

Strengthening the Executive Team

A Bridgespan Leadership Accelerator Program

An online program to improve your nonprofit executive team's performance.

Overview

Nonprofits led by strong executive teams create more impact and are better places to work, but only one out of four executive teams feel like they're working together effectively. In this program, you'll learn and apply best practices to help you work together more efficiently, effectively, and inclusively.

How it Works



Leadership Team Discussions

Come together as a group for two hours every few weeks to discuss key issues



Individual Learning & Reflection

Log onto our online platform and complete individual assignments before meeting as a team



Coaching Support

Individual and group coaching offered for Project Leads and CEOs

How Your Team Benefits

Nonprofits who participate in this program have:

- More time to focus on the work that matters and fewer ineffective meetings.
- More clarity, efficiency, and collaboration across the organization.
- Greater impact for the beneficiaries and communities you care about most.

In this program, your team will create a custom team playbook that highlights:

- **What you work on together:** The set of topics and decisions on which your executive team should focus.
- **How and when you meet:** The meeting strategy and practices that will enable productive and intentional meetings.
- **How you work together:** The practical ways you will build and maintain a healthy team dynamic across the organization.

Program details:

Who: Nonprofit leadership teams (typically the ED/CEO and the team they manage, usually 4-6 people; see FAQ for more information)

Two sessions per year:

Session 1: January - June

Deadline: Rolling admissions until December 15

Session 2: August - December

Deadline: Rolling admissions until June 30

Website:

(Bspan.org/StrengtheningtheExecutiveTeam)

Email us: LeadershipAccelerator@Bridgespan.org

Should Your Team Participate?

The Strengthening the Executive Team program might be right for you if your team and organization:

- Have at least 3 senior leadership team members and at least 10 FTEs.
- Want to clarify the role and purpose of your leadership team.
- Has new leadership (e.g., new CEO, other senior leaders), and you want to become a high-functioning team.
- Want to make sure your leadership team is spending its time in the most effective way possible.
- Can dedicate approximately 2 hours per week over a 3-5-month period along with one Project Lead that can dedicate approximately an additional 2 hours per week over a 3-5 month period.

Curriculum

Step 1: Clarify the work you do.

Step 2: Agree on roles.

Step 3: Align on how and when you meet.

Step 4: Establish how you work together.

View full curriculum here: <https://www.bridgespan.org/bridgespan-services/leadership-accelerator/strengthening-the-executive-team/curriculum>

Time Commitment

Team members must be prepared to dedicate approximately 2 hours per week in total on the program over a 3-5-month period (depending on the program and your team's pacing). Additionally, you will designate one of your team members to serve as the Project Lead. The Project Lead's time commitment will be approximately 2 additional hours per week while the CEO/ED will be approximately 1 additional hour per week.

Optional Toolkits

Depending on your team's needs and interest, you can take advantage of Bridgespan-provided toolkits to tackle immediate next steps. These toolkits include: **Learning Plan Toolkit**; **Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit**; **Decision Criteria Toolkit**; and **Bridging to Strategic Planning Toolkits**.

As a Strengthening the Executive Team program alum, you will always have access to these resources.

"This experience ensured we carved out the time to have deliberate, focused, and effective conversations with a simple framework that helped us to pinpoint where we could be more effective as an executive team, and we are already seeing the benefits."

CEO, 2020 Strengthening the Executive Team cohort

Application Process

Step 1: Complete the Request More Information form on the Leadership Accelerator website, or email us at LeadershipAccelerator@Bridgespan.org.

Step 2: A member of the Leadership Accelerator team will contact you within seven days to schedule a discovery call. We'll ask you about your organization and team size.

Step 3: If we agree that the program is a good fit, we'll send you an enrollment form!

Bridgespan Leadership Accelerator

Frequently Asked Questions

How can I be confident that this content will be relevant for my organization?

Over the last 20 years, Bridgespan has helped hundreds of nonprofit organizations effectively address key leadership and strategic issues. We have developed our programs in collaboration with a diverse set of global organizations, nonprofit leaders, and sector experts.

Our tools and learning approaches have helped clients get clear on their strategies, accelerate their impact, improve their decision-making confidence, and empower their teams to prioritize the work that matters most.

We have tested our Leadership Accelerator programs to ensure that each program is impactful, actionable, and sustainable.

Our programs are:

- Widely applicable across organization types and geographies.
- Described by teams as among the most powerful experiences they have had together.

How does Bridgespan bring an equity lens to this process?

Each Leadership Accelerator program integrates an equity lens. In each program, this manifests differently depending on the topic at hand.

Examples:

- **Achieving Strategic Clarity:** In Achieving Strategic Clarity, we ask you to intentionally consider how racial equity and inequity affects the outcomes you are trying to achieve and the work you do, as you develop your intended impact and theory of change. You'll be asked specifically to examine how your organization can advance racial equity. We have supported organizations who have wrestled with issues of equity for many years, as well as those organizations that have not historically used an explicit racial equity lens to articulate their work.
- **Investing in Future Leaders:** Identifying and prioritizing development areas and drafting development plans for staff are key elements in building a stronger and more inclusive pipeline of leaders within your organization. In the Investing in Future Leaders program, you will be asked to think about how you develop your emerging leaders and ensure your talent development strategy reflects your goals and values. This is a unique opportunity to consider how your talent goals relate to your equity goals.
- **Strengthening the Executive Team:** Equity and inclusion are critical topics for an executive team to consider. In this program, we explicitly integrate equity in a few ways: clarifying whether there are goals on equity and inclusion that are the focus of your executive team; offering suggestions for how your team might take a stronger equity lens in decision-making processes; and including questions around equity and inclusion as part of the conversation on team dynamics.

• **Creating an Adaptive Plan:** In this program you will articulate where you want your organization to be in two years and develop plans on how you will get there amidst uncertainty. As you name your two-year vision, you will discuss how you will center equity in your goals for impact, as well as how your organization will look and operate. For example, you'll consider ways you might further equity in the outcomes you seek, your approach to solution design, and your role in systemic change. You will also be asked to consider ways you might build a more equitable and anti-racist organization by examining your staff and board composition, culture, capabilities, and other internal resources.

What are the prerequisites for teams interested in applying?

Organizations who participate in Bridgespan Leadership Accelerator programs typically have 10 staff members. However, there are some exceptions. If you have a smaller team size and are interested in participating, please reach out to the Leadership Accelerator team to see if the programs might be a good fit.

Teams should be prepared to select a Project Lead who will serve as team lead and receive additional guidance from Bridgespan.

What do you mean by “senior leadership” and “executive team”?

The senior leadership or executive team is typically the ED/CEO and senior direct reports. For our Achieving Strategic Clarity and Creating an Adaptive Plan programs, you might also include other individuals whose roles can provide unique insight to conversations about target outcomes and approach. If you enroll in the program, we will work with you to help you identify the right individuals to participate. If your executive team is larger than six individuals, please contact us at LeadershipAccelerator@Bridgespan.org to see if this program is the right fit.

What commitment will my team need to make?

Team members must be prepared to dedicate approximately 2 hours per week in total on the program over a 3-5 month period (depending on the program and your team's pacing). You'll spend this time in two ways:

- **Team meetings:** Every other week, team members will spend about 2 hours coming together to discuss key topics and make decisions.
- **Individual pre work:** In between team meetings, team members will dedicate about 1 hour per week to pre-work.

Additionally, you will designate one of your team members to serve as the Project Lead. The Project Lead's time commitment will be approximately 2 additional hours per week while the CEO/ED will be approximately 1 additional hour per week.

How will I engage my board in this process?

Board members do not typically enroll as participants in our Leadership Accelerator programs. However, we recognize that it can be very valuable to bring your board along as you and your senior leadership team work through critical strategy and organizational issues. We have explicit opportunities for teams to discuss how to engage board members as a part of our Leadership Accelerator programs, and encourage teams to discuss board engagement with their coaches during coaching calls.

How do you select organizations to participate in the program?

Space in our programs is limited. We will select organizations on a first-come, first-served basis, and base our selection on a mutual assessment of whether the program is the right fit for your organization.

Will my team have access to Bridgespan support?

We have carefully designed this program such that your Project Lead can help your team navigate the content, make critical decisions, and advance through the process without intensive direct support from Bridgespan. However, teams do have access to Bridgespan support along the way. Project Leads can access 1-on-1 coaching on behalf of their teams, and they can attend weekly group office hours via conference call. In addition, Bridgespan provides ongoing email support and is available for additional coaching as necessary.

Are the Leadership Accelerator programs accessible?

The NovoEd platform is compliant with the following accessibility standards (from NovoEd website): US Section 508, W3C WCAG 2.0 AA, and ISO 40500:2012 compliant. However, users with screen readers have experienced usability challenges related to the platform navigation. In such cases Bridgespan has provided additional resources (e.g., text documents) to support clients. All events have closed captions and alt text in slide decks. The programs are only offered in English, but the online learning platform has an AI language translation feature and event closed captioning has a language translation feature. If you have concerns related to platform accessibility for team members, please inquire directly. We are committed to making our program accessible for all participants.

What is the Project Lead role?

The Project Lead serves as the glue that holds this learning experience together. The Project Lead's time commitment will be approximately 2 additional hours per week while the CEO/ED will be approximately 1 additional hour per week.

- **Owning the process:** The Project Lead manages the work plan and meeting schedule for the project.
- **Facilitating the conversation:** During team meetings, the Project Lead will help to guide the conversation, ensuring that all voices are heard and helping the group move towards decisions (drawing upon our video facilitated Team Summit process).
- **Delivering results:** After team meetings, the Project Lead works closely with the ED/CEO to translate decisions into action.

How should I choose the right person for the Project Lead role?

Important qualifications of a Project Lead include:

- Strong project management and meeting facilitation skills.
- Well-established and respected within the senior leadership team.
- Reputation for getting things done, ready to put in a couple extra hours when necessary
- Interest in the strategy related to the program topic area.
- We typically recommend that EDs/CEOs do NOT serve as Project Leads, due to the time required to play the Project Lead role. However, for the Strengthening the Executive Team program in particular, there are some cases where it's appropriate for the CEO/ED to play this role. Please reach out to us if you have questions as to who should play this role.

Learn about our Leadership Accelerator programs

www.Bridgespan.org/LeadershipAccelerator