

Handout: Case Study – Anonymous Community Organization (ACO)

Anonymous Community Organization (ACO) is a 20-year-old nonprofit focused on community wellness and youth engagement. For many years, ACO enjoyed a having strong reputation in the community. Its programs were popular and effective, with solid turnout and a loyal base of community partners. A few key foundations provided multi-year funding, and the staff and board were deeply committed to the mission.

However, over the past few years, ACO has begun to experience some changes. After the founding executive director stepped down, a new ED came on board with a vision for change—but their ideas haven't fully taken root. Long-time staff are feeling stretched thin, and burnout is becoming more common. Some have left, and it's been hard to fill those roles. While programs are still running, they haven't evolved to meet current community needs. The board, once highly engaged, now feels distant and unclear about its role. Their last strategic plan expired a year ago, and the organization hasn't yet revisited or renewed it.

ACO still has many strengths, but there's also a growing sense of misalignment. Externally, they may still appear stable—but internally, signs of early decline are surfacing.

Reflection Questions:

- What lifecycle 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?

We'll use this story as a starting point to reflect on how to recognize and respond to where we are in the organizational life cycle.



Image Source: Nonprofit Lifecycles: Stage-based Wisdom for Nonprofit Capacity by Susan Kenny Stevens. PHD.