



GROUP

L e a r n i n g f o r A c t i o n

# Rhode Island Foundation Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence Year 1 Evaluation: Report of Key Findings

April 2010

## **Prepared For**

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LFA Group enhances the impact and sustainability of social sector organizations through highly customized research, strategy development, and evaluation services.



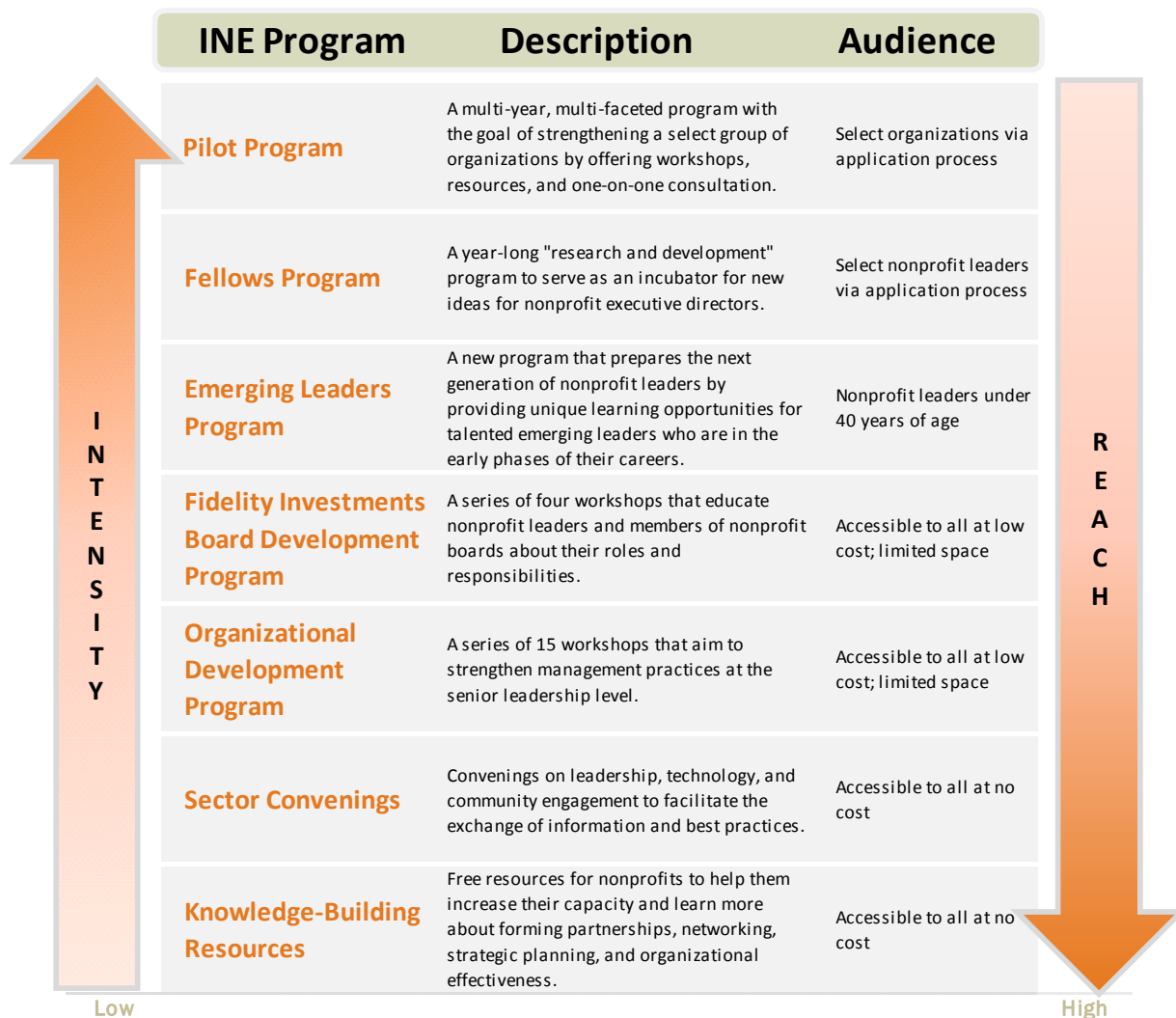
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## I. Introduction and Background

Established in 1916, the Rhode Island Foundation (RIF) is a community foundation whose mission is “to build a better Rhode Island as a philanthropic resource for people, communities, organizations, and programs.” The community foundation launched the Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence (INE) in 2008 “to build the capacity of nonprofit organizations so they can better achieve their missions.” The Initiative’s long-term intended impact is ultimately to improve the quality of life for Rhode Islanders through strengthening the nonprofit sector.

The INE offers an array of programs that range in level of intensity and reach with respect to content and duration of engagement. The figure below provides a brief description of each INE program, as well as its intensity level and reach, relative to other programs.



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All INE programs aim to achieve the long-term outcomes of:

- Increasing knowledge about and implementation of best practices in nonprofit governance and organizational effectiveness;
- Increasing the number of effective executive leaders and governing bodies;
- Increasing the number of organizations with stable and effective organizational systems and structures; and
- Improving communication and collaboration among organizations.

RIF contracted with the independent research, evaluation, and strategy firm of LFA Group<sup>1</sup> (LFA, *Learning for Action*) to evaluate the INE with respect to its impact on participants' knowledge and skills, as well as on organizational practices.

LFA focused on addressing the following evaluation questions for this study:

- What are the characteristics of people and organizations in the RI nonprofit sector that INE programs reach?
- Are INE programs timely and relevant, responding to the needs of the Rhode Island nonprofit sector?
- What impacts are INE programs having at the individual and organizational levels?
- What should the INE consider so that it continues to increase its own effectiveness in building the capacity of nonprofit organizations in Rhode Island?

The remainder of this report describes the evaluation methods used for this assessment and then presents key findings from the study.

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<sup>1</sup> Formerly LaFrance Associates, LLC

## II. Evaluation Methods

### *Logic Model Development*

The logic model serves as an at-a-glance tool to communicate what the INE programs do and how success is defined. In collaboration with RIF INE staff, evaluators drafted a logic model for each of the INE programs, clustering them by level of intensity: low, moderate, and high (see Appendix A). These logic models may be revisited and refined based on findings from this evaluation.

### *Instrument Development and Data Collection*

Evaluators used a mixed-methods design including qualitative and quantitative research. All protocols were developed in collaboration with RIF INE staff and are included in Appendices B through D.

- **INE participant surveys** were administered online to 662 INE participants, of whom 163 people completed the survey for a response rate of 25%. The survey assessed the level of impact that INE programs have had on their knowledge and on their organization with respect to nonprofit governance, management and leadership, and financial capacity. Evaluators also asked workshop participants to report on the effect of the Board Development and Organizational Development workshops.
- **Key informant interviews** were conducted with 14 INE participants who were considered to be “high frequency” participants to learn about their experiences from engaging with INE’s programs. RIF INE staff provided LFA with a sample of executive directors and board members who have participated in multiple INE programs.
- **Staff surveys** were conducted with nine staff to learn about their experiences from working with the INE staff and programs. Electronic surveys were sent to staff who completed and sent them directly to LFA staff to ensure confidentiality. Most staff respondents work in the Grants Program.
- **Administrative data** were extracted from INE’s databases to gather additional participant characteristics including receipt of a RIF grant and the participant organization’s sector of focus.

Evaluators analyzed the survey data to generate a summary of participant characteristics, participation in programs, and impacts of the programs. LFA team members conducted content analysis of interview data and open-ended survey responses to extract themes that emerged. Two members of the evaluation team separately read the notes and responses from the interviews and surveys to generate a comprehensive list of themes. Following this initial step, the two LFA team members met to refine the themes.

### *Strengths and Limitations*

#### ▪ **Strengths**

There are several strengths to this evaluation. First, we used the logic models for each program to identify intended outcomes and impacts of the INE programs. LFA generated survey and interview questions based on these outcomes and impacts to assess targeted and quantifiable changes. Second, the mixed-methods design allows for triangulation: cross-checking results from one method with another to strengthen or challenge findings. Finally, this report may serve as a baseline report from which INE may use as a benchmark for successive evaluations, and as a way to modify strategies of the INE.

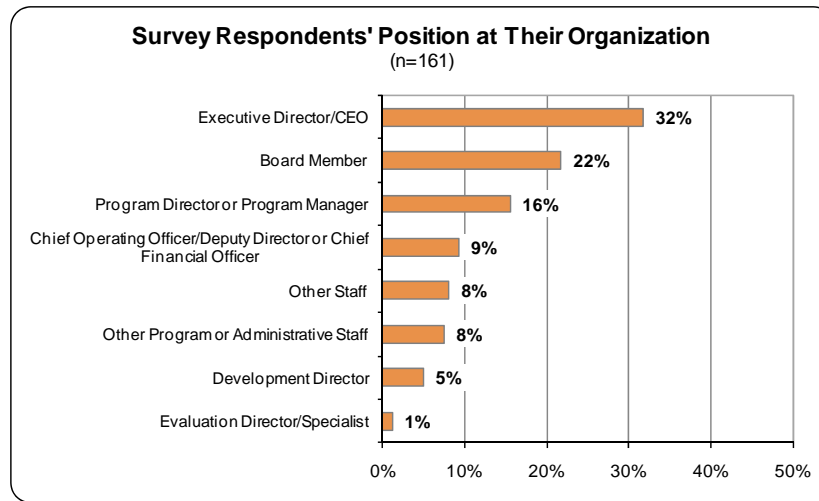
#### ▪ **Limitations**

One limitation of this evaluation is that it provides a snapshot of the effects that INE programs collectively have had on participants, but does not provide an in-depth assessment of each individual program’s impact. In addition, many participants and participant organizations may not have had sufficient time to impart knowledge gained from the well-attended workshops and convenings to other staff and board members to create desired changes at the organizational level. Creating organizational change can take a significant amount of time, and can require intervention with more than one board member or other organizational leader/staff person.

### III. Profile of Participants and Use of INE Programs

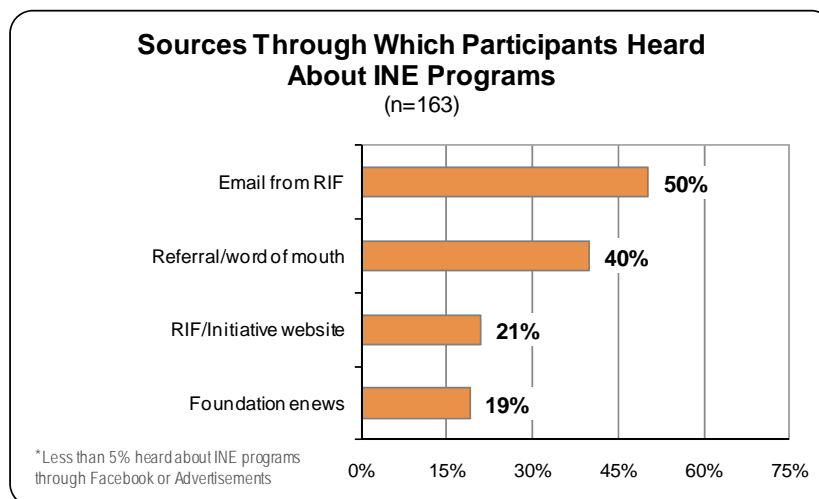
Most survey respondents are Executive Directors/Chief Executive Officers (32%) of Rhode Island nonprofits, followed by board members (22%). Other respondent positions include Program Director or Program Manager (16%), and Chief Operating Officer/Deputy Director or Chief Financial Officer (9%) (see Exhibit 1 [U](#)). A plurality of survey respondents (43%) have been in their current position between one and three years. Most participant organizations are in the human services sector (30%) followed by economic and community development (23%), and arts and culture (22%) sectors (not depicted). Other participating sectors include education (12%), health (11%), and the environment (2%) sectors.


**Exhibit 1**

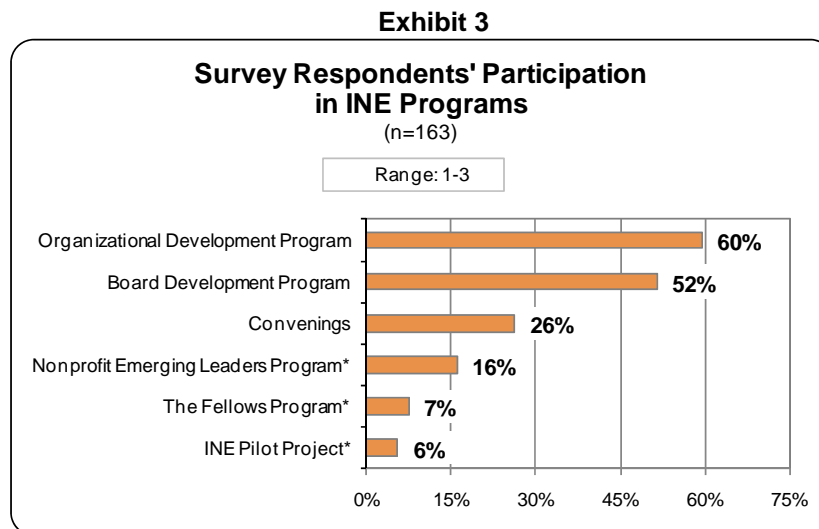


INE advertises its program offerings in a variety of ways. Survey respondents primarily learned of INE programs through emails from the Rhode Island Foundation (50%) and referrals or by word of mouth (40%) (see Exhibit 2 [U](#)). The RIF INE website was a source for learning about offerings for 21% of survey respondents, followed by the Foundation's e-news (19%). In interviews, participants shared that motivations for attending INE programs included their own professional development, general interest in capacity building, and networking opportunities.

**Exhibit 2**



As shown in Exhibit 3 , the two programs with the highest participation are the Organizational Development and Board Development Programs. Unlike the Fellows Program and Pilot Program, these programs have no eligibility criteria or application process to participate and are accessible to all nonprofits. On average, most survey respondents participated in one INE program only.



\*These programs require an application or have eligibility criteria.


INE has been offering the Organizational Development Program since the fall of 2008 and is part of INE's moderate intensity programs along with the Board Development Program. Evaluators asked participants which workshops they had attended as part of the Organizational Development and Board Development Programs. Notably, in both programs, the highest participation rates were found in finance-related workshops, which may be a consequence of the current economic climate. Of the 15 Organizational Development Program workshops, Finance 101 had the highest participation rate (22%) followed by Organizational Change and Creating a Communication Strategy (see Exhibit 4 )

**Exhibit 4**  
**Organizational Development Workshop Participation**

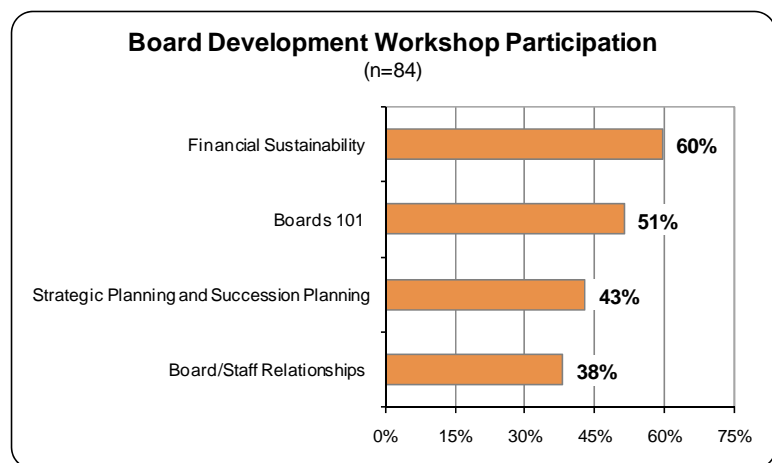
Organizational Development Workshop (n=97)	Percentage
Finance 101	22%
Organizational Change	19%
Creating a Communication Strategy	19%
Finance 102	17%
Emerging Leaders workshops	16%
Developing a Planned Giving Program	14%
Development Doctor	12%
Aligning Strategic Thinking and Technology	11%
Managing Your Organization's Workforce During Challenging Economic Times	9%
Managing Your Organization's Capital Assets	9%
Strategic Restructuring	9%
Finance 103	7%
Developing a Contingency Plan	7%

**Exhibit 4****Organizational Development Workshop Participation**


Organizational Development Workshop (n=97)	Percentage
Social Enterprise 101	7%
Do You Know Whether Your Goals are Being Achieved	5%

The Board Development Program consists of four different workshops, which were first offered in the spring of 2008. A preponderance of survey respondents participated in Financial Sustainability (60%) followed by Boards 101 (51%). Compared to LFA's evaluation of the Board Development Program in May 2009, the participation rates of these two workshops have increased by more than 10%. The Strategic Planning and Succession Planning workshop was attended by 43% of Board Development Program participants, followed by 38% who attended the Board/Staff Relationships workshop (See Exhibit 5 .

INE also offers lower intensity services in the form of knowledge-building resources and convenings. Participants most frequently accessed INE's self-assessment tools (18%) followed by the Consultant Directory (15%) and the Research Reports (14%), though the majority of survey respondents (65%) report they have not accessed any of INE's knowledge-building resources (not depicted). A smaller proportion of participants (26%) have attended INE's Sector Convenings, with the Leadership Convening (14%) and Community Engagement Convening (12%) having the highest levels of participation.

**Exhibit 5*****A Timely Assessment of Coping in the Current Economic Context***

The current financial downturn has greatly affected the Rhode Island nonprofit sector. Cuts in public and private funding have led to difficult choices for nonprofit organizations about their programming and organizational structure. The fiscal health of nonprofits is declining as their sources of income decrease and the demand for services increases.<sup>2</sup> In their quest to be relevant and timely, RIF staff asked the evaluation team to include questions in this assessment about how organizations are coping.

Evaluators asked participants what steps their organization has taken to respond to the financial crisis since spring 2008. Organizations are primarily reducing expenses, partnering or collaborating with other organizations and engaging staff in fundraising. A plurality of survey respondents (48%) reported having reduced non-personnel expenses. Differences in sub-sectors are noteworthy: As high as 69% of participants from the education sector reported reducing non-personnel expenses, while 43% of participants in the health and human services (HHS) sector reported this approach. However, a higher percentage of participants in the HHS sector reported reducing staff hours or laying off staff, compared to participants in other sectors. Approximately one quarter of participants reported reducing expenses by reducing or eliminating professional development budgets (see Exhibit 6 .

<sup>2</sup> United Way of Rhode Island Nonprofit Sector Survey, March 2009.

### Exhibit 6

#### Steps Organizations Have Taken to Respond to the Financial Crisis Since Spring 2008

Steps Taken (n=163)	Percentage
Reduced non-personnel expenses (e.g. travel, supplies)	48%
Found new collaborators for space, programs, outreach, etc.	34%
Dedicated more staff time to fundraising	29%
Created an alliance with other organization to deliver services or handle administration	25%
Drew from reserves or lines of credit to cover current expenses	25%
Increased services to meet increased demand	23%
Reduced staff hours	23%
Laid off staff	23%
Reduced or eliminated professional development budget	23%
Decreased services consistent with decreased revenue	20%
Consolidated program sites	13%
Renegotiated rent	7%
Merged with other organization	3%

Nonprofit organizations are working together to meet increased demand with increasingly limited resources. Almost one-third (34%) reported finding new collaborators for space, programs, or outreach, while one quarter of respondents created an alliance with other organizations to deliver services or handle administration. Twenty-nine percent reported that they dedicated more staff time to fundraising. One quarter of survey respondents also reported taking other steps to weather the financial crisis such as drawing from reserves or lines of credit to cover current expenses, and decreasing services consistent with decreased revenue. Some participants reported increasing services to meet increased demand, with the highest percentage (35%) being reported by individuals in the health and human services sector.

## IV. Key Findings

As the INE develops its programs and future direction, its focus remains to strengthen the nonprofit sector in Rhode Island. Overall, INE programs are influencing nonprofit leaders' and stakeholders' thinking about organizational effectiveness. As more staff and board members at nonprofit organizations participate in INE's offerings, they gain shared language and understanding – a solid foundation for improving the capacity of their organizations.

The following section summarizes findings on the collective impact and outcomes of INE's programs and of outcomes of the Board Development and Organizational Development programs.

They are helping people to solve problems. They are the place to get advice geared to nonprofits; you could not get that before.

They're absolutely giving people the tools to move forward. [...] They've done a wonderful job.

*INE Participants*

The more effectively we operate, the more [our] missions will be accomplished, and if other people in the audience are using the information as much as we are, then we've made a big dent in our effectiveness. So if we're any example, then [the initiative] is making a big difference.

*INE Participant*

### Outcomes of Attending the Board Development and Organizational Development Workshops

The Board Development and Organizational Development Programs were the top two most attended INE programs among participants. The short-term goals of the Organizational Development and Board Development Programs are to:

- Increase knowledge on sound financial management practices and increase knowledge about effective nonprofit management among participants.
- Increase knowledge about effective boards, the role of board members, finances and financial stability among participants.
- Increase clarity among board members about roles and responsibilities, and the expectations between board and staff.

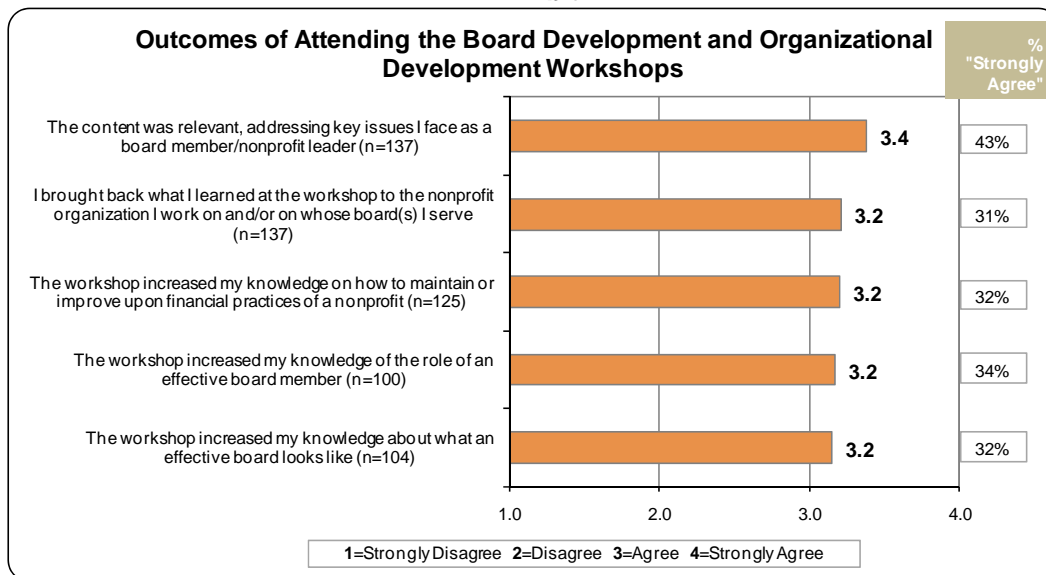
These programs aim to strengthen management practices, improve organizational structures and sustainability, and to improve the financial sustainability of participating organizations.

LFA assessed the effects of the Board and Organizational Development workshops, such as increased knowledge in organizational capacity areas and the relevance of workshops topics. Nearly all (92%) workshop participants agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the workshops to others, demonstrating their solid endorsement of the workshops' quality and value. Participants with less than one year of experience in their position at their organization were most likely to "strongly agree" that they would recommend this workshop to others (67% versus 43% overall) compared to participants with more than one year of experience in their positions.

In general, compared to the Organizational Development workshops, the Board Development workshops had higher attendance rates and had a higher percentage of participants who reported increased knowledge about financial practices and effective board functioning. Boards 101 and Board-Staff Relationships were particularly impactful workshops. Among the Organizational Development workshops, Organizational Change and Creating a Communication Strategy – the two most highly attended workshops – had a higher percentage of participants reporting increased knowledge in organizational capacity areas.

All interviewees had participated in the Board Development or Organizational Development workshops and spoke of the contributions that the workshops made when responding to interview questions.

**Exhibit 7**



- **Workshops are timely; content is relevant.**

As demonstrated in Exhibit 7, overall, 43% of workshop participants “strongly agree” that the workshop content was relevant to addressing key issues that they face as a board member or nonprofit leader. At least half of participants in management and leadership positions, such as program directors, development directors, and program managers, agreed to this statement, speaking to the broad relevance of these workshops across different positions. Interviewees also expressed the relevance of the workshops in terms of how they helped nurture their skills as a leader of their organization. Participants from the health and human services (51%) and economic and community development (46%) sectors were more likely to strongly agree that the workshop content was relevant compared to the arts and culture (32%) and education (25%) sectors.

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For me, and for I think many others, not only have they oriented us to our job, but they're point the way to very good tools to know how to do that and how to work with it.

*INE Participant*

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- **Participants disseminate learnings from workshops to others in their organization.**

Nearly all (92%) survey respondents reported that they shared learnings from the workshops with other staff or board members at their affiliated nonprofit organizations. In many cases, interviewees’ participation led to the attendance of other staff or board members at the workshops. Many interviewees echoed the sentiment that the workshops are uniquely valuable and timely given the economic climate, with the nonprofit sector placing more focus on building capacity and developing collaborative partners. Thirty-four percent of survey respondents have found new collaborators for space, programs, outreach, etc., in response to the recent financial crisis. A few interviewees felt that nonprofit leaders and staff should take advantage of INE’s workshops so that they are knowledgeable about the fundamentals of building nonprofit capacity.

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Timeliness [motivated me to participate in INE] because no one would have predicted the change in the environment in the past 18 months. They're trying to do more creative thinking regarding how to make the sector more effective.

*INE Participant*

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- **Workshops increase knowledge about effective boards.**

On average, the workshops increased participants' knowledge regarding effective boards, including what an effective board looks like and the role of an effective board member. This finding is consistent with the results of LFA's evaluation of the Board Development Program: many participants reported that the Board Development workshops increased their awareness and knowledge about the roles and responsibilities of the board in general, including how they function and what qualities constitute an effective board. On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), a larger percentage of board member participants compared to CEO/Executive Directors "strongly agreed" that the workshops increased their knowledge about what an effective board looks like (39% versus 23%) and on the role of an effective board member (41% versus 28%). This finding suggests that: 1) CEOs and Executive Directors may be more knowledgeable about board member roles prior to attendance; and 2) the workshops have the most impact on increased knowledge among the primary target population (i.e., board members). One interviewee, who is a board member, said that the workshops were "enlightening," leading to a broader understanding of effective boards. S/he applied this knowledge, of aligning an organization's activities to its mission, to another organization for which she held a governing role.

- **Learning about effective boards is most useful to participants who have up to ten years of experience in their positions.**

INE's Board and Organizational Development workshops have the most effect on participants who have been in their current position for up to ten years. Overall, current INE programs have a "significant impact" on a smaller percentage of participants with longer tenure in their positions. In particular, the subgroup of participants who have been in their positions for more than ten years generally had the lowest percentage of individuals reporting increased knowledge or "significant impact" in governance, financial stability and sustainability, or effective management compared to participants with up to ten years of experience in their positions. However, participants in their positions for seven to ten years reported increased knowledge about effective boards at similar levels to participants in their positions for less than one year; approximately 40% of participants in both subgroups.

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One of our board members heard about [Boards 101]. The [board member] took it and raved about it. We're actually changing our board training to ask all board members to take it so that they understand what is expected of a board member.

*INE Participant*

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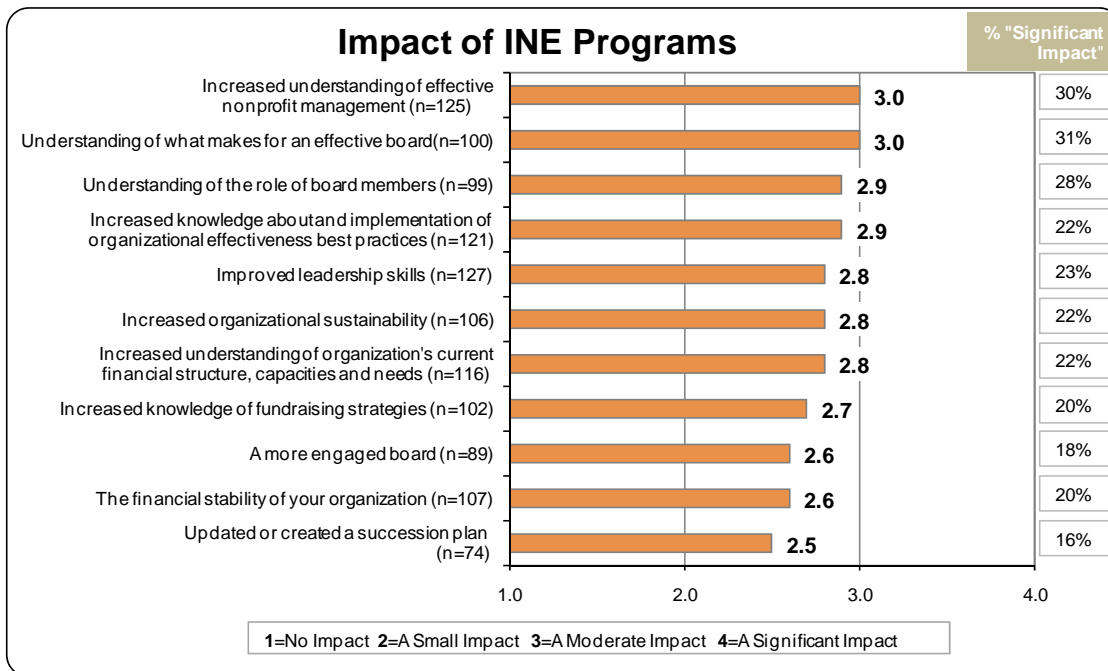
- **Knowledge about maintaining and improving upon financial practices is valuable regardless of participants' nonprofit sector.**

Overall, thirty-two percent of participants "strongly agree" that the Board Development and Organizational Development workshops increased their knowledge on how to maintain or improve upon nonprofit financial practices with little variation across nonprofit sectors. This finding suggests that learning about financial practices is imperative for all nonprofits, especially during times of economic crisis.

### *Impact of the Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence Programs Overall*

Through surveys and interviews, evaluators assessed if INE programs have contributed to increased understanding of how to build organizational capacity as well as actual changes in organizational practices. Participants answered a series of closed-ended questions on a scale of 1 (no impact) to 4 (a significant impact) assessing levels of impact that INE programs had on their organization with respect to nonprofit governance and organizational effectiveness. Evaluators also assessed contribution to long-term outcomes such as improvements in the financial stability of participant organizations and increased engagement of boards.

Exhibit 8



- **INE programs have the greatest impact on participants' increased knowledge and understanding of best practices in nonprofit governance and organizational effectiveness.**

On average, participants reported that INE programs had “moderate impact” (average scores of 2.5 to 3.0) on various areas of knowledge in organizational capacity and improved practices (see Exhibit 8). INE programs have the highest level of impact on increased understanding and knowledge of nonprofit governance, leadership and management, and organizational finances (average scores of 2.7 to 3.0). Evaluators examined the percentage of participants who reported that INE programs had a “significant impact” – the highest bar against which to assess the Initiative. A range of 28% to 31% of participants reported that the programs had a “significant impact” in improving their understanding of effective nonprofit management and board functioning.

INE programs have the lowest level of impact on changes in organizational practices, such as having a more engaged board or an updated succession plan. This finding may be attributable to: 1) the relatively “light touch” nature of workshops, which were more highly attended by respondents than other INE programs; 2) a short period of elapsed time since the launch of INE programs; and 3) the relatively small proportion of all INE participants who are engaged in the Pilot Program, a high-intensity program that includes one-on-one consultation in addition to participation in various other INE programs.

Interviewee testimonials also conveyed their increased knowledge and understanding about the important elements about organizational capacity and ways to implement best practices. Many mentioned that they shared what they learned from INE programs with their boards and staff. When multiple individuals attended workshops from the same organizations, interviewees noted an increase in their shared vocabulary about board governance, leadership and management, and finances. Collective participation allowed participants to compare their notes on the topics addressed during the workshops, and for some, helped them realize they are on the right track or helped clarify board responsibilities. For some organizations, board conversations were informed by the

Finance 103 was really content heavy...I came away with bits of information that I did not have before. My formal training has been through the Rhode Island Foundation. It has been really valuable, with their concrete, textbook-like information, which I have been able to share with my board and staff.

*INE Participant*

knowledge gained from participation of multiple individuals from one organization in INE workshops, since this newly acquired collective knowledge was then passed on to individuals who did not participate. For one executive director, attending an INE workshop with a board member resulted in more ownership and buy-in of the workshop learnings from other board members, leading this executive director to conclude that attending the workshop alone would not have been as effective.

- **INE programs increase knowledge about financial sustainability.**

Interviewees noted the impact INE has had on their increased knowledge about financial management and fiduciary responsibilities. One interviewee noted that participation in a finance workshop got the board thinking more strategically about their organization's finances. Another participant shared that as a result of participating in INE's programs s/he learned about a tax charge related to their primary fundraising strategy.

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Going to the workshops makes people think about *what* we are doing and *how* we are doing.

*INE Participant*

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- **In general, participants with less experience in their current position or in management positions were more likely than their more experienced counterparts to report "significant impact" from INE programs.**

Evaluators assessed whether, and if so how, one's role at the organization and length of time in a position influence the level of impact experienced from INE programs. In general, a higher proportion of participants who have been in their positions for less than four years, compared to those in their positions for four or more years, reported "significant impact" of INE programs. Length of time in one's position is significantly associated with the programs' impact on improved leadership skills. Thirty-six percent of individuals in their position for one to three years reported "significant impact," compared to 23% overall, on improved leadership skills ( $p < 0.1$ ).

Individuals who have been in their position for more than ten years were least likely to report "significant impact" from INE programs compared to individuals who have been in their positions for less than ten years. This is likely attributable to their higher level of accumulated knowledge at the organization and in the nonprofit sector compared to other less experienced participants. However, with respect to board functioning, findings suggest that INE programs are valuable to both new employees as well as those with institutional knowledge of the organization. The percentages of individuals with seven to ten years of experience reporting a "significant impact" on 1) their understanding of what makes for an effective board (55%) and 2) the role of board members (45%) were comparable to those with less than one year of experience reporting "significant impact" (58% and 45%, respectively).

Overall, a higher proportion of participants in management-level positions (e.g., program manager, program director, etc.) reported "significant impact" compared to participants overall. In particular, 35% to 40% of participants in management-level positions reported that INE programs had a "significant impact" on their knowledge and skills in management and leadership compared to 20% to 30% overall. This finding indicates that the programs are influencing a critical target audience for improving nonprofit management.

- **Participants and participant organizations are taking incremental steps to improve organizational capacity and sustainability.**

Based on interviews, evaluators found that participants have begun to implement changes at the board level that improve effective governance. Many shared that as a result of their increased knowledge about board functioning, board meetings are more appropriately focused, board members are clearer about roles and responsibilities, and boards are generally becoming more effective. One interviewee specifically mentioned that board members now know where to focus their meeting time based on their learnings about appropriate roles and responsibilities. As a result of participation in INE programs, this same organization changed its board composition, reviewed its by-laws, developed confidentiality agreements and ethic and conflict of interest statements, and outlined the responsibilities of its board members. Another interviewee, who is a board member, shared feeling more effective in his/her role at the organization as a result of the Boards 101 workshop. Participation in INE programs also helped another interviewee increase his/her commitment to motivate the board of directors to be more effective. In addition, another interviewee reported increased transparency with staff about decision-making processes at his/her organization after attending a workshop covering communication and transparency.

Specifically, the one that helped for the website was the communication strategy one, to the point that the board adopted the recommendation and committed the dollars to develop the website. We had been talking about it for years. In combination with the timing, this particular session helped formulate and strengthened the position that I was feeling for a long time. It got it moving further along.

*INE Participant*

On average, participants reported “moderate impact” of the INE programs on increased organizational sustainability (in general), the financial sustainability of their organization (specifically), and on an updating a succession plan (average scores of 2.8, 2.6, and 2.5 respectively). And, organizations are implementing incremental changes in their financial practices. One interviewee shared that as a result of the finance course participation, his/her organization examined the percentage of time devoted to programs versus administration. It was helpful for this organization to learn what the benchmark was, set up a system to track this information, and assess how they were doing against this benchmark. This same organization benefited from RIF’s “Development Doctor.” Another interviewee established a working relationship with one of the presenters who then worked with their organization and helped them create a financial plan. The creation of a financial plan for this organization gave the participant and the board members a broader view of the organization’s financial health whereas prior to participation in the workshop, a financial analysis was not on this organization’s radar.

- **INE programs contribute to increasing knowledge and skills broadly across the nonprofit sector, regardless of whether or not participants have also received a grant from RIF, although there are some differences in experiences across sub-sectors of nonprofits.**

When comparing results from INE program participants who have received a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation to participants who have not, the impact of INE programs on these two groups did not significantly differ. In other words, previous engagement with and receipt of grant support from the foundation is not a precursor to experiencing positive outcomes from INE programs.

In general, a higher percentage of participants from organizations in the health and human services sector followed by the education sector reported “significant impact,” compared to other sectors. Overall, lower percentage of participants from the economic and community development sector reported “significant impact” of the INE programs. Organizations in the HHS sector may have a greater need for building organizational capacity and sustainability given the higher proportion of participants who reported reduced staffing and increased demand for services in response to the economic crisis. Another possible

explanation is that organizations in the HHS and education sectors have greater capacity and infrastructure to implement newly acquired knowledge.

- **INE provides participants with valuable opportunities to network and learn from the experiences of others.**

INE is building the capacity of Rhode Island nonprofits by providing networking opportunities. Interviewees consider the convenings and workshops as venues to form partnerships with other organizations, creating a sense of community among participants. Participants noted the value in meeting and connecting with representatives from organizations of different sizes from their own, with a similar mission, or with shared challenges. Many instructors structured their workshops to be conducive to engaging in peer learning, exchange of strategies, and mentoring opportunities. One interviewee specifically mentioned that as a smaller organization they were able to make valuable connections with large organizations. Participants view INE as playing an integral role in increasing collaboration among nonprofits in the future.

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With peer exchange, [directors] have an opportunity to speak informally and to teach each other about real life scenarios, and to get real, practical, on-the ground information on how people handle issues when they arise.

Participating in the sector convenings gave staff the opportunity to network with colleagues [outside of our agency] and learn from their experiences.

*INE Participants*

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## V. Programmatic Feedback

Overall, participants expressed positive sentiments towards INE programs and staff, commenting on the quality and relevance of the INE programs, as compared to other organizations providing similar services in Rhode Island. Both participants and RIF staff shared their perspectives on the strengths, areas for improvement, and future directions of INE.

The environment of the RIF is so beautiful to be in, which makes the whole experience really a great one. I am beginning to feel I have a little home there.

*INE Participant*

### Strengths of INE Programs

Participants highlighted the **quality of the workshops and presenters** as a major strength of INE programs. Presenters drew from personal experience in the nonprofit sector and provided concrete and relevant examples. Overall, the sessions were well-balanced between time spent on presentation and on discussion during which participants had opportunities to ask questions to the presenter, and interact with others. Interviewees also mentioned the utility of workshop materials outside of the workshop setting, applying them at their organizations.

I was surprised at the quality and how much I really got out of it... I try to go to as many as I can because they are so good.

*INE Participant*

Both staff and participants expressed that **accessibility** is another positive aspect of INE programs. Staff mentioned that the programs have increased the foundation's approachability to local nonprofits. Nonprofits can access the diversity of workshops, which have no eligibility criteria. Indeed, 15% of respondents were from organizations that had not received a grant from RIF, demonstrating that the INE is attracting nonprofits without previous engagement with the foundation. Participants commented on the low cost and central location as positive features of the workshops and convenings.

They are phenomenal people, kind, accessible. I can't think of a concern or question I had that they have not addressed.

*INE Participant*

Finally, RIF staff acknowledged that INE programs have had a **positive influence on the foundation's internal practices**. The INE's culture of learning and evaluation has contributed to increasing awareness of the importance of evaluating the impact of all of the foundation's efforts. One staff member noted that the RIF Grants Program will be incorporating a diagnostic tool (e.g., organizational assessment tool) into the grantmaking process as a result of one of the efforts in the INE's Pilot Program. Some staff have also experienced professional development through opportunities to co-lead INE workshops.

The Fidelity workshop offerings have provided an important avenue for organizations to access the Foundation and receive a different level of assistance that has been previously lacking.

*Rhode Island Foundation Staff*

## Areas for Improvement

INE serves an array of organizations with respect to area of focus, size, and level of organizational capacity. In addition, individual participants vary with respect to their position at the organization, level of experience in the sector, and level of knowledge in organizational capacity building. While participants overall report that INE programs have a positive effect; the INE faces a real challenge in meeting the needs of a diverse audience.

Both staff and participants identified **a lack of clarity in defining the target audience** for specific workshops as an area for improvement, because some participants have unmet expectations after the experience. Some viewed certain workshops to be too complex, while others felt that the content was too basic and better suited for nonprofits in the start-up stage. Staff and participants advocated for having the INE specify the intended audience for each workshop when advertising so that participants can identify workshops that aligns with their needs. RIF staff and INE participants alike mentioned that not articulating the target audience for one INE program led to an unintended outcome. Some participants felt unreasonably excluded from the new Emerging Leaders Program which serves leaders under 40 years old in the social sector. RIF staff recognized the exclusionary tendency of this program. Participant interviewees who are over 40 years of age see value in this program and feel that they have much to gain from participating. One interviewee noted that there are many older individuals that have transitioned into the nonprofit sector and are emerging as leaders and would benefit from this INE program.

The INE has a very small staff to develop and support a very large agenda, which has limited their ability to deliver a more comprehensive selection of programs to agencies working at a variety of levels – from grassroots to more mature organizations.

Rhode Island Foundation Staff

Participants identified some logistical issues as potential deterrents to program attendance. Though interviewees noted that the cost of INE workshops is affordable, **participants were dissatisfied with incurring a cost for parking**. This issue was mentioned by many interviewees since the cost of parking was almost as much as the cost of some of the workshops. Some participants also recalled that the foundation validated parking for a period of time, which helped mediate the associated costs of attending the workshops.

A few participant interviewees expressed their **dissatisfaction with the provision, or lack thereof, of food and refreshments** as a minor issue for consideration. Some workshops are offered during the lunch hours, and interviewees appreciated knowing whether or not INE will offer lunch during these workshops.

## How to Engage More Nonprofits

Interviewees shared their suggestions on how INE could involve more nonprofits in its capacity-building programs. Many suggested that **INE could engage in more personal and targeted outreach**. In addition to sending out mass emails, participants thought that INE staff could make personal calls or site visits to gain a better understanding of the nonprofit organizations that are engaging with the foundation. Another strategy for outreach was advertising INE programs in directories and clearinghouses. Those in the education sector view this outreach strategy as an effective way of informing others in the educational community about INE workshops.

Rhode Island is so small, [INE] could take advantage of the personal relationships that work so much in this state and make an effort to get to know people at a more personal level who come to INE and foster a sense of being part of a community.

INE Participant

According to interviewees, **utilizing participants' networks** to help spread the word about INE workshops would be an effective strategy to engage more nonprofits. Participants reported that INE could ask them for contacts in their networks whom they think will benefit from INE workshops. One participant suggested creating an incentive program for referrals.

**Offering programs in other parts of the state** beyond the Providence metropolitan area can attract those organizations that must consider the cost and time to travel from other parts of the state to Providence in order to participate. One participant mentioned that the possibility of offering virtual sessions should be explored as a way for remote organizations to participate, especially for those organizations in the education sector that have strict district limitations on travel. RIF staff also agreed that expanding the offering into other geographic areas of the state would help engage more nonprofit organizations.

Staff and participants advocated for **additional dates for, and earlier notification of, workshops** to increase attendance. Some interviewees reported not being able to attend a particular workshop due to a prior commitment, and needing to wait a year for the next offering.

### Suggestions for Future Programming

Participants continue to see INE's role in the future as **providing a venue for partnership and collaboration** among participating nonprofit organizations. Participants would appreciate more opportunities to make connections with others in the social sector and encourage INE to continue this aspect of its programming. According to interviewees, INE has spearheaded capacity-building efforts in Rhode Island, but they are aware of other organizations, such as United Way and the Chamber of Commerce, offering similar workshops. As nonprofits are urged to collaborate and form partnerships with other organizations, interviewees commented that the INE may want to reach out to other capacity-building providers and work together to avoid duplicating efforts.

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[INE should offer] a presentation on developing true partnerships versus partnerships in name only for grants. There is a big push among foundations to get organizations to merge [...]. I believe that creating true, structural, long-term partnerships is the wave of the future for successful nonprofits and there is a lot that needs to be learned before this will happen effectively on a large scale.

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INE Participant

Interviewees suggested that INE mobilize its experts in the field to **provide one-on-one, in-depth coaching or mentoring** to nonprofits with specific capacity-building projects. One interviewee suggested that INE could engage in in-depth coaching on specific capacity-building projects, much like the Pilot Program, and then provide a case study to share with others about how that organization progressed. Foundation staff also suggested that INE work directly with nonprofits as opposed to offering generalized trainings for an entire field. Another proposed strategy is that workshop presenters hold organization-specific question and answer sessions either before or after each session. These sessions will not only address the specific questions of participants but also avoid lengthy discussions during the presentations that may not apply to more than one participant. There is a fine balance to strike between individual technical assistance and collective discussion and problem-solving.

Participants provided many suggestions for workshops topics they would like to see offered. Many of the suggestions were related to **how nonprofits weather the economic crisis**. In the open-ended survey response section, participants shared that they would like to participate in more fund development workshops, specifically on ways to enhance fundraising, seeking and winning benefactors, and online fundraising best practices. These suggestions are consistent with how the sector is responding to the economic crisis and how the economic downturn has impacted Rhode Island nonprofits. One interviewee mentioned that information about planning for budget cuts would be very helpful during these difficult economic times. RIF staff also had similar suggestions, identifying workshops on fund development, financial management, responsible budgeting, and managing shrinking resources as beneficial to the social sector.

## VI. Conclusion

This evaluation of the first year of the Rhode Island Foundation's Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence demonstrates the exceedingly high quality of the Initiative's offerings. Findings on the extent to which participants experience targeted outcomes and impacts are consistent with other comparable capacity-building programs LFA has studied in the early stages of their development and implementation processes.

INE participants have overwhelmingly positive responses to the Initiative's offerings on building the capacity of nonprofits in Rhode Island. They expressed the need and desire for such programming to continue during a time of decreased funds and amidst a tenuous economic climate. The programs contribute greatly to increased awareness and knowledge on the elements of organizational capacity and on strategies to implement best practices. Consistent with the findings from the Board Development Program Evaluation, participants welcome the opportunity to network with others in the nonprofit sector in Rhode Island, and endorsed the continuation of these opportunities.

To a lesser extent, INE programs are having an impact on changes in organizational best practices, such as having a more engaged board or an updated succession plan. However, this finding is not surprising given that the most attended programs are the workshops, a one-time intervention. The Board Development and Organizational Development workshops are not as intensive as the multi-year Pilot Program, during which an organization is intended to progress towards improved organizational sustainability. Participation in the higher-intensity programming will likely increase over time; thus, learnings from INE's higher intensity programs have not yet surfaced. As these components are evaluated, together with the evaluation of moderate intensity programs, RIF will have a more complete assessment of the INE's collective outcomes and potential for deep impact. With these findings in hand, the RIF will be better positioned to ascertain the balance between breadth and depth across INE's programs.

## VII. Appendices

Appendix A: RIF INE Logic Models

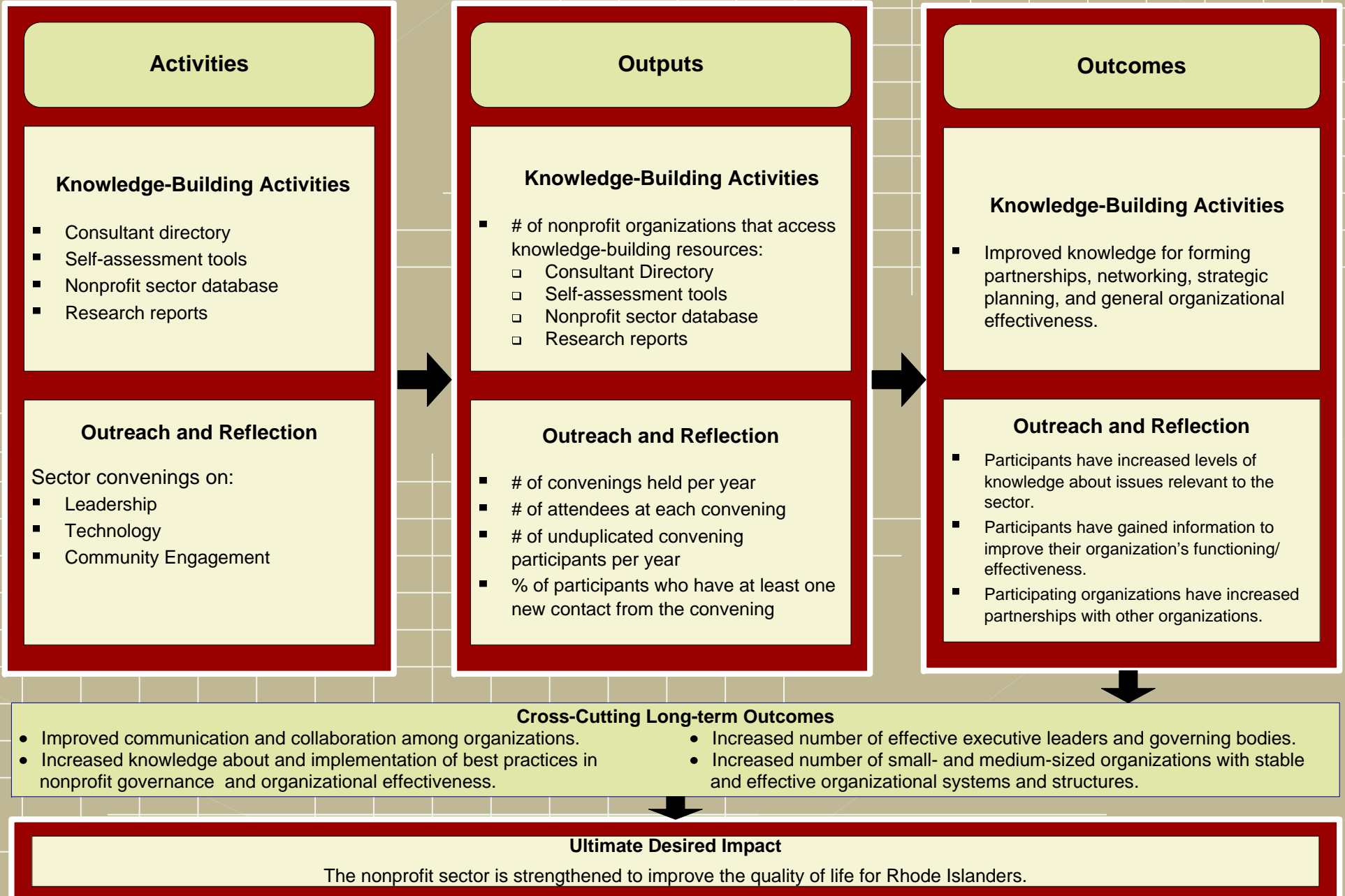
Appendix B: Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence Participant Survey

Appendix C: Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence Participant Interview Protocol

Appendix D: Rhode Island Foundation Staff Survey

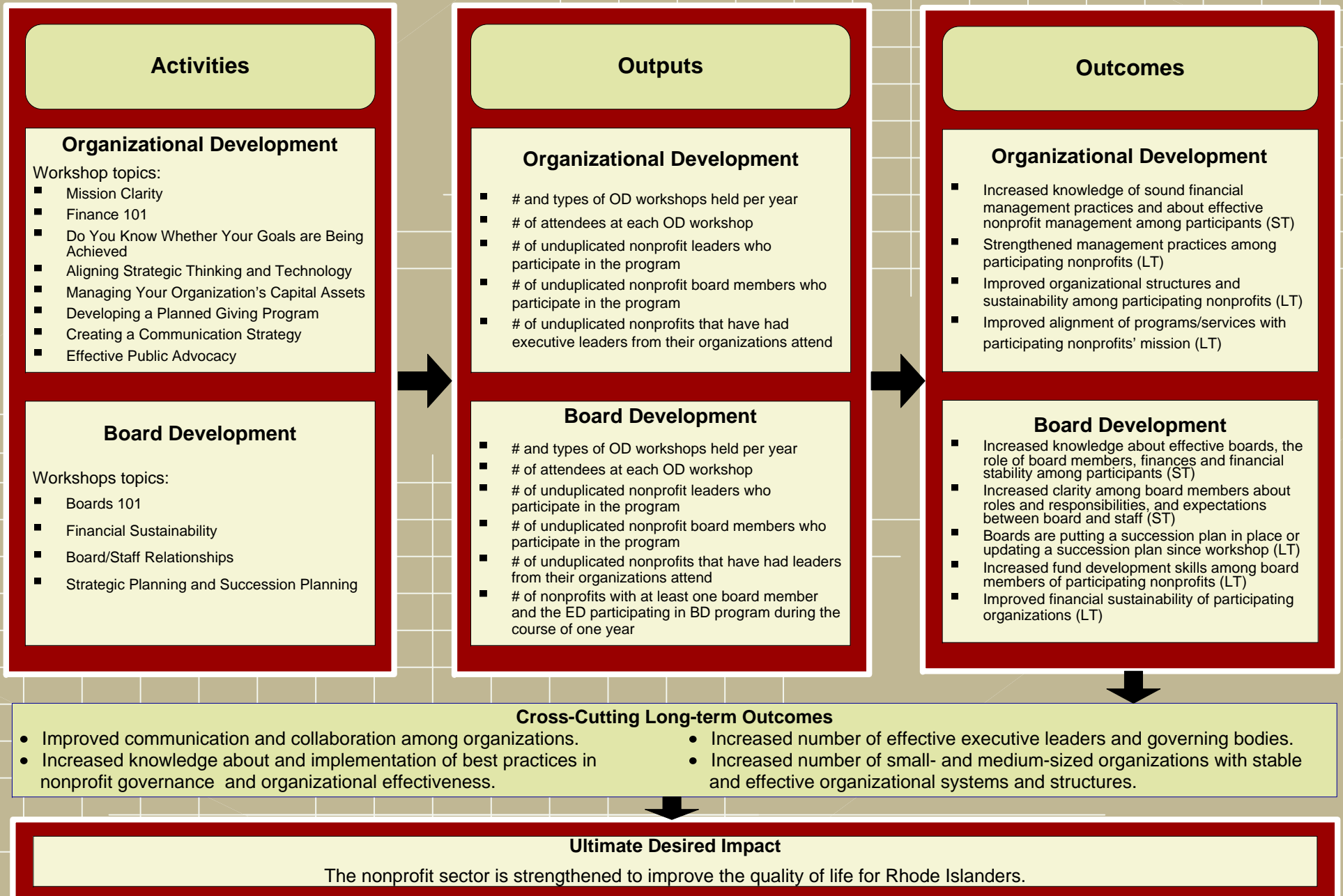
# Appendix A: The Rhode Island Foundation Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence

## Lower Intensity Programs: Knowledge-Building Activities and Sector Convenings



# Appendix A: The Rhode Island Foundation Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence

## Moderate Intensity Programs: Organizational Development and Board Development Workshops



# Appendix A: The Rhode Island Foundation Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence

## Fellows Program

### Activities

- Fellows complete a self-designed program that deepens, enhances or sets a new direction for their leadership abilities
- Fellows receive up to \$10,000 for proposed program activities, and their organization receives up to \$5,000 to support the leader's time away from daily operations for up to two months
- Fellows receive leadership and professional development

### Outputs

- # of Fellows participating in the program per year
- Others TBD (based on self-designed program)

### Outcomes

- Increased knowledge of effective leadership among Fellows
- Increased leadership skills among Fellows
- Increased commitment to their organizations and sector
- Others TBD (based on self-designed program)

### Cross-Cutting Long-term Outcomes

- Improved communication and collaboration among organizations.
- Increased knowledge about and implementation of best practices in nonprofit governance and organizational effectiveness.
- Increased number of effective executive leaders and governing bodies.
- Increased number of small- and medium-sized organizations with stable and effective organizational systems and structures.

### Ultimate Desired Impact

The nonprofit sector is strengthened to improve the quality of life for Rhode Islanders.

# Appendix A: The Rhode Island Foundation Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence

## Pilot Program

### Activities

- Board Development program workshops for the Board and ED
- Organizational Development workshops for the Board and ED
- Technical assistance
- Peer learning/mentoring
- Capacity-building grants

### Outputs

#### Year 1:

- 10 hours of board development training
- 12 hours of organizational development training
- 9 hours of peer learning for executive directors (4- 1.5 hour meetings and two 1.5 hour meetings with EDs and board chairs)
- 7.5 hours of peer learning for board chairs (3-1.5 hour meetings and two 1.5 hour meetings with EDs and board chairs)
- 4 hours per month of technical assistance from a consultant

#### Year 2:

- 21 hours of peer learning for executive directors (1.5 hours/month and bi-annual 1.5 hour meetings with EDs and board chairs)
- 9 hours of peer learning for board chairs (quarterly 1.5 hour meetings and bi-annual 1.5 hour meetings with EDs and board chairs)
- 12 hours of executive mentoring for 5 executive directors
- 4 hours per month of technical assistance from a consultant

#### Year 3:

- 21 hours of peer learning for executive directors (1.5 hours/month and bi-annual 1.5 hour meetings with EDs and board chairs)
- 9 hours of peer learning for board chairs (quarterly 1.5 hour meetings and bi-annual 1.5 hour meetings with EDs and board chairs)
- 12 hours of executive mentoring for 5 executive directors
- 4 hours per month of technical assistance from a consultant

### Outcomes

- Participating organizations attain BD outcomes and OD outcomes (as appropriate).
- Participating organizations are increasingly engaged in strategic planning processes to ensure that program activities are in alignment with mission and goals.
- Participating organizations have greater stability, both financially and with regard to their organizational structures.
- Other outcomes determined on an individual organization basis.

### Cross-Cutting Long-term Outcomes

- Improved communication and collaboration among organizations.
- Increased knowledge about and implementation of best practices in nonprofit governance and organizational effectiveness.
- Increased number of effective executive leaders and governing bodies.
- Increased number of small- and medium-sized organizations with stable and effective organizational systems and structures.

### Ultimate Desired Impact

The nonprofit sector is strengthened to improve the quality of life for Rhode Islanders.

## Rhode Island Foundation – Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence Participant Survey

**Thank you for participating in the 2009 Survey of participants in the Rhode Island Foundation's Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence (INE). This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.** The purposes of the survey are:

- 1) To assess the value and impact of the INE services and programs; and
- 2) To better understand how INE programs can be most relevant for and have the greatest impact on nonprofit organizations in Rhode Island.

**This survey is completely confidential.** It is being conducted by the independent evaluation firm of LFA Group (LFA; formerly LaFrance Associates, LLC). Only aggregate data will be reported. No one other than the researcher tabulating the survey results will have access to individual responses. If you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please contact Jessica Xiomara Garcia at [jessica@LFAgroup.com](mailto:jessica@LFAgroup.com) or by calling 1-866-396-2850 x322.

If you feel there are questions other staff members may be better able to answer, we invite you to share the survey questions with them.

Please complete the survey by **December 9, 2009**.

**Thank you for your important work in Rhode Island and  
for your help with this survey!**

- 
1. What INE programs have you participated in? *Please check all that apply.*
    - Organizational Development program workshops
    - Board Development program workshops
    - The Fellows Program
    - Nonprofit Emerging Leaders Program
    - INE pilot project
    - Convening
    - Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
  2. How did you hear about the Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence programs you have participated in? *Please check all that apply.*
    - Referral/word of mouth
    - RIF/Initiative website
    - Email from RIF
    - Foundation enews
    - Facebook page
    - Advertisement
    - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Which of the following INE knowledge-building resources have you accessed? *Please check all that apply.*
    - The Consultant Directory
    - Self-assessment tools
    - Research reports
    - None of the above
  4. Which of the following INE sector convenings have you attended? *Please check all that apply.*
    - Leadership convening (October 8, 2008)
    - Technology convening (November 7, 2008)
    - Community engagement convening (December 5, 2008)
    - Arts & Business Council/INE Convening (March 31, 2009)
    - None of the above

**Appendix B: Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence Participant Survey**

5. Using a scale of 1-4, please respond to the following questions regarding the value of INE resources and convenings for your agency.

How valuable would you rate INE's resources and convenings for:	<i>Too soon to know or was already in place</i>	Not at all Valuable 1	Somewhat Valuable 2	Valuable 3	Very Valuable 4	Not Applicable
a. Forming partnerships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Networking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Informing strategic planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Improving financial management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Increasing organizational effectiveness generally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Which Board Development workshops have you attended? *Please check all that apply.*

- Boards 101 (Offered 3/20/08, 9/18/08, 4/9/09, and 9/15/09)
- Financial Sustainability (Offered 4/17/08, 10/15/08, 4/21/09, and 10/7/09)
- Board/Staff Relationships (Offered 5/22/08, 11/19/08, 5/20/09, and 11/19/09)
- Strategic Planning and Succession Planning (Offered 6/12/08, 12/11/08, 6/11/09, and 12/3/09)
- None
- I don't remember

7. Which Organizational Development workshops have you attended? *Please check all that apply.*

<input type="checkbox"/> Finance 101 (10/21/08)	<input type="checkbox"/> Finance 103 (6/25/09)
<input type="checkbox"/> Do You Know Whether Your Goals are Being Achieved (11/18/08)	<input type="checkbox"/> Development Doctor (7/22/09)
<input type="checkbox"/> Aligning Strategic Thinking and Technology (12/16/08)	<input type="checkbox"/> Developing a Contingency Plan (8/12/09)
<input type="checkbox"/> Managing Your Organization's Capital Assets (1/21/09)	<input type="checkbox"/> Organizational Change (10/2/09)
<input type="checkbox"/> Developing a Planned Giving Program (2/24/09)	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Enterprise 101 (10/6/09)
<input type="checkbox"/> Creating a Communication Strategy (3/18/09)	<input type="checkbox"/> Managing Your Organization's Workforce During Challenging Economic Times (11/3/09)
<input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Restructuring (4/24/09)	<input type="checkbox"/> Emerging leaders workshops (various)
<input type="checkbox"/> Finance 102 (5/29/09)	<input type="checkbox"/> None
	<input type="checkbox"/> I don't remember

## Appendix B: Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence Participant Survey

8. Using a scale of 1-4 with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 4 being “strongly agree”, please rate your agreement with the following statements, as they pertain to you, regarding the Board Development or Organizational Development workshops you have attended.

	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4	Not Applicable
a. The content was relevant, addressing key issues I face as a board member/nonprofit leader.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. The workshop increased my knowledge on how to maintain or improve upon financial practices of a nonprofit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. The workshop increased my knowledge about what an effective board looks like.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. The workshop increased my knowledge of the role of an effective board member.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. I brought back what I learned at the workshop to the nonprofit organization I work on and/or on whose board(s) I serve.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. I would recommend this workshop to others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Using a scale of 1-4, please respond to the following questions regarding the impact of INE programs on your agency.

To what extent did participation in INE programs contribute to...	<i>Too soon to know or was already in place</i>	No Impact 1	A Small Impact 2	A Moderate Impact 3	A Significant Impact 4	Not Applicable
a. Your understanding of the role of board members.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Your understanding of what makes for an effective board.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. An increased understanding of effective nonprofit management.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. An updated succession plan or the creation of a succession plan.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. A more engaged board.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Increased organizational sustainability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Increased your knowledge about and implementation of organizational effectiveness best practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Increased understanding of your organization's current financial structure, capacities and needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. The financial stability of your organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Increased knowledge of fundraising strategies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
k. Improved your skills as a leader.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Appendix B: Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence Participant Survey**

10. What steps has your organization taken to respond to the financial crisis since spring 2008? *Please check all that apply.*

- Created an alliance with other organization to deliver services or handle administration
- Consolidated program sites
- Decreased services consistent with decreased revenue
- Dedicated more staff time to fundraising
- Drew from reserves or lines of credit to cover current expenses
- Found new collaborators for space, programs, outreach, etc.
- Increased services to meet increased demand
- Laid off staff
- Merged with other organization
- Reduced non-personnel expenses (e.g. travel, supplies)
- Reduced or eliminated professional development budget
- Renegotiated rent
- Reduced staff hours
- Not applicable/Our organization has not had to take any steps
- Other: *Please specify* \_\_\_\_\_

11. What other types of programs or services do you think that RIF INE should offer Rhode Island nonprofits? Why? What would you find to be most relevant to your organization in particular and the sector in general?

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**About You**

12. Which category best describes your position at your organization? *Please select one.*

- CEO/Executive Director
- Chief Operating Officer/ Deputy Director
- Chief Financial Officer
- Program Director
- Development Director
- Program Manager
- Evaluation Director/Specialist
- Program Assistant/Administrative Staff
- Other: *Please specify* \_\_\_\_\_

13. How long have you been in your current position? *Please select one.*

- Less than a year
- 1-3 years
- 4-6 years
- 7-10 years
- More than 10 years

**Thank you for your time and input!**

Rhode Island Foundation  
Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence

Key Informant Interview Protocol for INE Participants

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*Thank you for taking the time to provide your input and insight into the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the Rhode Island Foundation's Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence. We are conducting these interviews to learn about your experiences with the Initiative and to better understand how the programs can be most relevant for and have the greatest impact on nonprofit organizations.*

*As a third-party evaluation group, we are committed to keeping this interview **confidential**: your comments will not be linked to you or your organization in our report to the Rhode Island Foundation.*

*I expect the interview to last 30 to 45 minutes. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?*

**Interviewee Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Organization:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Background and Context**

1. What is your role at **[name of organization]**? How long have you been with your organization?  
How long have you been in the nonprofit sector?
2. What INE programs (Fidelity Investments Board Development Program, Organizational Development Programs, Sector Convenings, Fellows Program) have you participated in?  
*probe:* How did you hear about **[INE program]**?
3. What motivated you to participate in INE's programs?  
*probe:* Are there others in your organization (staff and/or board members) who have participated in INE programs?

**Overall Perspectives on INE Programs**

4. To what extent did **[INE program]** meet your expectations?  
*probe:* In what ways were your expectations not met? In what ways could INE programs better meet your expectations?
5. How has participation in INE programs increased your knowledge about nonprofit capacity building and effectiveness? From your participation, have you experience increased knowledge, improved skills, and/or enhanced effectiveness in your role?
6. If other members of your organization have participated in INE programs, how has your collective participation impacted your organization?  
*probe:* Have you had the opportunity to implement the knowledge gained from participation in INE programs?
7. From your perspective, how is the Initiative building the capacity of nonprofits in Rhode Island?  
*probe:* To what extent does the INE implement and share best practices in terms of organizational leadership and development, nonprofit governance, and organizational effectiveness?
8. What other types of programs or services do you think that RIF INE should offer Rhode Island nonprofits? Why? What would you find to be most relevant to your organization in particular, and the sector in general?

### Programmatic Feedback

9. What worked well about the structure of the INE programs that you participated in?  
*probe:* What did not work well?
10. Do you have any suggestions for how INE could engage more nonprofits in its programs?
11. Do you have any additional comments about your experience with the INE?  
*probe:* What suggestions for the INE do you have for improvements?

**Thank you!**

Rhode Island Foundation  
Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence

RIF Staff Survey

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Thank you for taking the time to provide your input and insight into the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the Rhode Island Foundation's Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence. The purpose of this survey is to learn about your experiences with the Initiative and to better understand how the programs can be most relevant for and have the greatest impact on nonprofit organizations.

As a third-party evaluation group, we are committed to keeping your survey responses **confidential**: your comments will not be linked to you in our report to the Rhode Island Foundation.

The survey should take about 20 to 30 minutes to complete.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Background and Context**

1. What is your role at the Rhode Island Foundation?
  
2. How long have you been in this position at RIF?
  
3. What is your relationship to, interaction with, or role within, the Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence?
  
4. What has been your involvement in the planning, development and implementation of INE programs?
  
5. From your experience, how do INE and other RIF efforts/programs work together?
  - a) What suggestions do you have for how the INE could work together with other efforts within RIF that would yield the greatest mutual success? In thinking about this question, please bear in mind that to be an effective capacity-building initiative, the INE needs to have nonprofit organizations' trust, necessitating some degree of "firewall" to protect the confidentiality of participating organizations.

### Strengths and Challenges

6. What would you describe as the key strengths of the Initiative? What have been the major accomplishments of the Initiative?
  - a) From your perspective, what supports or activities led to these accomplishments?
  
7. In your experience, have you witnessed/experience an individual or organization improve their performance and effectiveness as a result of INE program participation? Please describe.
  
8. To your knowledge, how is the INE adhering to best practices in building the capacity of nonprofits? (Organizational leadership and development, nonprofit governance, other areas of nonprofit organizational effectiveness)
  
9. What are some challenges of the Initiative? How have these challenges been addressed?

### Perspectives on the INE Programs

10. Are there ways in which you think the Initiative has fallen short of its potential? Please describe.
  
11. How has the Initiative met, or not met, your expectations?
  
12. From your perspective, how has the INE influenced the foundation as a whole? For example, have there been any changes in RIF's practices or processes that may have been influenced by the INE programs?

**Programmatic Feedback**

13. Reflecting on the economic landscape and current context for nonprofits, what would you suggest as areas of focus for the Initiative to maximize its relevance and impact?

14. What suggestions do you have for engaging more nonprofits in INE programs?

15. What suggestions do you have for improvements to the INE?

**Thank you!**