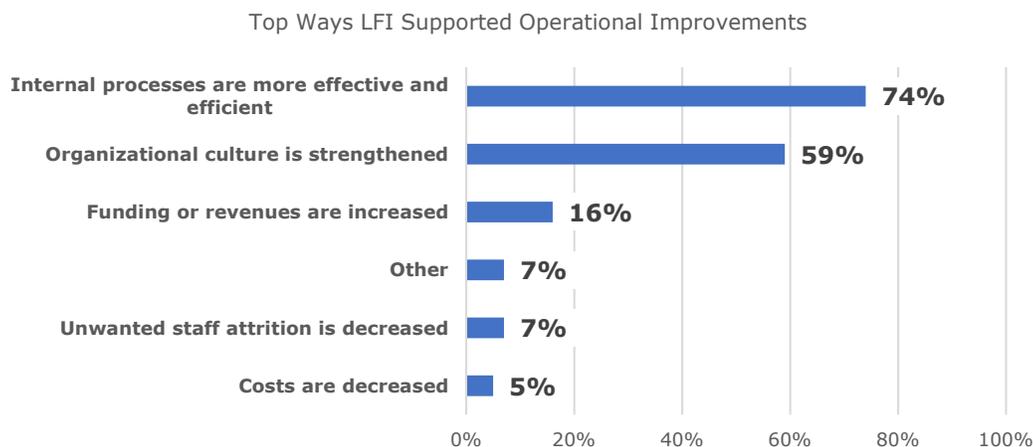
Percent of respondents who agreed that **LFI helped improve their executive team’s effectiveness**

Impact on Organizational Operations

LFI supported lasting improvements in some organizational operations.

Respondents who noted improvements in organizational performance shared perspective on what types of operational improvements they think have resulted from participating in LFI. Two types of improvement were articulated by most participants: more effective and efficient internal processes and strengthened organizational culture (74% and 59%, respectively).

Figure 12. Percent of Respondents Selecting Options as "Most Important" Benefits



Talent management and engagement were areas of internal improvement that respondents mentioned frequently as benefiting from participation in LFI. Many respondents noted that these in the context of open-ended responses as being more clearly articulated/defined and generally more effective. One respondent shared, "LFI helped us rebuild our onboarding process for new staff. I think the staff that benefited the most from our work at LFI was all our new staff that came in after the 2019 fiscal year – 2020 and beyond. I think that was critical and helpful for [several] reasons but primarily, there was a lot of helpful content around uniting employees around a vision and a mission." Another respondent shared, "We definitely improved our hiring process overall, and that work was led by our HR staff. I think that improved, especially because of the second-year project."

Respondents were less inclined to report improvements in other operations (such as fundraising, reductions in turnover, and decreased costs) and cautious to name that these were improved because of participation in LFI specifically (see Figure 12). For example, one respondent shared, "We certainly have seen an increase in our funding and specifically our donations, our individual donations. We ended the year very strong this past year. I don't think it's causation, just having done LFI... I don't know that that's what's causing it. I mean, it's probably helpful. I do know that some things, like staff attrition, we're trying to gather the information on. I don't know if it's been able to make any changes just yet, but at least what the dashboard is doing is letting us know what's happening to be able to look at it."

LFI contributed to improvements in organizational cultures. Of respondents who thought LFI supported operational improvements, 59% reported strengthening of organizational culture. One respondent shared, "I think that LFI has definitely helped [organizational culture]. We did a very specific activity around defining our core values... We revisit it at every staff meeting, and that has carried on. It's been incorporated into our job descriptions and when we talk about our values, so that I

"[In] my department, for example, I had so many programs and so many staff – so much work that I was responsible for, 40+ employees. Looking back, I don't know how I was able to manage the way I did. I think I was just working around the clock every day, and that's not sustainable, right?"

"[We worked towards] creating a sustainable number of direct reports and building capacity within each of the sub-departments [and] we created a level of supervisors, managers, directors, and what I call 'frontline staff'. That was the pivoting point for me specifically, is creating that structure after we went through the process."

-LFI Alumnus

think it is 100% LFI-related and has [been sustained].” While some respondents described improvements to organizational culture directly, through increased direct focus on mission clarity and core values, many respondents noted that improvements in organizational culture occurred as a result of other processes (namely, decision-making processes) being clearer. The idea of “transparency” surfaced as an important mechanism that promotes this, for example, one respondent shared, “As an executive team, I found the projects to be particularly helpful in organizing our decision making and allowing for transparency to our agency about how we are making our decisions.”

Respondents also made distinctions related to the culture of the executive team itself, which related back to overall executive team effectiveness, and the organization overall. Some respondents acknowledged the idea that the executive team plays a critical role in defining the culture for the entire organization. One respondent shared, “Participating in LFI helped clarify that the culture of our (or any) organization is set from the top, and without buy-in, the culture will not change no matter how much time or money is invested in the process.” 📌

“The tools and strategic thinking became a part of what provided the road map to me for leading the organization. It strengthened my clarity about what was important to build a positive culture and strengthened our foundation which has allowed for growth.”

-LFI Alumnus

LFI’s Contributions to Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is especially important in the nonprofit sector, given the values-driven nature of the work. According to [SHRM](#), “the key to a successful organization is to have a culture based on a strongly held and widely shared set of beliefs that are supported by strategy and structure.”

According to past participants, LFI served as a venue for executive teams to learn about and practice using tools that have the potential to positively impact their organization’s culture – by helping them clarify the HOW (strategy) and WHY (mission) as well as improving how the executive teams work together to effectively lead the organization. Of participants who reported LFI supported improvements to organizational operations, 59% reported that their “organizational culture was strengthened” as a top benefit. Survey respondents and interviewees shared, from their perspective, how LFI supported their ability to shepherd improvements to organizational culture which, for some, has resulted in greater alignment on mission and values, increased transparency, and higher levels of trust across the organization.

Generating Awareness. Some participants noted LFI supported leaders in understanding what is important for shifting and nurturing a strong organizational culture. One alumnus shared, “the tools and strategic thinking [from LFI] became a part of [my] road map for leading the organization. It strengthened my clarity about what was important to build a positive culture and strengthened our foundation which has allowed for growth.”

Developing Language. Some participants noted LFI helped to create common language and core practices for better organization wide communication. One alumnus shared, “the most valuable aspects [of LFI] were the shared language and associated concepts we developed in strengthening our communication both among Senior Leadership members and the rest of the staff.”

Establishing Norms. Some participants noted LFI supported their teams in setting value and behavior norms that ultimately impact how the organization is led. One alumnus shared, “[LFI provided] tools and resources, [and we] developed leadership norms that have helped us lead the organization and develop future leaders.”

[Understanding and Developing Organizational Culture](#), SHRM.

Impact on Ultimate Social Outcomes

LFI aims to support executive teams to achieve their goals and create meaningful change for the individuals and communities. Over the two-year LFI experience, executive teams learn about and work on issues that will better equip them to serve communities, and Bridgespan believes that building this capacity has the potential to support tangible change for target populations and end-users. To better understand if and how participation in LFI supported organizations in generating meaningful progress towards their mission, survey respondents and interviewees were asked to reflect on the extent to which they perceived LFI as being helpful in impacting their ultimate social outcomes.

Overall Impact on Organizational Performance

LFI supported improvements in organizational performance across organizations of varying sizes and types. Overall, more than three-quarters of respondents agreed that participation in LFI helped improve their organization's performance (77%). The previous section of this report notes that most respondents believed that participation in LFI most often translated to internal processes being more efficient and effective. No significant differences were observed when compared to organizations in other budget categories (see Figure 13). This finding suggests that LFI has potential benefits despite the scope or size of the organization. The same was true for organizations of different types. Direct service organizations, advocacy, organizing, and community building organizations, and organizations classified in another way all reported similar levels of agreement that LFI supported improvement in their organization's performance (see figure 13).

77%
Percent of respondents who agreed that **LFI helped improve their organization's performance**

Figure 13. Average Reported Responses by Organization Budget + Organization Type

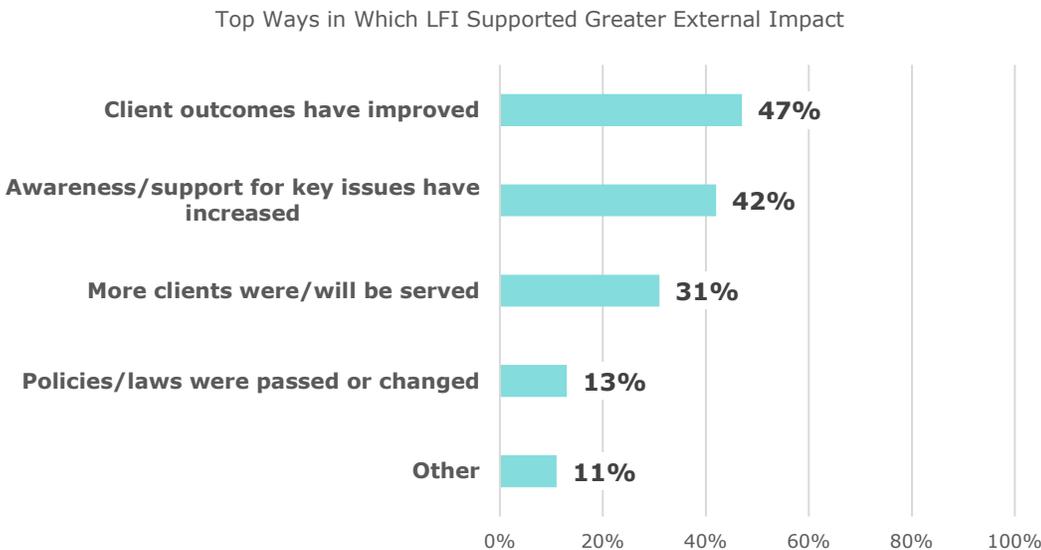


LFI's format, classroom sessions that teach theoretical strategy concepts followed by application through projects, might be one potential explanation for its reported effectiveness across organizations of varying sizes and types. The balance of

general theories and application, with customized support through coaching, seemed to create an experience that is generally meaningful across the board. One respondent shared that the LFI’s format, of “theoretical frameworks, exercises, team time together, and tailored projects”, were the most valuable aspects of the LFI experience.”

LFI played a role in supporting the ability of some organizations to increase their external impact in tangible ways. Most respondents shared that LFI supported greater strategic clarity and improved executive team effectiveness – thus improving organizational performance (77%). For those respondents who believed LFI supported tangible improvements to their external outcomes since participating, the largest percentage (41%) identified this as translating to improved client outcomes. More clients served also emerged as a top improvement (31%). Given that most survey respondents (61%) come from direct service organizations, this finding is promising since it signifies increased access to services or improvements in actual conditions. Finally, increases in awareness and support for key issues that organizations care about emerged as the second most common type of increase in external impact (42%), which signifies the capacity of this subset of organizations to communicate and educate key stakeholders in pursuit of advancing their mission.

Figure 14. Percent of Respondents Selecting Option as “Most Important” Achievement



It is worth noting that, among some survey respondents and interviewees, it was difficult to identify tangible changes that participation had on their ultimate social outcomes for legitimate reasons. First, some respondents and interviewees noted LFI was potentially just one of many factors that supported increases in external impact, and it would be difficult to draw a direct connection between participation and ultimate outcomes. Second, many participants noted that, aside from perception, it is difficult to concretely measure their external impact, let alone identify the extent to which it has increased, remained the same, or decreased since participating. For many nonprofits, understanding external impact takes time, resources, and expertise to generate the data required to quantify or qualify it – which is a long and extensive process. This, however, does not discredit the positive impact that LFI has on building the capacity of most participating nonprofits (as illustrated by the data presented throughout this report), which is assumed to be important for supporting organizations in becoming highly impactful. ✦

“I think there’s a lot of good learnings we have from LFI that are helping with our decision-making process, and now we’re ramping back up in a smarter way.”

Based on good financial decisions based on willingness to identify whether we keep or get rid of programs based on their effectiveness, we became leaner and more focused. So now we’re growing back our numbers [of clients served], and we’re doing it in a smarter way. Last year, in 2021, we served 5K to 6K clients, and this year we’ve [set] a target of 9K or more. ”

-LFI Alumnus

Key Insights and Considerations

Leading For Impact® (LFI), a capacity building program for nonprofit executive teams, delivers a dynamic and integrated experience to support organizations on their journey to maximize their impact. This two-year experience specifically targets executive team's ability to sharpen their strategic thinking skills and work together in a more effective manner towards improved organizational performance. LFI leverages applied learning techniques to ensure teams have opportunities to utilize classroom learning with respect to their own organization's priority issues – all while receiving intensive and personalized coaching support from an experienced Bridgespan consultant.

This external evaluation, conducted by Harder+Company Community Research, sought to build off existing internal evaluation efforts to understand the extent to which LFI's impact on teams and organizations persists over time (post-program). It also sought to begin to unpack the suspected impact that the program has on individuals and their leadership capabilities. Finally, this evaluation aimed to identify how, if at all, LFI supported an increased level of external impact or mission achievement.

Evaluation Key Insights

The following synthesizes the evaluation findings into a few brief insights. These insights are general conclusions from the external evaluation team's perspective, based on the data collected, about LFI's longer-term impact on executive teams and their organizations.

- **LFI created an important venue for executive teams to learn about and collaborate on key issues, and this experience had lasting impact on perceived organizational performance.** Respondents shared, through the survey and interviews, that LFI created dedicated time and space away from their organization's day-to-day happenings to learn and build capacity, which is a luxury in most nonprofit contexts. Respondents, overall, reported not only having a positive program experience, but that their organization's performance improved due to the shared learning and project work. Through LFI, executive teams learned tools and frameworks to hone strategy and how to work together and make decisions more efficient and effectively, which supported a perceived increase in their ability to achieve their ultimate outcomes.
- **The program's strength is in the cumulative experience of classroom sessions, applied team projects, and coaching supports, and the resulting insights generally stayed with teams long after the experience ended.** Respondents often referenced the integrated nature of the LFI experience, which allowed them to apply new or improved skills to real life situations with ongoing support and assistance from coaches. While there are certainly elements of each core component that respondents uplifted as being particularly effective, it's clear that the "complete package" is what helps LFI's learnings stick over time. Even respondents who participated as early as 2013 reported that LFI's learnings amplified executive team capacity in the long run and continued to be relevant in their day-to-day work in the last year.

- **While LFI was most impactful with respect to its stated outcomes (strategy, organization, and team effectiveness), the experience came with additional benefits for individual leaders that continued post-program.** Respondents generally agreed that LFI supports the development and growth of individual team members despite its team-orientation. Respondents found that the program not only increased their knowledge and skills resulting in increased leadership capacity, but also helped to develop confidence in their ability to effectively lead. LFI's impact on participant's career trajectories showed promise through knowledge and skill building with a potentially amplified effect on BIPOC leaders. Further, respondents noted both frequent and recent application of the tools, frameworks, and experiences that the program exposed them to, which signifies LFI's lasting impact on leaders' day-to-day work.
- **Organizations of all sizes and types can benefit from LFI, however consideration to timing, executive team capacity, and contextual factors is important to maximize its impact.** Analyses showed that LFI had similar levels of impact on organizations of varying sizes and types, and there were no significant differences in the extent to which the learnings were sustained over time. This suggests that LFI could effectively support a broad segment of the nonprofit sector in cities across the country. Prior to enrollment, LFI assesses the extent to which executive teams "demonstrate readiness", however some respondents still report challenges with their team's ability to make the most of their experience. Additional consideration might be given to organization's experiencing specific contextual factors or leadership transitions prior to enrollment as well as additional coaching and action planning on those specific issues to increase the chances of project success if those teams do enroll.

Considerations for the Future

These considerations are meant to provide fodder for Bridgespan as they continue to evolve and improve LFI's structure, content, and overall experience. These considerations touch on conclusions about areas of opportunity for program implementation as well as future learning and evaluation efforts.

- **Nurturing connections.** Respondents frequently noted the strength of the cohort model and appreciation for the opportunity to learn from and connect with other organizations in their area, particularly those who have similar missions. Respondents also shared mixed perceptions about their ability to develop lasting relationships and professional connections. Bridgespan might consider ways to more robustly support and nurture connections during and post-program – which could serve a bigger goal of a more connected nonprofit environment in each cohort city.
- **Sustaining and further deepening equity-focused content and coaching.** Respondents agreed that LFI's teachings and support were valuable, yet there were mentions of opportunities to deepen conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Bridgespan has taken heed to this feedback, which has also surfaced in internal evaluation efforts, and in recent years, Bridgespan has increasingly focused on equity in the LFI experience. These changes appear to be making progress, since fewer respondents in recent years named equity as a key gap in the LFI offering. Moving forward, Bridgespan should embrace the idea that there will likely always be opportunities to deepen the focus on this topic or dive into the nuance of how equity can and should be centered in nonprofit pursuits, given changes in local, state, and national contexts and social justice movements.

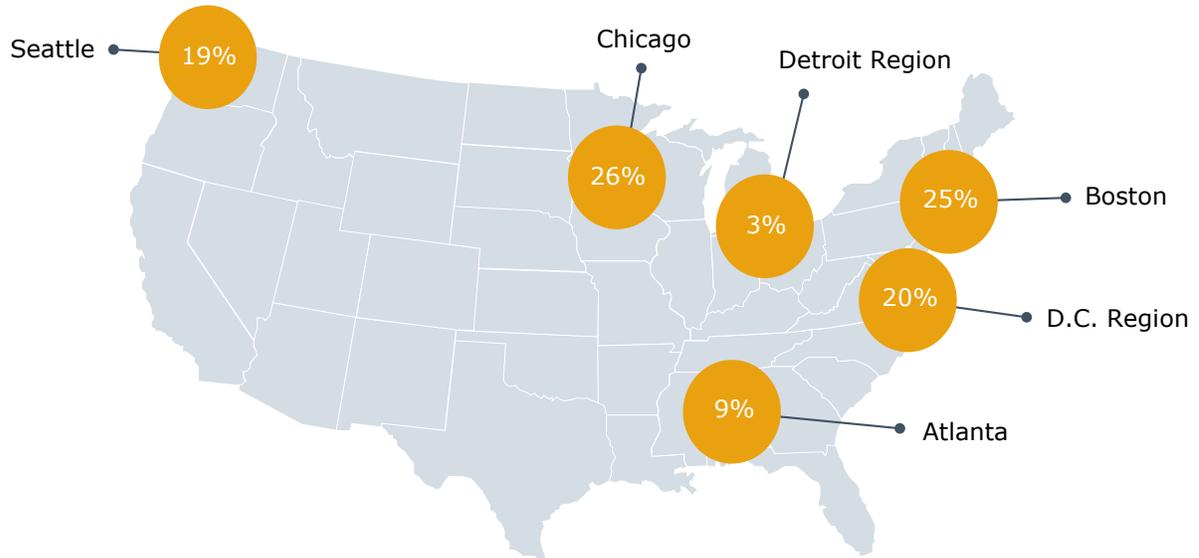
- **Tweaking monitoring and evaluation processes.** LFI currently has robust and effective monitoring and evaluation processes in place that support quality assurance, accountability, and reporting/communication of its outcomes. Many of LFI's high-level learnings were confirmed and validated through this study, which speaks to the thoughtful design and implementation of ongoing evaluation efforts. Through this evaluation, new areas of inquiry, such as impact on individual participants and organizational culture, were explored. Measures and questions were developed for the survey and interview protocols to gather baseline data on these focus areas, which led to interesting findings about the more comprehensive impact of the program. Bridgespan might consider incorporating those measures into the regular 6- and 18-month evaluations to continue to monitor and evaluate the program's effect on these areas.
- **Towards further understanding impact.** This evaluation was commissioned to explore the extent to which LFI's impact on strategic clarity and team effectiveness persists over time (often years post-program), given that participants consistently and reliably report positive impacts on these areas in the 6- and 18-month evaluations. This evaluation also sought to unpack "impact" one step further to understand how improvements in organizational direction and operations do or do not support greater external impact or progress towards ultimate social outcomes. The measurement tools used in this evaluation were self-report. Self-report measures are common and widely used in the organizational capacity building/development space, however they do have limitations (for example, subjectivity). Nevertheless, Bridgespan should feel confident in the findings from internal evaluation processes and this external evaluation. However, truly "validating" the program's impact would require more objective measures of organizational performance (i.e., collecting and comparing organizational performance metrics over time or validated pre-post measures of organizational capacity) and/or a more rigorous methodology (i.e., quasi-experimental design), potentially involving a control group. These measures would likely be costly and very difficult to complete. Special consideration would likely be needed to justify the feasibility and cost-benefit of these approaches.

Concluding Remarks

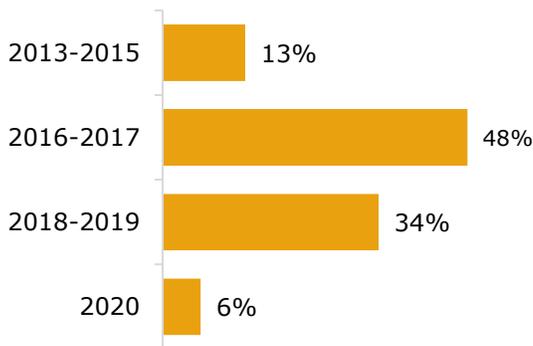
The Bridgespan Group's commitment to providing nonprofit organizations across the country with high-quality capacity building supports has, generally, resulted in improvements in performance for most of the participants and organizations this evaluation reached. Findings also show that LFI empowered executive team members to lead with new or improved knowledge, skills, and confidence. While LFI has room for growth and will undoubtedly evolve over time, this evaluation found that LFI serves an important function in the nonprofit capacity building space – helping organizations "lead for impact". ✦

Appendix A: About the Survey Respondents

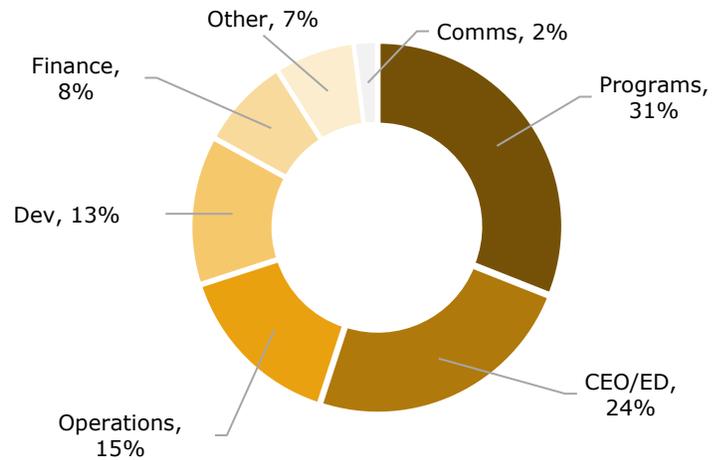
Cohort City (n=281)



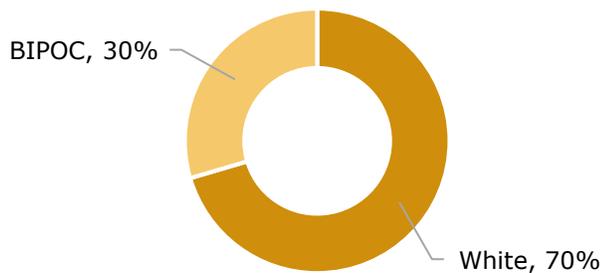
Cohort Year (n=281)



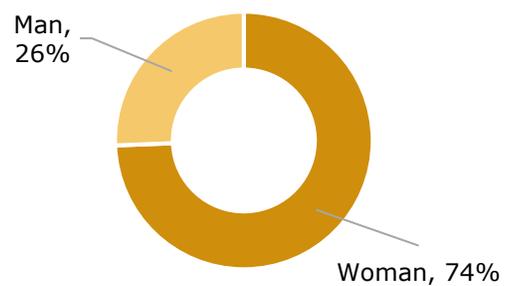
Respondent's Role while in LFI (n=281)



Race/Ethnicity (n=247)



Gender Identity (n=247)



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Harder+Company Community Research works with public- and social-sector organizations across the United States to learn about their impact and sharpen their strategies to advance social change. Since 1986, our data-driven, culturally-responsive approach has helped hundreds of organizations contribute to positive social impact for vulnerable communities. Learn more at www.harderco.com.
