



Future NPO Profile

As part of the First Fruit Re-Tool Program during the 2020-2021 season of the pandemic, a potential profile of future nonprofit leaders and organizations began to emerge. Compiled below are some thoughts for Christian nonprofits to consider as they carry out their mission in an unprecedented time of accelerated change.

Leaders

- Driven by a vision greater than they can accomplish on their own
- Master storyteller/motivator and digitally savvy
- Resilient yet flexible
- Knows how to say “no,” and set boundaries as needed
- Team player, the solo leader is out
- Local, adaptable, and supported
- Maintains holistic attitude, even with a focused expression

Organizations

- Diversified structures that are not hierarchical or dependent on individuals
- Staff-turnover: Interest in experience and value vs vocation and stability
- Smaller or Bigger: Mid-sized may struggle
- Outsourced partnerships for specialty areas
- Transformational engagement with “clients”
- Traditional sources of funding will not be sufficient, need to seek alternative sources
- Recognize need for ongoing development of staff/leadership

Leaders

DRIVEN BY A VISION GREATER THAN THEY CAN ACCOMPLISH ON THEIR OWN

- What are they motivated by? What gets them out of bed in the morning? With the overwhelming access to resources, tools, and capacity, there is very little that cannot be accomplished today. Yet for tomorrow’s leaders, just keeping the wheels turning is not enough (that is management, not leadership). Having a vision and calling beyond their reach provides leaders with a motivation that requires them to be dependent upon God’s provision and direction, humility to know it’s not just up to them, and an attitude of cooperation that opens them up to creative partnerships both within and outside of their sphere of influence.

MASTER STORYTELLER/MOTIVATOR AND DIGITALLY SAVVY

- The leaders of tomorrow must excel at sharing the vision, as well as the passion and motivation behind the vision. Just having compelling statistics and anecdotal accounts are not enough.

They will need to be able to distill complex ideas and communicate the underlying foundations in simple and compelling ways to a variety of audiences. Being able to recognize and adapt to each individual situation will be critical—rather than just relying on a list of talking points.

- While tomorrow's leader does not need to be 'techy', they should be aware of the nuances and opportunities that the increasing use of technology will provide. Being able to engage in the digital sphere will be an important skill set.

RESILIENT YET FLEXIBLE

- Think of a rubber band: It must maintain the tension and rebound into its original shape after repeated stretching and manipulation, while also adjusting to outside influence. Tomorrow's leaders must be able to flex and adapt to a constantly changing environment, while simultaneously holding steadfast to the calling and vision/mission. Leaders who are unwilling to adapt to unpredictable needs will break under the intensity of pressure.

KNOWS HOW TO SAY NO AND SET BOUNDARIES AS NEEDED

- With the overwhelming amount of demands and work to be done, tomorrow's leaders will have to have experience and a commitment to say "no" with grace. There will be a never-ending to-do list and opportunities—especially if the leader is committed to a vision greater than themselves.
- Taking a step back from everything will provide tomorrow's leader with a greater perspective of the whole, while helping to prevent burnout or catastrophic collapse. Leading by example, a leader who can edit themselves models healthy leadership to their teams and clients. And they tend to operate out of a place of health rather than exhaustion.
- We need to acknowledge the importance of healthy boundaries and then ruthlessly keep them! The slippery slope or slow eroding of our best intentions leads us into unhealthy places and practices.

TEAM PLAYER, THE SOLO LEADER IS OUT

- While the leader will ultimately be responsible, the 'super leader' of the past will no longer be fruitful. There are too many responsibilities and varied needs for one person to do it all. Tomorrow's leaders must be willing to surround themselves with gifted and capable partners, trusting their judgement while sharing the blame and the praise.

LOCAL, ADAPTABLE AND SUPPORTED

- Successful leaders must understand the local culture. An "expert" coming in from the outside will not have the nuances and knowledge of cultural distinctives that can make or break an effort. While this knowledge and experience is critical—it does not override the traditional skill set needed but will supplement it with critical awareness.

- A critical aspect of success will be the support structures that are in place for a leader. Smart leaders will recognize the need to have mentors and others that will speak honestly and directly into their own lives.

MAINTAINS HOLISTIC ATTITUDE, EVEN WITH A FOCUSED EXPRESSION

- Specialization loses its benefit when it becomes siloed and cannot engage the whole.
- Being focused for short seasons can be helpful, but only if used sparingly.
- Leaders need to see both the nuances and details and how all the pieces are interrelated and integrated. Like a yo-yo that is constantly going up and down, leaders must have the ability to bounce back and forth between the big picture and the details.
- We might have a specific target, focus, or deliverable that we need to achieve, but we cannot do that without a foundation of core competencies and support.

Organizations

DIVERSIFIED STRUCTURES THAT ARE NOT HIERARCHICAL OR DEPENDENT ON INDIVIDUALS

- Combining changing demographics in the work force and the need for quick responses to external factors, organizations will need a flatter structure in terms of hierarchy and leadership. Collaboration, coordination, and communication will be key organizational skills necessary for successful implementation of vision.
- The need to spread both institutional knowledge and risk over a wider representation of personnel will lead to a demise of the “key person” reliance of the past.

STAFF-TURNOVER: INTEREST IN EXPERIENCE AND VALUE VS VOCATION AND STABILITY

- With the days of 35+ year careers in one organization long gone, the tenure of both support personnel and key leadership positions are increasingly shorter. The upcoming generation’s value on experience (and perceived value) over long term stability and the rapid pace of change in our world will drive organizations into a continual state of staff turnover.

SMALLER OR BIGGER: MID-SIZED MAY STRUGGLE

- Given the increasing complexity of compliance issues and the back-end operations and support services necessary to just “exist”, mid-sized organizations will have the most difficult time. Smaller organizations have the flexibility, adaptability, and low overhead costs to be nimble in response to issues. Larger organizations have the benefit of having reserves and resources to adequately support its mission and vision.
- Mid-sized orgs have the challenge of needing to operate and have the skill set of a larger entity without the benefit of the resources. This puts them in a difficult spot of spending a greater

percentage of funding on “admin” vs “program”. Those that can navigate this season of adolescence quickly will be best placed for success in the future.

OUTSOURCED PARTNERSHIPS FOR SPECIALTY AREAS

- Related to both the size of the organization and the need for diversified engagement, the successful organization will utilize outsourced partnerships to supplement and support them in specialty areas. For smaller organizations, this could be utilizing back-office support services (accounting and finance, human resources, graphic design, legal, etc.) and for larger organizations, hiring consultants and specialists to manage single issues or projects. For most non-profits, it will not be possible to have all the necessary skills and resources internally to navigate future challenges.

TRANSFORMATIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH “CLIENTS”

- Who do non-profits consider their “clients”? The end recipients of their vision and mission? The donors that provide the resources necessary to accomplish that vision and mission? The employees that make the vision and mission happen? All the above and more is the correct answer. The list of stakeholders that an organization needs to be aware of and paying attention to is growing constantly.
- The move from a transactional relationship to one of transformation will be critical to success and effective partnership.

TRADITIONAL SOURCES OF FUNDING WILL NOT BE SUFFICIENT, NEED TO SEEK ALTERNATIVE SOURCES

- The historical model of a nonprofit relying solely on donation funding will be more and more difficult to sustain. New models and sources of revenue must be considered and pursued— even by the traditional nonprofit. Fee-for-service, governmental grants (to meet social needs), and business as mission models will be needed to supplement the traditional funding sources.

RECOGNIZE NEED FOR ONGOING DEVELOPMENT OF STAFF/LEADERSHIP

- When thinking about staff development, organizations must engage the ‘whole person’. In addition to expanding skill set and competencies related to the job, personal, spiritual and emotional development of the individual must be addressed.
- Successful organizations will recognize that their staff and leaders are whole people who need to be encouraged to grow in all areas of their lives. Providing development opportunities that relate to both their assigned role and general growth will be important.
- Develop systems, processes and opportunities for staff and leaders to have regular access to spiritual directors, life coaches, and professional counseling.

Recommendation and Invitation

These thoughts on the future NPO profile came out of an 8-month partnership between First Fruit and David Acierno with Ean Consulting. During this season, David met with numerous First Fruit grantees and provided a wide range of services. From traditional consulting around areas of communications, operations, and board governance, to providing executive support and encouragement David worked with key ministry leaders from all over the world.

Timing is so critical. Not only can having a few more seconds help save a life, but it can also make a difference as one contemplates a serious decision set before them.

I bring this up as an affirmation of God's timing in how First Fruit came to connect with Ean Consulting and make use of its highly relevant services. And, in 2020 no less! It was a record-breaking year of crisis-after-crisis. So many of the repercussions of that time still linger today for our partners that are serving some of the hardest hit groups and places around the world.

As a grantmaking foundation trying to navigate the uncertainty of last year, we knew just making grants would be insufficient, especially when the moment called for something more. So, when it came to doing more as a foundation, I was grateful that David was not only available but highly strategic in offering ideas on how we might best serve our grantees who are having to make difficult decisions in the face of COVID-19, among other hardships.

I can speak to David's sensitivity, discernment, and expertise to serve a broad constituency over several months and on a variety of important issues and challenges. He brings a wisdom and empathy that puts leaders at ease. They not only have a coach who can offer sound technical advice, but they also have a listener who knows the pain and suffering of leading in crisis all too well.

Manivanh Khy, Chief of Staff with First Fruit, Inc.

To connect with David and explore how he might be able to journey with you, please contact:



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