Executive Summary
Ladder to Leadership: Developing the Next Generation of Community Health Leaders

From 2007 through 2012, Ladder to Leadership: Developing the Next Generation of Community Health Leaders provided leadership training to 219 early-to-mid-career professionals working with vulnerable populations in eight targeted regions and communities across the United States. The $3.6 million Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) national program aimed to build a pipeline of future leaders for health-related nonprofit organizations and communities by bolstering leadership capacity through promoting collaboration and encouraging innovation.

Read the full report. Learn more about the program here.

CONTEXT
Nonprofit health organizations provide critical support for millions of underserved Americans. These organizations need skilled leaders who can serve as visionary catalysts for change. Yet an impending exodus of senior managers as Baby Boomers retire threatens the strength and capacity of these organizations.

The Program
Some 20–30 fellows from each of the eight regions or communities participated in a 16-month training program developed by the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, N.C. The training included multiday sessions on collaboration, conflict resolution, and decision-making; “360-degree assessments” with feedback from fellows’ supervisors, peers, and employees; one-on-one coaching and mentoring; and team projects tackling health care challenges in the fellows’ own communities.
The Center for Creative Leadership partnered with a foundation in each region or community to help implement the program. Heather Champion, PhD, headed a team at the center that evaluated the program. They used surveys at the program’s outset, at its end, and one year later; surveys of fellows’ supervisors and other co-workers during and after the program; and interviews with fellows, co-workers, and local sponsors.

**EVALUATION RESULTS**

The evaluators reported these key results to RWJF:

- **At the conclusion of the program, fellows and their colleagues reported that it had bolstered the leadership capacity of participants:**
  - 95 percent of the fellows—and 90 percent of their supervisors, peers, and the employees who report directly to them—reported an increase or a significant increase in fellows’ leadership effectiveness.
  - 89 percent of the fellows, and 82 percent of their colleagues, reported an increase or a significant increase in fellows’ ability to coach others.

- **One year after completing the program, fellows from the first five cohorts reported sustained gains in leadership ability:**
  - 29 percent had received a promotion, and another 37 percent had taken on more duties.
  - 77 percent continued to report that the program had increased their leadership ability and their belief in their capacity to be a good leader.

- **At the conclusion of the program, fellows and their colleagues reported a positive impact on their organizations:**
  - 86 percent of both fellows and their co-workers reported an increase or a significant increase in their organization’s ability to deal with complex challenges.
  - 68 percent of supervisors reported that the program had increased fellows’ ability to identify and bring in resources to support the organization’s work.

- **One year after completing the program, fellows in the first five cohorts reported a positive impact on their communities:**
  - 72 percent reported an increase in their leadership of collaborative community projects.
  - 71 percent of fellows continued to leverage networks to address community health challenges.
“Recognizing my leadership style through the program allowed me to change my mindset to better lead others. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that Ladder to Leadership saved my career. I think if I hadn’t gone through the program I would have abandoned the nonprofit world.”—Deborah W. Hoffman, MA, Albuquerque fellow

Read profiles of eight of the fellows.

A social network analysis done as part of the evaluation measured the share of possible collaborative relationships among the fellows in each cohort before and after the program, defining collaboration as sharing information, sharing resources, or jointly implementing an activity. It found:

- **Ladder to Leadership enhanced social and collaborative networks among the fellows:**
  - 80 percent of fellows and 76 percent of their colleagues reported an increase or a significant increase in work-related social networks among the fellows.
  - Collaborative relationships among the fellows in each cohort increased by 13 percent, on average.

**AFTERWARD**

In May 2011, RWJF awarded the Center for Creative Leadership a six-month grant\(^1\) to examine best and next practices in leadership development. Based on that research, RWJF gave the center a $1.6 million grant\(^2\) from May 2012 to May 2014 to develop and pilot two training programs under RWJF’s *Boundary Spanning Leadership* authorization:

- The Community Coalition Leadership Program expands the boundary spanning leadership and coaching skills of grantees who use coalitions and other multi-sector mechanisms to help organizations and communities fundamentally improve health and health care. It includes communities who are part of RWJF’s *Roadmaps to Health Community Grants* initiative\(^3\) and representatives of organizations that provide technical assistance to these coalition-based initiatives.

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1 Grant ID# 69011. $98,984 from May 15, 2011 to November 14, 2011.
2 Grant ID# 69887. $1,599,723 from May 25, 2012 to May 14, 2014.
3 This $8.6 million program, running from November 2010 to November 2016, is part of the RWJF County Health Rankings & Roadmaps initiative to mobilize local communities, national partners, and leaders across all sectors to improve health. Whereas the County Health Rankings show what is known about what makes people unhealthy or healthy in each county in the United States, Roadmaps to Health show what can be done to make neighborhoods and communities healthier places. The program funds local coalitions and multisector partnerships to take action to improve health by addressing the factors that, according to the County Health Rankings, most influence health. These include education, income and employment, community safety, and family and social support.
• The Boundary Spanning Leadership Program supports individual RWJF grantees and national program office leaders nominated across the Foundation’s teams and portfolios with a 2½ day leadership training course.

The Center for Creative Leadership is developing and piloting both programs. The center also serves as the national program office for *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Executive Nurse Fellows*. For more on this program, read the Program Results Report.

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**Program Management: Human Capital**
National Program Office: Center for Creative Leadership
Program Director: David Altman

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