




Community Leadership Training Series

Exploring Organizational & Leadership Life Cycles

Workshops are offered through a partnership with the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and Hartford Public Library.

 This event has live captioning.

 This webinar is being recorded



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(she/her/ella)

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Community Leadership Training Series

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Session #1

Exploring Organizational and Leadership Life Cycles

Wednesday, April 16, 2025, 12:00pm -1:30pm
(Virtual Session via Zoom)

Session #2

Leading Through Ambiguity and Change

Wednesday, June 4, 2025, 12:00pm -1:30pm
(Virtual Session via Zoom)

Session #3

Aligning Leadership with Purpose

Tuesday, July 15, 2025, 9:30am -12:30pm
(In-Person, 10 Columbus Blvd, 7th floor)

Webinar Engagement

How to get the most out of this session?

01

Feel free to introduce yourselves to us in the chat. We want to connect with each other here!

02

If you hear something that resonates with you or sparked your curiosity during the presentation, mention it in the chat.

03

Please share your questions with me at the end of the presentation. I'll provide some laser consulting to a few organizations.

5



4



3



2



1



Grounding Technique

What Season Are You In?

If your organization were a season right now, which one would it be and why?

- 🌱 Spring – new ideas, experimentation, excitement
- ☀️ Summer – growth, momentum, expansion
- 🍂 Fall – harvesting, reflection, letting go
- ❄️ Winter – quiet, pause, regrouping





Raíces/Roots

From the Latin word
radix meaning
“starting point”



Today's Agenda

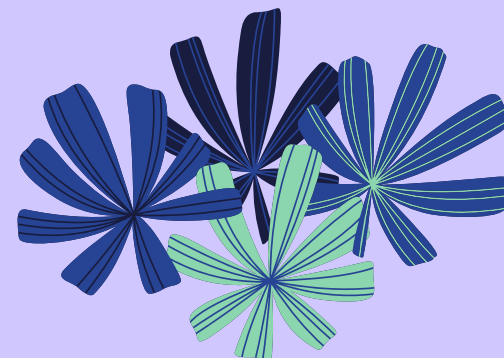
What we'll learn and experience:

- We'll look at the stages in nonprofit organizational life cycles—what they look like and what they ask of us.
- We'll talk about leadership life cycles—how we grow and evolve in our leadership roles to meet the season our organization is in.
- We'll reflect on how those two tracks—the organization and the individual—interact with each other.
- And we'll explore how to respond with intention when things feel misaligned.
- We'll engage in real-time problem-solving in the Q&A laser consulting round.

“

Transformation doesn't happen in a linear way, at least not one we can always track. It happens in cycles, convergences, explosions. If we release the framework of failure, we can realize that we are in iterative cycles, and we can keep asking ourselves—how do I learn from this?

Adrienne Maree Brown, Emergent Strategy





What is the Non Profit Life Cycle?

Source: Nonprofit Lifecycles: Stage-Based Wisdom for Nonprofit Capacity, Susan Kenny Stevens



Think of the life cycle as a tool that gives you a realistic sense of where your organization stands and whether or not all of its systems are in alignment.

- What's growing?
- What needs attention?
- And what kind of leadership is right for right now?

Key Factors that Influence an Organization's Lifecycle Stage



How long an organization has been in existence.



The size of the organization.



The style of the founder or primary leader.



The rate of growth.

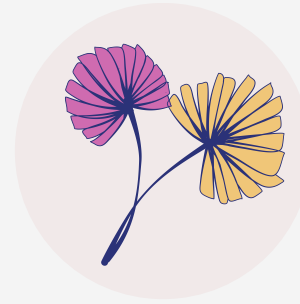


The external environment it is operating within.

Benefits of Using the Life Cycle Framework



It clarifies where you are and what you need.



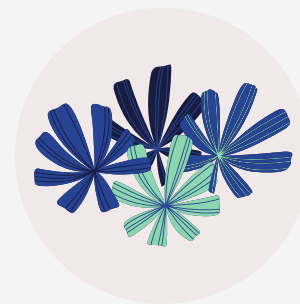
It reframes struggles as growing pains—not failures.



It sets realistic expectations.



It supports better strategy and leadership choices.



It prepares you for change.

Idea Stage

In this stage, a solution or vision for a community need has been identified and developed, though a formal organization has not been established and programs are not well-defined.

In addition:

- Supporters – service volunteers and funders – are heavily relied upon and are likely comprised of friends and family.
- Many groups do not move beyond the idea stage into the formal “start-up” stage.
- Most people use a “kitchen cabinet,” or small group of trusted friends, as advisors.





Start-Up Stage

Marked by high energy, limited funding, and a newly acquired 501c3 status, startups are out to prove their business case by experimenting with program design.

In addition:

- Startups boards are comprised of close friends and trusted colleagues.
- There is always more work than people in this stage, meaning everyone does everything: Think a hands-on, working board that's very engaged in doing, rather than governing.
- Transitioning out of this phase requires a strategic plan to address growth, personnel and position descriptions, governance transition (from a working board to a governing board), and strong focus on fundraising to raise the money needed.



Growth Stage

As the organization hits its stride, becoming a growth-stage operation, it focuses on standardizing and deepening programs to meet the needs of its constituents and formalizing its structure and processes to ensure organizational vitality.

Growth always outpaces capacity, systems, and cash, so keep in mind:

- Communication can be an issue at this stage, as everyone can no longer know everything.
- Growth sees people seeking formal policies and procedures that are written out explicitly or new ways of doing business.
- To run this organization, a CEO must change their style and up their skill level.
- Cash flow can be a challenge, prompting the need for larger, multi-year grants or contracts.

Maturity Stage

Mature organizations have a reputation among their constituents. They have established formal organizational structures and processes, managed by an executive leader and led by a governing board of directors. Programs are outcomes-based and are aligned with the strategic plan. Funding is diversified and supports the organization's needs. The CEO is often getting more involved in external community relations, including major donor fundraising.

This can be a happy place, but complacency must be avoided:

- Things work, systems are in place, and people know their jobs – however, they often begin the process of creating the problems found in the next phase.
- This transition calls for policies and procedures to be followed, and more upgrades in software for HR, data collection, development, and more.
- Organizations can get too set in your ways, developing silos, becoming rigid in their policies, and putting a stop to risk-taking.
- Though the board is governing, they may also be moving toward a more limited sense of engagement, and feeling set in their ways.





Decline Stage

Organizations in decline have settled into a prescribed way of doing things, subtly losing touch with clients and resisting the programmatic adaptations necessary to meet changing community needs. The formal systems and budgets that once spurred growth now hinder evolution.

In particular:

- Decline often sets in through genuine or willful ignorance among leaders. In this organization, the CEO may “retire in place,” and the board comes to meetings complacent and unengaged.
- Those who love the way things have always been done may be happy, but those who ask questions probably do not stay long; this applies to the board as well, where a member who starts asking tough questions may be ostracized rather than listened to.
- Leadership will need to recognize and address their problems and then build a crisis plan for addressing the issues.

Turnaround Stage

This pivotal stage finds organizations in the process of regaining and reimagining their impact and demand. Strong leadership and a committed board lead the restoration, in which programs are redesigned to meet community and constituent needs, budgets are cut to meet cash flow demands, and formal processes are simplified to enable the transformation.

As the bridge back to “growth,” this stage often involves:

- The crisis plan referenced above, which helps define the bridge and determine how to cross it.
- A subsequent plan that repositions the organization for growth at the end of the bridge.
- A board ready to work closely with the chief executive and follow a turnaround plan that will inevitably cause waves, disrupting the organization’s culture and people.





Terminal Stage

When an organization has declined too far, a turnaround is unsuccessful, or a start-up never finds its place, an organization enters the terminal stage. Leadership has lost interest and motivation; funding and staff have dwindled.

At this point:

- This organization faces three options: closing, merging, or transitioning programs to another nonprofit.
- Often, the board (with a limited number of members remaining) is left to decide whether to keep the organization alive.
- It is best to take action before a forced bankruptcy or being out of compliance.

Nonprofit Life Cycles Overview

Stage	Key Question	Duration	Obstacles	Opportunities
Grass Roots - Invention	Is the dream feasible?	0 – 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance to forming • Lack of funding/expertise • No outside support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creativity • Energy for the dream • Excitement to join
Start-Up - Incubation	How do we get this started?	1 – 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of formalizing • Sustaining initial enthusiasm • Focusing the founder and energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excitement of funders • Charismatic leader • People wanting to belong
Adolescent – Growing	How can we build this to be viable?	2 – 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of systems & accountability • Overwhelmed with change • Change may alienate funders, clients, staff and board • Danger of becoming isolated in the system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of accomplishment • New faces, 'arms and legs' • Diversification in all areas of the organization • Rejuvenation for the founders
Mature - Sustainability	How can we ensure sustainability?	7 – 30 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of or too much control • Lack of risk taking • Board & staff too operational • Unable to transition in to a governance board • Conflict between old and new 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling secure • Adequate resources • New staff/board – fresh ideas • Ability to try something new
Stagnation & Renewal	How, if any, can we renew?	2 – 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance to change • Inability to address key challenges • Declining excitement • Isolation of the agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wisdom from past • Strategic Partnership opportunities • Chance to take risks again and think 'out-of-the-box'
Decline And Shut-Down	Should we close?	1 – 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial crises • Inappropriate leadership • Loss of staff and volunteers • Lack of any passion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to complete turnaround • Graceful 'sunset' or merger

What Stage Are You in?



Organizational Lifecycles Are Dynamic



Seven Arenas

These seven areas are deeply intertwined, and the interplay between them really tells the story of where your organization is.



1

GOVERNANCE/BOARD

2

LEADERSHIP/MANAGEMENT

3

FINANCES

4

ADMINISTRATIVE
SYSTEMS/OPERATIONS

5

STAFFING

6

PROGRAMS/SERVICES

7

MARKETING/COMMUNITY
OUTREACH

Why Capacity Matters?





Case-Study Handout

Source: Nonprofit Lifecycles: Stage-Based Wisdom for Nonprofit Capacity, Susan Kenny Stevens



Reflection Q's

- What stage do you think ACO is currently in?
- What leadership responses would be most helpful right now?
- If you were a staff member, board member, or consultant supporting ACO, where would you begin?
- Have you seen something similar in an organization you've worked with?



Organizational Lifecycle Self-Scan Worksheet

For each of the seven arenas below, rate where you believe your organization is right now using the following scale:

- 1 – Very Early Stage
- 2 – Developing, but Inconsistent
- 3 – Functioning with Some Gaps
- 4 – Stable and Aligned
- 5 – Strong and Evolving with Intentionality



Reflection

Now take a few minutes to look back over your ratings.

- Where are you strongest?
- Where might you be underdeveloped?
- And where is there tension between where you are and where you want to be?

Leadership Across the Life Cycle

What Does This Stage Asks of You as a Leader?



Leadership Characteristics & Competencies Needed by Life Cycle Stage

What kind of leader do we need at this stage?

 Idea <i>Inspire & Imagine</i>	 Start-Up <i>Found & Frame</i>	 Adolescent <i>Ground & Grow</i>	 Mature <i>Produce & Sustain</i>	 Renewal <i>Review & Renew</i>	 Terminal <i>Decline & Dissolve</i>
<p>Creativity, vision</p> <p>Single-minded in pursuit of the dream</p> <p>Entrepreneurial mindset</p> <p>High commitment, willing to devote time to the cause</p> <p>Inspiring communicator</p> <p>Good understanding of the community and marketplace</p>	<p>Energetic</p> <p>Able to balance multiple, competing priorities</p> <p>Willing to take risks</p> <p>Decisive, action-oriented</p> <p>Single-minded but adaptable</p> <p>A generalist with many skills</p>	<p>Energetic</p> <p>Strategic thinker</p> <p>Action planner with excellent execution skills</p> <p>Able to engage others and build support</p> <p>Able to balance multiple, competing priorities</p> <p>Able to create systems and routinize some functions</p> <p>Good judgment about which opportunities to pursue</p> <p>Dynamic, comfortable with continual change</p>	<p>Skill in managing people and processes</p> <p>Appreciates the need for systems to manage and deliver programs efficiently and effectively</p> <p>Able to delegate</p> <p>Able to balance stability with continually seeking improvement based on community/constituent needs</p>	<p>Willing to challenge status quo and "take charge"</p> <p>Highly responsible, but not inclined to blame</p> <p>Able to problem-solve</p> <p>Willing to be hands-on in leading change</p> <p>Good communicator with internal & external stakeholders</p> <p>Perseverance</p>	<p>Rational and willing to listen</p> <p>Willing to challenge status quo and "take charge"</p> <p>Highly responsible, but not inclined to blame</p> <p>Able to problem-solve</p> <p>Willing to be hands-on in leading change</p> <p>Good communicator with internal & external stakeholders</p>



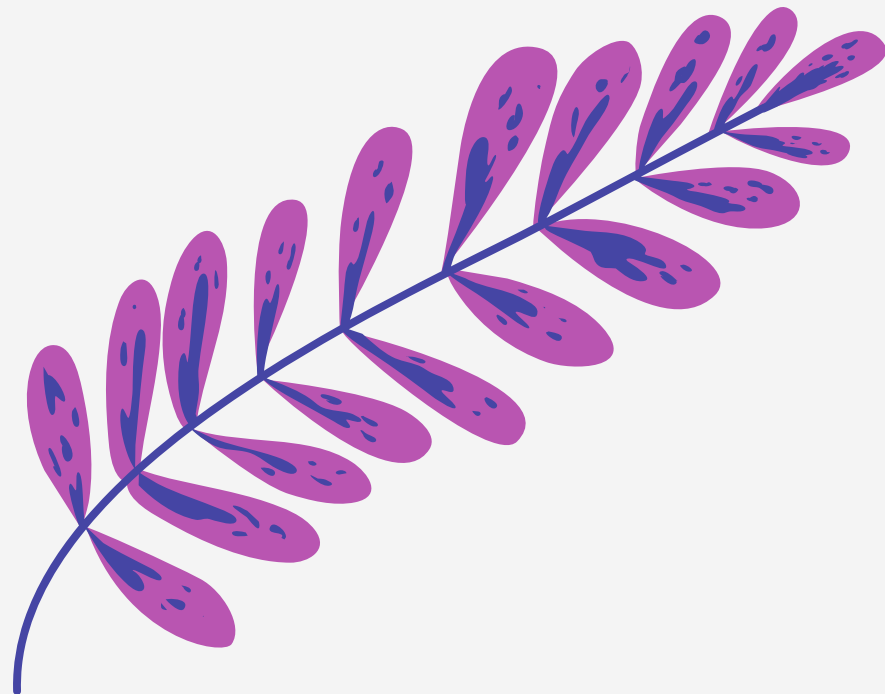
49%

of Executive Directors of Color continue to report less support from boards and staff than their white peers.

75%

of white Executive Directors said they had strong support from their board.

SESSION SUMMARY



Find clarity in the intentional pause. Getting grounded and being in an ongoing practice of being reflective isn't a delay—it's part of the work.



Organizations grow in iterative cycles, not straight lines.



Not all parts of an organization develop at the same pace—assessment helps you see the full picture.



Each stage requires a different kind of leadership. What worked before may not serve you now.



Leadership is layered. Your stage matters, and so do your identity, power dynamics, and access to support.

Upcoming Trainings & Convenings



Essential Tools for Nonprofit Success

8:30am-10:30am

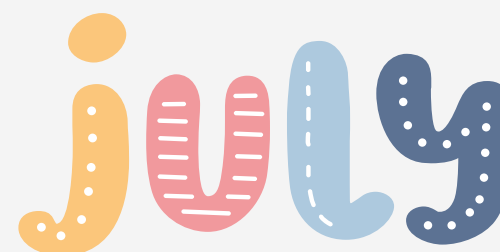
Hartford Public Library



Leading Through Ambiguity and Change

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(Virtual Session via Zoom)



Aligning Leadership with Purpose

Tuesday, July 15, 2025, 9:30am - 12:30pm

(In-Person, 10 Columbus Blvd, 7th floor, Hatford)

Resources



“A Guide To Gender Identity Terms” by NPR

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

“Five Life Stages of Nonprofits Organizations” by Judith Sharken Simon

“Nonprofit Lifecycles: Staged-Wisdom for Nonprofit Capacity” by Susan Kenny Stevens

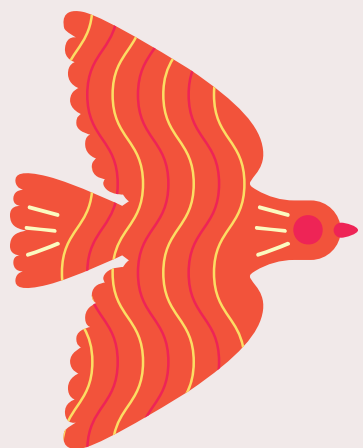
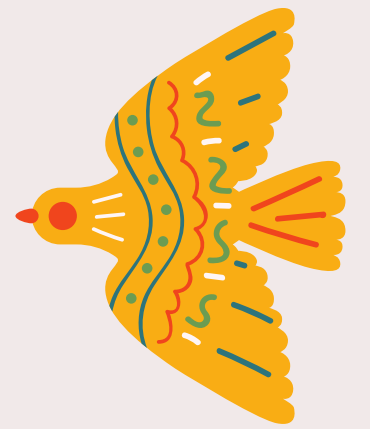
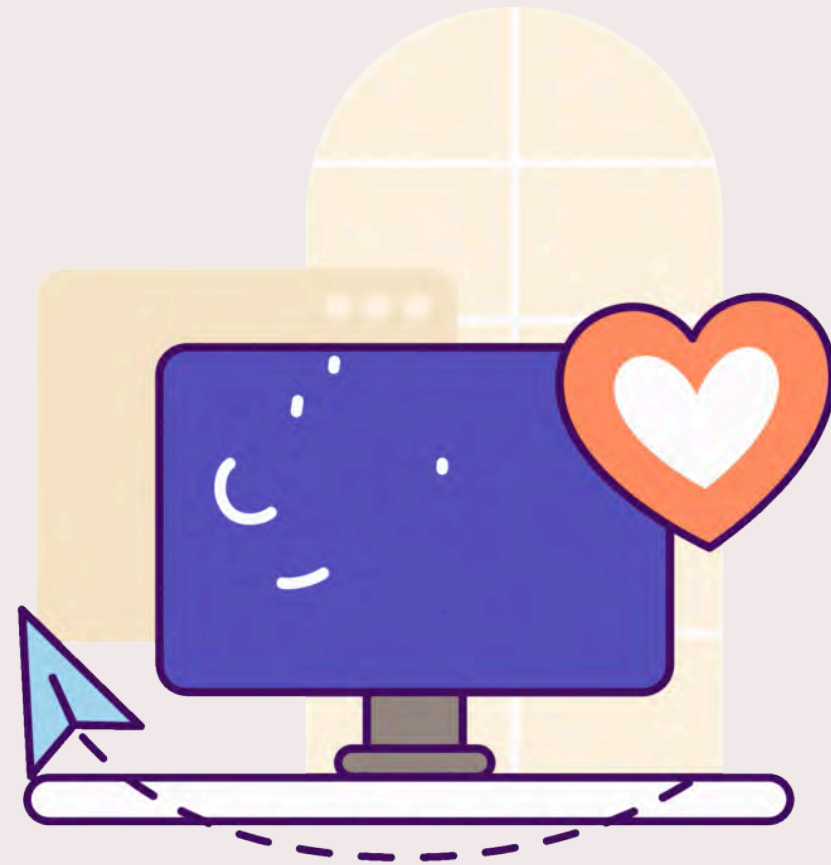
“Nonprofit Organizational Lifecycles-Self Assessment Guide” by Nonprofit Lifecycles Institute

“Nonprofit Organizational Life Cycles” by Speakman Consulting

“Nonprofit Organizational Life Cycles White Paper” by The Varga Group

“Life Stages Diagnostic Worksheet” by The Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership

“The Push and Pull: Declining Interest in Nonprofit Leadership” by Building Movement Project



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www.raicesconsulting.com**