

# With the Right Development, Leaders Can Make a Measurable Difference

**By Donna Stark, Vice President, Talent and Leadership Development,  
Annie E. Casey Foundation**

After twenty years at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, I will soon transition from my current role as vice president, talent and leadership development, to part-time work doing what I love: strengthening the field of results-based leadership through coaching and developing the tools of the discipline.

I leave my role as vice president with a strong belief that investing in leaders generates the highest return on philanthropic investments and that leadership development is one of the clearest paths to social change.

Strikingly, however, many foundations continue to underinvest in this area. A 2011 Foundation Center study reported annual foundation support for leadership development was only 1 percent of all foundation giving—or just \$29 per employee, per year.

Are we underinvesting in leadership development? I think so, but the answer isn't just to invest more—it's also to invest it more wisely.

## Producing Results

At Casey, we have learned that leadership development can produce real results. Take for example:

- In 2001, only 49 percent of Maryland kindergartners heading to school were fully ready to learn in their new classrooms. By 2013, that portion had soared to 82 percent. The percentage of African-American kindergarteners who were ready to learn more than doubled, from 37 to 79 percent. This work, originally led by State Superintendent of Schools Nancy Grasmick and Assistant State Superintendent Rolf Grafwallner, is now fully led by a state-local partnership between the State Department of Education and the local Early Childhood Advisory Councils, supported by the federal Department of Education's Race to the Top grant.
- Marion County, Indiana, reduced the recidivism rate of returning prisoners by 4.4 percentage points in five years. This effort was initiated by then Governor Mitch Daniels and the work was facilitated by Lena Hackett, president of Community Solutions, Inc. Leadership from the state and Marion County departments of corrections and local nonprofits also were critical to the effort.
- Molly McGrath Tierney's efforts as the director of the Baltimore's Department of Social Services and a Casey Children and Family Fellow reduced the number of children in foster care in Baltimore by 69 percent from 2007 to 2015, and the number of children awaiting adoption by 83 percent.

Changes like these don't happen without leaders working intentionally to achieve big results.

These lead innovators came from public agencies, the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, and communities, and shared three common characteristics that drove them in their ambition for change:

- They were relentless in their pursuit of results and felt an urgency about finding solutions
- They were unwilling to wait for things to get better and took the lead in making things better.
- They used their positional authority, convening power, or knowledge of cutting-edge practices to bring the right people to the table—people who had a role to play in making change.

They also followed a results-based leadership (RBL) approach, which helped them create measurable, sustained progress on tough problems, and engage the many stakeholders, organizations, staff, and other influential leaders they needed to make it happen.

## Defining Results-Based Leadership

During my years at Casey, I, along with the Leadership Development team, and 1,500 program participants, have discovered what leadership skills contribute to accelerating improved outcomes. Our own experience coupled with existing literature and knowledge in the field led us to develop Casey’s RBL model.

The RBL approach is based on five core competencies, two foundational frameworks, and two foundational skills—the 5-2-2 of RBL, as seen below.

The 5-2-2 of Results-Based Leadership	
The 5 Core Competencies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be results-based and data-driven, establishing clear targets, and using data to assess progress and change course as needed</li> <li>• Bring attention to and act on disparities, recognizing that race, class, and culture impact outcomes and opportunities for vulnerable children</li> <li>• Use oneself as an instrument of change to move a result, based on the belief that individual leaders are capable of leading from whatever position they hold</li> <li>• Master the skill of “adaptive leadership,” which makes leaders aware of the impact of values, habits, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors associated with taking action to improve results</li> <li>• Collaborate with others, understanding that the capacity to build consensus and make group decisions enables leaders to align their actions and move work forward to achieve results</li> </ul>	
The Frameworks	The Foundational Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Theory of Aligned Contributions</b> – This theory describes how leaders can move from talk to action and work together to produce better results.</li> <li>• <b>Person-Role-System</b> – Leadership is influenced by a person’s individual preferences and style, as well as the role he or she plays in formal and informal systems. The person-role-system framework is used to address common barriers to aligned action.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Results-Based Accountability™ (RBA)</b> – Developed by Mark Friedman, RBA helps leaders differentiate between population- and program-level results and develop impactful strategies to make a measurable contribution to the achievement of results.</li> <li>• <b>Results Based Facilitation (RBF)</b> – This approach, developed by Jolie Bain Pillsbury, helps leaders design, lead and contribute in meetings that effectively move groups from talk to action and hold participants accountable for advancing the work.</li> </ul>

At Casey we also have learned that how you deliver leadership development opportunities has an impact on their outcomes. For this reason, our program design includes creating the “container” for learning, learning in cohorts, and applying lessons and tools back home.

**The Container:** The “container” is the intentional creation of a work environment that enables acceleration in learning and accountability. It includes faculty and facilitators who are experts in RBL. They document the sessions, share aspirational results and all relevant data, describe the arc of learning to participants, co-design the sessions with participant representatives, and invoke high degrees of accountability for actions.

**Learning in Cohorts:** Our program participants work in groups where they can exchange ideas, learn from each other, practice, and get feedback. Groups, usually ranging in size from 16-40, may include individuals, pairs (such as senior and emerging leaders), teams, or a community, depending on the nature of the program.

**Applying Lessons and Tools Back Home:** Every program participant commits to applying the leadership lessons and tools in their leadership roles, as they learn them. This practice creates the opportunity for leaders to experiment with using RBL tools and methodologies, adapting those tools to individual leadership styles, and assessing their ability to use what they've learned.

Each program is co-designed with our partners to meet their needs and ensure high relevancy. The length of each program and the frequency of the sessions varies with each program to accommodate the participants' busy schedules while covering the necessary content. Some programs may be as short as five, two-day sessions over eight months, while others may be ten, four-day sessions over eighteen months. At the request of program participants, Casey also provides post-program booster sessions.

## Getting Started

Casey's development approach has been an evolving process over many years. Today, it's core to its leadership initiative. Many funders, however, see getting started as near impossible, as three common myths often cloud their thinking:

**Myth #1: Leadership development is expensive.**

Not all leadership development programs or opportunities are high-priced endeavors. Something as simple as peer learning among executive directors can be a meaningful first step.

**Myth #2: Leadership development is not what our program officers know how to do.**

Although that may be true, it isn't difficult to engage your grantee leaders, find out what they need, and then find partners who can be responsive to the identified needs.

**Myth #3: There is no way to know if the investment is making a difference.**

It is hard to measure the return on investment, but not impossible. Providing the tools, building the skills, and creating peer networks can lead to better outcomes, next generation leaders ready to take the helm, healthy work cultures, and a stronger sector. Some of the [literature and research from the private sector](#) that shows high return on the investment is applicable to the social sector.

As funders, we invest so much in strategy development and finding the right grantee or partner to advance ideas that we believe are going to make a difference. Those of us who also invest in leadership development know that good ideas don't reach their full potential in the absence of great leaders who have the skills, tools, practices, and networks that move ideas to action to results. Investing in leadership development for individuals, grantees in place-based work, or for the field has a high return, sustained over time, for mission critical organizations and the communities they serve.

Find tools and learn more about results-based leadership at <http://www.aecf.org/work/talent-and-leadership-development/leadership-development/>.

## Advancing Investment in Leadership Development

In 2013, a group of funders committed to supporting leadership development met to share models, address common problems, identify trends, and explore co-investment opportunities to help advance the field. This leadership funders group—which includes Casey, the American Express Foundation, the Bank of America Charitable Foundation, the Barr Foundation, the Durfee Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation—aims to strengthen the field and encourage wise philanthropic investments in leadership development. The Building Movement Project helps the group develop the learning agenda, document the meetings, and create knowledge from our discussions. We hope to bring others into the community of philanthropic investors in leadership and plan on meeting again in January 2016, with the likelihood of meeting twice yearly to wrestle with issues related to leadership development.



**Donna Stark** is the vice president, talent and development at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Stark is driven by the belief “that people dedicated to achieving results really can make a difference, that leadership is an important lever for change, and that it is important for the Foundation to be investing in leadership if it wants its ideas to take hold.”

### BOSTON

535 Boylston St., 10th Fl.  
Boston, MA 02116  
Tel: 617 572-2833

### NEW YORK

112 West 34th St., Ste. 1510  
New York, NY 10120  
Tel: 646 562-8900

### SAN FRANCISCO

465 California St., 11th Fl.  
San Francisco, CA 94104  
Tel: 415 627-1100

