

April 2021

# Executive Leadership Institute (ELI)

For community foundation CEOs



**CFLeads**

Community Foundations  
Leading Change

# Background

## The Promise of Community Foundations

Strong communities depend on good jobs and a healthy citizenry to thrive. A strong community also requires engaged residents as well as public and private institutions – including community foundations – that work together effectively to address the community's challenges.

Helping communities attain their ideals is at the core of America's community foundations. At their best, community foundations build thriving communities by working with people of all backgrounds on their common concerns. They pursue cross-sector solutions to tough issues and they marshal the needed resources to address them. They improve education systems, clean up the environment, strengthen the arts, foster job growth, improve public health, and advance equity.

Community foundations are perfectly positioned to address these issues. Their independence, permanence, public charity status, and local relationships give them the clout and ability to reach far beyond their walls to strengthen their communities.

## The Need for Effective Leaders

Leading such an organization is extraordinarily challenging for even the most facile manager or most sophisticated visionary. Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) at community foundations need inspiration, information, creativity, and passion. They need good data, tried-and-true tools, and savvy advice.

Today's community foundation leaders must be able to draw upon the full breadth of tools at their disposal to have the greatest impact in their community, recognizing that grants alone will not build vibrant, healthy places to live. They and their organizations must be able to partner with a broad array of people throughout the community – donors, public officials, corporate leaders, nonprofit managers, researchers, private foundations, small community group leaders as well as the media – and leverage the resources from allies across sectors. Their ultimate objective – the overall well-being of the community – is immense and not easily defined or measured but it is what makes their institutions so uniquely valuable.

Creating a community vision and articulating the most appropriate issues to address now – opportunity, equity, education, the arts, environment, to name a few – requires more than vision. It requires a culture, relationships, resources and skills to exercise community leadership.

# Executive Leadership Institute

To help community foundation CEOs strengthen their foundation's ability to solve community problems, CFLeads has developed an executive education program. The **Executive Leadership Institute (ELI)** is a year-long learning opportunity focusing exclusively on community leadership for community foundation CEOs.

The Executive Leadership Institute reflects a growing recognition in the field that the practice of community leadership is critical and requires specific skills and strategies — beyond grantmaking.

ELI also incorporates a peer learning approach, which helps participants quickly identify and adopt effective practices that are relevant to their work.

The Executive Leadership Institute includes individuals from large, medium and small communities from across the country who sit at the helm of community foundations of all different sizes and asset mixes. Despite this diversity, participants frequently remark on their common struggles and aspirations.

## WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

“

ELI has pushed my thinking, and my practice, in ways I could have never done alone. Learning directly from peers in the field has been invaluable.

**Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker**  
*President & CEO*  
*Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo*

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

“A must attend! No greater learning experience or opportunity exists in the community foundation field.

Shelly O'Quinn  
CEO  
Innovia Foundation

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

“I was in a desert and didn't realize how thirsty I was for a community of peers. There are others of the size of my foundation who are out here without community. This experience was so valuable.

Tory Irgang  
Executive Director  
Chautaugua Region Community Foundation



# Program Overview

ELI for CEOs is an exclusive **one-year intensive learning opportunity** tailored specifically for community foundation CEOs who are eager to help their foundations more effectively address difficult challenges in their communities. It is designed for CEOs all along their community leadership journey.

The program consists of three face-to-face meetings designed to help community foundation CEOs build organizations that

have the culture, staff skills, external relationships and resources to strengthen their communities.

With a focus on challenging CEOs in positive ways in a supportive peer environment, ELI was created to stimulate new thinking and create CEO-to-CEO relationships that will last beyond the one-year program timeframe to provide ongoing support and networking opportunities.

## PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Create a better understanding of the key elements of community leadership for community foundations;

Advance specific community leadership practices at participating VPs' foundations;

Build peer connections and seed potential collaboration through peer learning and collaborative problem solving;

Make progress on a self-identified community leadership challenge.

## CORE ACTIVITIES

Three two-day meetings, held over two days each, where participants assess their organization's community leadership practice, exchange stories about their organization's successes and challenges, and debate and explore the appropriate role of community foundations in building vibrant, welcoming places to live.

Meetings are conducted in a confidential environment that encourages candid discussion.

Individual work by CEOs between meetings on a challenge particular to their organization.

Homework assignments and/or readings prior to each meeting. These assignments/readings should take approximately two hours to complete prior to each meeting.

Optional site visits from community foundation staff in the cities where the meetings are held.

# 2021 Cohort Details

## Eligibility

This year's cohort is geared toward community foundation leaders who are newer (five years or fewer) to their role – but not new to community leadership thinking! Up to ten CEOs will be selected to participate. We strongly encourage leaders who are interested in aggressively pushing their practice, open to questioning their own assumptions, and eager to learn from their peers to apply.

## Cost

The fee to participate in ELI is \$5,850 with a 5% discount for 2020 or 2021 CFLeads investors. This cost covers one two-day virtual meeting and two two-day in-person meetings, including meals. Participants are also expected to pay for their own travel and accommodations. The fee may be paid in two installments over the course of the program.

### WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

“**Fabulous and unique opportunity to learn from community foundations of all sizes. Thank you!**”

**Fred Blackwell**

*President & CEO  
San Francisco Foundation*

Ready to apply? Visit [cflleads.org](https://cflleads.org) to get started.