



LEADERSHIP LEARNING
COMMUNITY

Prime Movers Evaluation
CASE STUDY:

Preparing and Supporting National Movement Leaders

“One of the true joys of working with LLC was the great working relationship we had with the team – it felt more like a partnership because we were all working together to explore critical questions. That was helpful for us because it allowed us to learn as part of the process and to continue to inform our evaluation work; that kind of knowledge can help guide our future decisions in a really powerful and effective way.”

(Adria Goodson, Deputy Director and Chief Learning Officer, Hunt Alternatives Fund)

“LLC’s ability to tap into its peer group to bring in appropriate experts as needed (like Bruce Hoppe from Connective Associates) was a real plus and strengthened the evaluation overall.”



In 2009, the Hunt Alternatives Fund hired the Leadership Learning Community (LLC) to conduct a retrospective evaluation of its social movement leadership program, Prime Movers. The Fund selects promising national movement leaders and provides them with resources for their personal and professional development, and convenes them in retreats and seminars over multiple years. The Fund decided to undertake an evaluation of the program to inform its decision-making process about the future of the program, and identify areas of improvement to make it more effective.

LLC was invited to conduct the evaluation because of our participatory approach to evaluating leadership development programs; knowledge of a variety of different leadership development strategies and how they are applied in different contexts; expertise in leadership development evaluation; and commitment to generating knowledge that can be shared with others who are engaged in developing and supporting movement leaders. By inviting other experts to collaborate with us and compliment our expertise, we delivered powerful recommendations for taking the Prime Movers program to the next level.

Note: The primary source for all the information presented in this document is Adria Goodson, Deputy Director and Chief Learning Officer, Hunt Alternatives Fund.

OBJECTIVES

We employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to explore how to support leadership that expands the scale, reach, and impact of movement work. The evaluation goals included:

- Gather data about the program design and implementation
- Determine the extent to which the Prime Movers program has supported social movement leaders to take a “decisive” step in their development
- Develop benchmarks that the organization may use to assess progress towards national movement leadership

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESULTS

“We believe that effective evaluations involve all of the stakeholders – including participants – throughout the process. We engaged Prime Mover fellows to determine the value and areas of improvement to the existing program strategy, and also partnered with the program staff to leverage their knowledge and collectively explore solutions. By working closely with both groups, and tapping into our own expertise in evaluations, we developed feasible recommendations that were grounded in real problems and opportunities.”

(Claire Reinelt, Lead Evaluator – Leadership Learning Community)

We developed a series of strategic recommendations that fall into the following categories: nomination and selection process, work plan development, program design, networks, and evaluation. The Prime Movers staff

has implemented several key recommendations and has already started seeing positive outcomes as a result.

SELECTION PROCESS

To ensure that incoming Prime Movers are well-positioned to benefit from what the program offers, the evaluation team recommended that the program staff pay closer attention to the personal, organizational and external readiness factors when interviewing potential candidates and making final selections. Since the evaluation, the Prime Movers team has become more intentional about having conversations about readiness with the candidates during the selection process.

WORK PLAN DEVELOPMENT

One of the most crucial recommendations addressed the need to alter the work plan development process so that Prime Movers could make better decisions about how to use their grant funds. The evaluation recommended providing self-assessment tools and examples from other Prime Movers to assist incoming Prime Movers in planning how to use resources more thoughtfully.

Based on this recommendation, the Prime Movers team made major changes to the planning process—giving participants time to go through the self-assessment tool and then taking time to develop the work plan for the first year only. Previously, participants were asked to develop the plan for the entire duration of the program in just four weeks.

“The idea for developing a self-assessment tool came directly out of the evaluation. The tool, which incorporated elements from the survey developed by LLC and other pieces, has provided a much better baseline for measuring the impact of the fellowship on individual leaders over time. Subsequently, we also created a mid-year survey and end of year survey that are tied to the Fellows' grant reports.”

PROGRAM DESIGN

Prior to the evaluation, the Prime Movers staff had been actively co-designing retreats with their Fellows. The evaluation team recognized the value of this strategy and recommended that the staff continue, and also increase the

participation of Prime Mover fellows in the design of retreats and seminars. Specific suggestions included co-designing retreats and seminars based on Prime Mover learning needs; and the use of convening methodologies such as World Café, Open Space Technology, and other circle methodologies to build lasting relationships among Prime Movers.

“The (last) retreat was an entirely ‘open space’ three day event and included guided meditation, followed by a discussion of what the members wanted to address during the retreat. It was the best retreat we have ever done; the participants loved it!”

Another recommendation from the evaluation team was to increase opportunities for self-convenings. In direct response to that recommendation, the staff has allocated resources to support Prime Mover-initiated regional dinners and gatherings, travel for one Fellow to cross-pollinate with another Fellow, and other support.

CONCLUSION

“The LLC model of being really collaborative and sharing knowledge and pushing it out is unique in the consulting world, and beneficial to people who are trying to promote social change in the world.”

We worked closely with the Prime Movers staff to identify and explore critical questions, and ultimately collaborate in developing an evaluation that truly captured the essence of the program and its potential. In the end, the team walked away not only with a series of strategic recommendations for improving the program, but also with more in-depth knowledge about the capacities of national movement leaders, and the strategies they are using for movement-building. LLC is currently working with the Fund staff to find venues for sharing the learning from this program with the larger community through conference presentations and publications.

Overall, the evaluation report played a key role in helping the Prime Movers staff uncover and prioritize strategies for improving the effectiveness of the program across the board. By emphasizing participant readiness as part of the selection process; increasing the participation of Fellows

in planning highly engaging retreats; supporting Fellow-initiated events; and incorporating a self-assessment tool in the planning process, the Prime Movers program is better equipped to optimize resources and offer a more rewarding experience for its participants.

ABOUT THE LEADERSHIP LEARNING COMMUNITY

We are a national nonprofit organization transforming the way leadership development work is conceived, conducted and evaluated, primarily within the nonprofit sector. We focus on leveraging leadership as a means to create a more just and equitable society. We combine our expertise in identifying, evaluating and applying cutting-edge ideas and promising practices in the leadership development field, with access to our engaged national network of hundreds of experienced funders, consultants and leadership development programs, to drive the innovation and collaboration needed to make leadership more effective. We provide members with unparalleled access to resources and networking opportunities. We also offer the following consulting services to help programs and foundations optimize their leadership investment strategy: scans, evaluations and network development.

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