

## Leadership Development in Out-of-School Time

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*“Implicit in a healthy, vibrant and thriving nonprofit sector are healthy, vibrant and thriving leaders.”*  
Roosevelt Smith, 2008

BOSTnet works with a network of programs in Boston and across Massachusetts and we see first-hand the impact of effective leadership on creating quality environments for youth. Yet, more often we see the barriers to consistent leadership. Many executive directors express a high-level of frustration and burnout in their positions, and the causes are increasingly common—resource constraints, dissatisfaction with their boards, fundraising fatigue, limitations in long-term planning, and inadequate compensation in the field. Youth development work demands a high level of cultural competency and social capital within a community in order to function effectively as a bridge between families, schools and community-based service providers. Increasingly, out-of-school time (OST) leaders are being held accountable for their ability to achieve measurable youth outcomes, engage in strategic partnerships and navigate the ever-changing funding landscape. These challenges transcend the diverse field of youth-serving organizations and are especially relevant to an under resourced field that lacks a clear and well-defined professional development system to support workers at all levels in organizations.

As a recent study by the *Wallace Foundation* makes clear, the lack of resources available for programs to focus on key management activities has a ripple effect through community-based organizations. “The larger impact of working within this under-resourced administrative management environment,” the authors note, “is the limits it places on organizations’ ability to be forward-looking and truly strategic.” It inhibits a leader’s ability to build social capital and innovate, both of which are important for organizations to remain relevant in their communities and to the youth they serve. At this important point in the development of the OST field, we need more than good managers. We need leaders who can provide clarity, direction and a unifying sense of purpose for our work. To achieve this, the OST sector will need to be more thoughtful about how it recruits, develops and nurtures leaders. We need to identify and harness new funding initiatives that build more pathways to formal training opportunities and mentoring, combined with informal peer-to-peer networks and community learning collaboratives.

### **Transition Challenge**

A disturbing outcome of these challenges is higher levels of turnover in organizations. A 2004 survey of over 2000 nonprofits by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that 65% are planning for a leadership transition within the next two years. A 2004 survey by United Way found that 45% of executives in their affiliate organizations were planning to leave before 2010. More recently, Compass Point’s *Daring to Lead 2006* surveyed 2000 executive directors in 8 cities across the United States, including Boston, and found that 75% are planning to leave their jobs within the next 5 years. Our initial research has found similar trends within the OST field in Boston. Many organizations that face a leadership transition lack a clear succession plan and perceived “bench strength,” resulting in organizational anxiety and very real impacts on the quality of services. This trend, moreover, seems to be affecting small, midsize and large organizations. This is a potentially transformational issue in a state like Massachusetts where 14% of the workforce works for one of the more than 36,000 non-profit organizations. While the current economic downturn may slow this trend, the long-term impacts on quality services and sound public policy cannot be overestimated.

### **Leadership Development Study**

BOSTnet recently partnered with the Trefler Foundation to gather data on the current state of leadership development opportunities and the perceptions of field leaders on how they view both the opportunities

and barriers to developing effective leaders. The study combined a review of the literature on leadership development with a field survey and focus groups during the summer and fall of 2008. The research builds on the work of Roosevelt Smith, former Executive Director of *Urban Dreams* in Dorchester, who did preliminary field work the previous winter and spring. Smith's research focused on how organizations have engaged in succession planning and on continuing leadership opportunities as executive directors transition out of their current positions.

### **Field Survey**

BOSTnet and Trefler released a survey on leadership development to nearly 600 practitioners across Massachusetts on August 6, 2008 and collected responses from 159 individuals. The majority of respondents represent large organizations. Nearly 40% work for organizations with an annual budget over \$1 million, while organizations with budgets between \$500,000 and \$1 million and under \$250,000, each accounted for 25% of the respondents. Thirty-six percent of respondents work for programs with less than 10 employees; 30% work for programs with over 40 employees. Most respondents listed their primary programmatic activities as youth leadership development, academic support, arts & cultural enrichment and general childcare, and the majority of respondents noted that their organizations ran programs that served children and youth from kindergarten to high school. Forty percent of respondents have worked in their current position less than 3 years and over 50% were promoted into their current position within their organization, indicating some opportunity for upward mobility. Respondents with over 10 years of experience comprised 33% of the sample group. Of all the respondents, 45% classified themselves as "organizational leaders." The findings of this diverse group are interesting:

- When asked to identify opportunities that have been helpful in their professional development, nearly 70% selected professional conferences; 58% outside training or class work; and, 55% informal peer networks. Mentors and more formal networks also ranked high.
- The sample group actively consumes outside training:
  - Over 90% of respondents took part in a training course within the past 12 months
  - 60% of these attended more than 3 trainings in the past year
- Over 50% of outside trainings were paid for by organizations and nearly 40% of internal trainings were provided by organizations free.
  - 20% of respondents said they only attend free trainings
  - 18% shared training costs with their organizations
  - 22% received scholarships from either public or private sources to attend trainings
- There is evidence that these trainings focused more on programmatic practices than on leadership or career advancement:
  - 60% of respondents indicated that **none** of the trainings attended related directly to leadership or career advancement
- Significantly, over 60% of respondents believe they have reached a career plateau in their current organizations with no opportunity for advancement.
  - 15% of respondents are looking to advance within their organizations
  - 12% are looking to advance in a different youth serving organization
  - 11% aspire to leave the field
- The majority of respondents (nearly 70%) **feel supported** by their organizations and nearly 60% believe that their organization actively develops leaders from within.
  - 77% feel that their organizational leadership role extends into their communities
  - 85% actively build social networks with other community leaders
- Asked to think about the kind of skills they need to develop to advance in their career, the majority of respondents identified the following as **primary**:
  - 1.) Fundraising, 2.) Financial management, 3.) Strategic planning

*Many in the group also identified:*

- 4.) Communications, 5.) Board management, 6.) Creative problem solving, 7.) Marketing, and 8.) Evaluation
- In selecting courses or trainings, the respondents said that 1.) Quality of instruction, 2.) When and where the course takes place, 3.) The reputation of the organization providing training and 4.) Costs were the most important factors.
  - Significantly, the sample group most often rated whether or not a course counts toward a degree or certificate as **not important**.
  - In thinking about the settings most appropriate to leadership development 1.) Non-profit training organizations, 2.) Professional associations, and 3.) Colleges/universities **rated highest**.
  - **Least preferred settings** included 1.) Community colleges, 2.) For-profit training organizations, and 3.) Online. (**Note:** Other BOSTnet surveys on professional development reveal a high interest in online training around practice skills. This interest seems to decline when training topics shift to leadership development or career advancement.)

### ***What the Field Sees***

Two small and informal focus groups of 10-15 individuals were convened on October 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008 at BOSTnet's offices. Roosevelt Smith facilitated both groups. The focus groups were structured to elevate the voice of the field around the issues raised in the survey and expand the discussion of leadership to come up with a definition of what effective leadership looks like in organizations serving youth. We wanted to get a better understanding of how these particular leaders view the opportunities and challenges of developing in their careers, both in terms of personal skills and system supports. The two groups were very different and provided a diversity of perspectives that was very helpful. Group 1 was younger and fell into a category of *emerging leaders* who often identified generational differences of how individuals approach leadership. Group 2 included more *established leaders*, some of who had experience in for-profit management. This second group was more reflective of their own opportunities and responsibilities as leaders within their organizations.

### Leadership vs. Management

Both focus groups acknowledge a distinction between management and leadership, but the line between the two was not always clear. Often when we talk about leadership we are really talking about management, the set of skills necessary to run an organization. For most people in our groups, management skills were primarily external and related to knowledge of finances, organizational development, strategic planning, relationship building, fundraising and marketing. Leadership, however, was more closely related to less tangible personal characteristics, such as values, vision, integrity, humility, ego, and the ability to reflect and inspire others. Effectiveness seems to come in a combination of management skills and leadership style that fits a particular context or environment. As one group member observed, *"the lack of management skills can be overwhelming. People find themselves in jobs they can't handle because they don't have the skills, even though they may have some of the leadership aspects."* Yet, as another participant noted, *"Not building relationships, not building trust, these are (gaps in) leadership, rather than management skills."* Despite these tensions, there seemed to be a sense that nonprofits have the promise of more collaborative models of leadership. Success is not linked to building and holding all the skills yourself, but in pulling people in who have the skills necessary to keep an organization focused on its mission and values. This approach requires a high level of honest communication and internal staff development systems, as well as resources to recruit the right people.

### Barriers to Effective Leadership Development

All of the participants in the focus groups recognized the barriers of low pay, high stress, limited support and unrealistic expectations. Moreover, burnout is not confined to executive directors. Uncertainty and operational tension leads to transitions up and down organizations. Various participants spoke candidly about the effects of limited resources on their work. *"How do we lead when we don't have enough money to build systems or hire the right people? Leadership gets co-opted by fear."* One offshoot of this is the increasing tendency to work in isolation, feeling as if your organization is under attack by competitors,

fickle funders, or down budget cycles that will take away your resources. In a climate of fragmentation and resource scarcity, it is increasingly difficult to move systems forward and remain innovative. Organization leaders often cannot do the foundational work necessary to develop a proper understanding of community needs. As one participant observed, *“Skill comes in saying I don’t know enough to launch this project, this vision. I need to know more about the community, my staff, my board . . . Writing a grant takes a lot of time, meeting with funders takes time and you don’t want people to come and see you when you’re not ready. It can squash your funding for years.”* The groups also felt an inherent tension in advancing in their careers and taking on more management tasks while getting farther away from what connected them to the field in the first place—working with youth.

### Generational Differences

There are clearly generational differences in how individuals approach leadership. For many “emerging leaders” there is a sense that more established leaders are change resistant. *“The old guard obstructs, even when they realize that something is broken.”* As a group, there was some consensus that younger people entering the field have been born into a value system that is more collaborative and participatory. There is a desire to share a place at the table and expand the dialogue, but for leaders with 10 or 20 years of experience it is hard to let go of hard won competencies and influence. One participant observed that we *“can make competency assumptions based on titles, but this may not match up with the actual abilities of the person. Positions haven’t been well defined or people haven’t been well trained in their roles. The older generation developed into roles without clear definition, the newer generation needs to have a system in place to show them where they are going.”* As another member of the group observed, *“The ED job has changed and the older generation hasn’t kept up. They band-aid opportunities together and do not make the work appealing. Who would want to be an ED? Staff needs to see that the ED is getting the support needed.”* Without the necessary support systems in place, fewer emerging leaders may see value in moving into defined leadership roles.

### **Developing Strong, Connected Leaders**

As a recognized center of the information economy and a leader in higher education, Boston has a wealth of management and leadership development opportunities for non-profit professionals. Many programs, like Leadership for Change at *Boston College*, the Institute for Nonprofit Management and Leadership at *Boston University*, and The Emerging Leaders Program at the *University of Massachusetts* offer a range of college-based leadership development options, but they are often highly competitive and require a high degree of commitment. These programs are also very expensive ranging from \$6500 to over \$16,000 (the more expensive programs offer graduate level credits). Other programs, such as LeadBoston at the *Boston Center for Community and Justice*, strive to build a diverse community of socially responsible leaders regionally. This program also has a fairly competitive interview process and requires sponsoring organizations to pay a substantial fee. Financial aid packages are available. There are also leadership development opportunities through non-profit consultants, such as *Technical Development Corporation (TDC)*, that offer management consulting, financial service, human resource development and executive coaching. Fees vary from the cost of individual workshops to more intensive contract work with a consultant. While all these programs provide world-class instruction and rich networks of leader communities, they all have issues with access (cost) and relevance to the OST field. Emblematic of this problem, few individuals in our focus groups had any real knowledge of these programs.

Perhaps more promising are leadership development initiatives that are emerging from the field. With a three-year grant from the Compassion Capital Fund through the Department of Health and Human Services, the *Boston Ministerial Alliance (BMA)* has expanded its Boston Capacity Tank programs. Through this work, the BMA offers a Capacity Training Workshop Series on a range of topics to strengthen the practices of programs, managers and leaders. These workshops are free and open to community-based organizations in Boston. Workshops such as these and BOSTnet’s Director’s Roundtables foster connections to a “community of practice,” where practitioners gather to both learn and network together. While there is much anecdotal evidence that these programs provide valuable services

for the field, it is difficult to determine long-term impact on participants. Other programs are working to integrate professional development with educational advancement, providing pathways for people in the field to gain college credit. In western Massachusetts, for instance, the *WestMOST Network* has developed the Continuing Education for Afterschool Leaders (CEAL) Initiative. Developed in collaboration with *Holyoke Community College, Springfield Technical Community College, Greenfield Community College* and *University of Massachusetts, University without Walls*, CEAL provides three credit-based college courses on supervision and leadership, program development and curriculum, and fiscal management and administration. The courses are provided through grant funding so selected participants only invest their time and some modest registration fees. CEAL combines coursework with self-directed readings and peer learning to provide afterschool and youth development directors and coordinators basic skill sets to be more effective managers. The first CEAL classes were held in the spring of 2008, and while it is not a requirement now, there is interest in linking the 3 courses into a leadership certificate. Participants that complete all three courses receive 9 credit hours (3/class) that can matriculate into a degree program at the participating colleges. When we consider that even a few college courses can have a measurable impact on an individual's earning potential over a lifetime, such opportunities should be a core piece of any workforce development system.

### ***What the Field Wants***

When asked to imagine what a leadership development system might look like, most focus group participants keyed in on three core strategies:

1. **Youth Development Leader Training:** Focus group participants were clear that there should be more opportunities to engage in formal training that builds organizational management skills. While there are many skill-building opportunities for nonprofit managers, participants were clear that cost and relevance to the OST sector is critical. Funders need to think strategically about how to leverage the many opportunities that exist for leadership development and make them both accessible and relevant for the field. There are also opportunities for private and public stakeholders, including agencies under Massachusetts' Education Secretariat, Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, and Department of Higher Education to expand current credential opportunities, such as the School Age Youth Development Credential (SAYD) run by *Achieve Boston* and the Professional Youth Worker Credential offered by *Commonwealth Corporation's* Pathways to Success by Twenty-One (P-21) initiative. A parallel certificate in organizational management and leadership would lead toward tangible goals, such as college credit or a recognized director's credential.
2. **Formal mentor systems:** Various leadership development programs, such as *Boston University's Institute for Nonprofit Management and Leadership* link emerging leaders with more seasoned leaders from other organizations. The value of mentors cannot be overstated. In fact, most respondents to our leadership survey as well as participants in our focus groups noted the importance of mentors to their professional development. The collaborative nature of the field may lend itself to more formal systems of community-based mentors.
3. **Informal peer-to-peer networking/learning communities:** Learning from peers is often cited as the most influential input in an individual's development as a professional. As a field, youth development excels at networking and connecting. There is value in creating informal opportunities for leaders of youth serving organizations to connect, discuss issues and problem solve in a collaborative, community-based way. For nearly 14 years *BOSTnet* has run monthly Directors' Roundtables to provide a forum for networking and shared learning. These types of networks are becoming increasingly prevalent nationwide.

Leaders of youth serving organizations are asked to be many things—youth development experts, educators, relationship specialists, behaviorists, staff trainers, family engagement coordinators, youth outcome evaluators, fundraisers, and board managers. The growing professionalism of the field over the past decade has pushed these tasks to ever-higher levels of skill requirements without increases in

compensation to support and develop staff effectively. To be truly transformative, OST leaders will need to move beyond running organizations and providing services to engage policymakers and funders in creating new roles. These roles may include developing the voice of the field to help shape the broader public dialogue around education, youth development and achievement; or aligning community-based assets, including schools, OST programs and health services to better address the needs of the “whole child.” This is critical in the current climate of education reform with so many choices being presented to communities—Expanded Learning Time, Pilot schools, community schools, Charter schools, service learning, etc. It seems likely that the role of OST as a partner in education and youth development will continue to expand in the coming years, putting greater demands on programs, and program leaders, to provide high-quality learning and enrichment opportunities. How we address these challenges will have a long-term impact on the field, as well as on the children, youth and families we work with everyday.

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