2026

Executive Leadership Institute (ELI)

Program Overview

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. Community foundation leaders — including CEOs, VPs, board members and CFOs — 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, including donors, public officials, corporate leaders, nonprofit managers, researchers, private foundations, small community group leaders and the media. They must 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 leeaders strengthen their foundation's ability to solve community problems, CFLeads has developed an executive education program. The **Executive Leadership Institute (ELI)** is a six month-long learning opportunity focusing exclusively on community leadership for community foundation leaders, including CEOs, VPs, CFOs and board members.

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.

100%

of recent ELI participants agreed that ELI helped them strengthen their understanding of key community leaderhsip elements and make progress on their leadership challenge.



WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

"For someone new to the field of philanthropy, ELI was a superb way to meet new colleagues and learn about valuable tools and lessons learned.

Judith Bell

Vice President of Programs
San Francisco Foundation



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community foundation leaders have deepened their community leadership skills through our Executive Leadership Institute.

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

"Participating in ELI has created space for me to live into my role as a community foundation CFO and benefit from the valuable knowledge and resources shared by my peers.

Bill Andrews

Chief Financial Officer
Fairfield County's Community Foundation

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

Program Overview

The Executive Leadership Institute is an exclusive **one-year intensive learning opportunity** tailored specifically for community foundation leaders who are eager to help their foundations more effectively address issues in their communities.

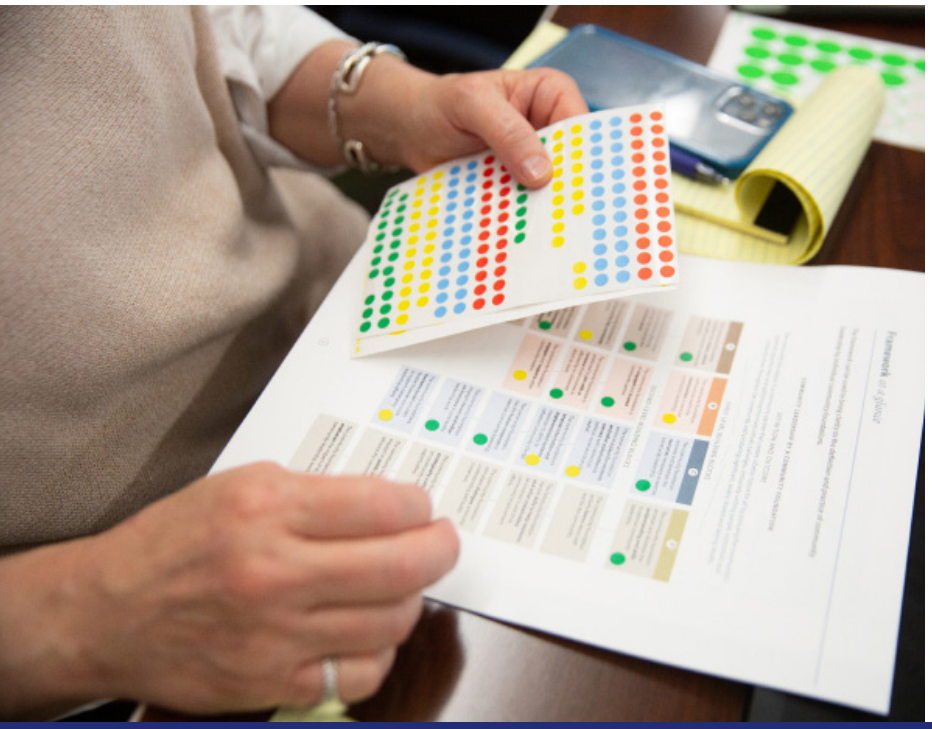
With a focus on challenging leaders in positive ways in a supportive peer environment, ELI was created to stimulate new thinking and create peer-to-peer relationships that will last beyond the one-year program timeframe to provide ongoing support and networking opportunities.

The ELI program typically consists of three face-to-face meetings designed to help community foundation leaders build organizations that have the culture, staff skills, external relationships and resources to strengthen their communities.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES
Create a better understanding of the key elements of community leadership for community foundations;
Advance specific community leadership practices at participating 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 participants 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.*

*Exact program structure varies by cohort and will be described on CFLeads' website.



ELI Cohorts

CFLeads currently offers ELI cohorts for community foundation:

- CEOs
- Vice Presidents including:
    - CFO, Chief Impact Officer, Chief of Staff

Details on each cohort, including timing, pricing and how to apply, are available on our website. CFLeads Investors are eligible to take advantage of a discounted program fee of $6,900 for all Executive Leadership Institute programs.

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

> **"The Executive Leadership Institute was a game-changer in my development as a community foundation leader.**

Lisa Schroeder

President & CEO
The Pittsburgh Foundation

Ready to apply? Visit cfleads.org to get started.