

Leading Through Crisis & Change

Strategies for Nonprofit
& Foundation Leaders

Workshop 1

La Piana
CONSULTING



Ali Carella, Ph.D.
Senior Consultant
La Piana Consulting
April 23, 2025

Introductions in Chat

- ✓ Name
- ✓ Role
- ✓ Pronouns
- ✓ Organization
- ✓ One word to describe how you're feeling entering today's conversation



3-Part Series

Workshop 1

Identify and implement **leadership strategies** to effectively **manage crises and organizational changes**

Workshop 2

Strengthen **communication and decision-making skills** to build trust and maintain stability during uncertainty

Workshop 3

Learn how to **personalize action plans** to address specific challenges facing your nonprofit organization

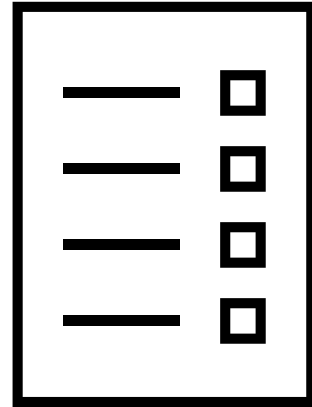
Workshop 1 Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will:

	Reflect on their leadership strengths and growth areas
	Learn key strategies for leading through crisis and change
	Differentiate between technical and adaptive challenges
	Reflect and share leadership approaches
	Learn specific, actionable leadership strategies for navigating change

Agenda

- Framing the Moment
- Defining Crisis Leadership
- Personal Reflection and Group Dialogue
- Strategies for Action and Adaptation
- Resources + Q&A



Participation Norms



Be present and open



Share generously and listen actively



Confidentiality: what's shared here stays here



Take what you need, leave what you don't

Registration Feedback

- Questions around:
 - Meaningful messaging
 - How to prepare leadership and board for the critical roles they play
 - How to support staff
 - Leadership well-being
 - Level of transparency in communication
 - Decision-making under pressure
 - Organizational resilience
 - Leadership during crisis or conflict

Opening Reflection Prompt

Think about a recent challenge your organization faced. What did leadership look like during that time? What helped?



Framing the Moment

- Decreased or unpredictable funding
- Pushback on DEI initiatives
- Economic volatility and inflation
- Increased service demands
- Burnout and staff retention issues
- Economic volatility and shrinking reserves
- Increased threats to marginalized communities
- And more....



What Can We Learn From the Past?

- It is a marathon and not a race.
- Social movements have been attacked many times in the past, there will be fractures, but we will find a way.
- As leaders, you need to find a way to stay calm in this ever-moving ecosystem.
- Unpredictability is a time of great innovation and increased opportunity for strategic collaboration.
- Take care of yourselves.



Skills for Leading Through Crisis and Change

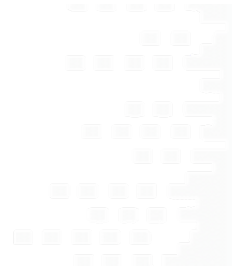
- Adaptability
- Clarity and transparency
- Strategic thinking under pressure
- Empathy and trauma-informed leadership
- Courage to act on values

Independent Reflection prompt:

What are your leadership superpowers? What do people rely on you for during times of change?



Questions?



Adaptive Vs. Technical Challenges

Technical Challenge	Adaptive Challenge
Clear problem, known solution, expert-driven	Complex, no easy answers, requires learning and values-based choices
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Implementing a new donor database or CRM system▪ Filing compliance paperwork with the IRS▪ Updating website functionality▪ Meeting specific legal or financial reporting requirements▪ Creating a budget or financial forecast with known variables▪ Hiring for a clearly defined role with a standard job description▪ Planning an annual fundraising event based on past templates	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Navigating shifting funding landscapes (e.g., loss of unrestricted support)▪ Responding to attacks on DEI or inclusive programming▪ Balancing urgent community needs with limited staff capacity▪ Rebuilding trust after leadership turnover or organizational harm▪ Reassessing mission relevance in a changing political or social context▪ Engaging staff in hybrid work cultures without losing cohesion▪ Responding to burnout and morale issues across the team▪ Adapting governance and board practices to be more inclusive and responsive

Why Does this Distinction Matter?

- Mislabeling adaptive challenges as technical leads to failed fixes
- Technical fixes won't rebuild trust or shift culture
- Adaptive work requires vulnerability and collaboration

Prompt:
What adaptive challenges are you facing right now?
Make note of it, we'll talk more about soon...

What Does Good Leadership Look Like in Crisis?

- **Steady, values-driven decisions:** Anchored in mission over panic
- **Transparent and timely communication:** Builds trust, even with uncertainty
- **Shared leadership and decision-making:** Elevates collective problem-solving
- **Resilience modeling for staff:** Normalize rest and boundaries
- **Strategic adaptability:** Willingness to pivot and learn
- **Connection to purpose:** Helps others remember why their work matters

What Does Ineffective Leadership Look Like During Periods of Unpredictability or Crisis?

- Avoiding hard conversations
- Withholding information
- Over-controlling
- Abrupt shifts in strategy with no clarity
- Prioritizing optics over impact
- Centralizing all decision-making
- Minimizing or ignoring internal dynamics
- Failing to acknowledge uncertainty

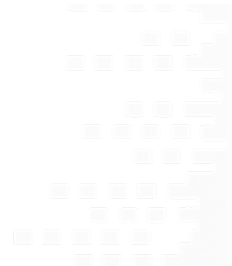
Crisis Leadership Framework

Principle	Definition	Practical Example
Get on the balcony	Step back to observe patterns, power dynamics, and systemic issues	Take time to assess how funding cuts are impacting not just your programs, but staff morale and trust
Regulate distress	Balance urgency with stability; avoid overwhelming people	Set realistic goals while acknowledging the uncertainty (e.g., “We don’t have all the answers, but here’s what we’re doing”)
Maintain disciplined attention	Keep people focused on the real (often uncomfortable) work	Guide board members to confront systemic racism in programming, even if it's emotionally difficult
Give work back to the people	Empower staff and stakeholders to solve problems together	Engage frontline staff in redesigning service delivery during a funding crisis
Protect voices of dissent	Ensure marginalized or less powerful perspectives are heard	Make intentional space for feedback from BIPOC staff or community members during strategic planning

What Should Leaders Be Doing Now?

- Stabilize what you can (people, communication, routines)
- Revisit and clarify your organizational priorities
- Build in feedback loops
- Protect your staff's well-being
- Invest in partnerships and community trust
- Name and defend your values clearly and repeatedly
- Steady, values-driven decisions
- Transparent and timely communication
- Shared leadership and decision-making
- Resilience modeling for staff
- Strategic adaptability
- Connection to purpose

Questions?



Small Group Breakouts

- Reflect on the following:
 - Your leadership superpower
 - Your most-pressing current adaptive challenge
 - The item that most resonated with you in the crisis leadership framework and list of actions leaders should be doing right now.

In your small group, discuss:

Given all that is above, what is one thing you can prioritize.

Why did these item rise to the top of the surface?

What about implementing this small change will be difficult?

What will the potential impact be for you and your team?

How will you know when you're successful?

Full Group Share – Bringing it All Together

- Reflect on the following:
 - Your leadership superpower
 - Your most-pressing current adaptive challenge
 - The item that most resonated with you in the crisis leadership framework and list of actions leaders should be doing right now.

In your small group, discuss:

Given all that is above, what is one thing you can prioritize. Why did these item rise to the top of the surface? What about implementing this small change will be difficult? What will the potential impact be for you and your team? How will you know when you're successful?

What's Next?

Workshop 2

Strengthen communication and decision-making skills to build trust and maintain stability during uncertainty

Workshop 3

Learn how to personalize action plans to address specific challenges facing your nonprofit organization

EVANSTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



LEADING THROUGH CRISIS

THREE-PART SERIES

SAVE THE DATES:

Wednesday, April 23, 2025	12:00p- 1:30pm
Wednesday, April 30, 2025	12:00p- 1:30pm
Wednesday, May 07, 2025	12:00p- 1:30pm

JOIN US ON ZOOM

REGISTRATION REQUIRED

La Piana Resources

- [Do I need a Strategic, Business, or Scenario Plan?](#)
- [Leading with Clarity: Communicating Through Volatile Times](#)
- [Unlikely Alliances: How Nonprofits Can Acquire For-Profit as a Strategic Option](#)
- [Career Advice for Senior Leaders](#)
- [Scenario Planning in Times of Crisis: The Board – Executive Partnership](#)
- [Nonprofit Scenario Planning in an Age of Chaos](#)
- [Strategy is Back in Style](#)
- [Subscribe to our Quarterly Newsletter](#)



Resources

Leadership in Crisis

- Heifetz & Linsky, *Leadership in a (Permanent) Crisis*, HBR (2009)
[Read Article](#)
- **The Practice of Adaptive Leadership** by Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky
[Book Info](#)
- **Bridgespan: Resilient Leadership in Uncertain Times**
[Read Article](#)
- adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy*
[Book Info](#)

Crisis Management & Communication

- **15 Strategies to Adopt When Navigating Nonprofit Crisis Management**
Offers insights on strategic foresight, stakeholder communication, & scenario planning.
[Read more](#)
- **Crisis Communication Planning and Strategies for Nonprofit Leaders**
A comprehensive guide on developing effective crisis communication plans.
(Book)

Thought Leadership & Commentary

- **NonprofitAF Blog** (Vu Le)
[Visit Site](#)



Resources



Financial Resilience

- **How to Prepare Your Nonprofit for a Recession**
Provides practical steps for financial planning during economic downturns.
[Read more](#)
- **Fundraising During a Recession Playbook**
Outlines strategies to maintain fundraising efforts amid economic challenges.
[Read more](#)
- **CEP: Managing Through Tough Times**
[Read Report](#)



Sustaining DEI Efforts

- **DEI Initiatives in the Crosshairs of the Administration**
Discusses legal considerations and risk assessments for DEI programs under political scrutiny.
[Read more](#)
- **Holding the Line: Strategies for Sustaining DEI Amid the Rising Tide of Opposition**
Offers actionable measures to protect and advance DEI initiatives.
[Read more](#)
- **ProInspire's Equity in Leadership Framework**
[View Framework](#)



Resources

Workforce Well-being

- **The Nonprofit Workforce is in Crisis**
Highlights challenges in nonprofit staffing and suggests resilience-building programs.
[Read more](#)
- **Addressing the Nonprofit Workforce Crisis: 4 Practical Strategies**
Provides strategies to improve staff retention and organizational culture.
[Read more](#)

Navigating Political Challenges

- **Resiliency Strategies for Nonprofits in Times of Political and Financial Instability**
Discusses approaches to maintain operations amid political and financial uncertainties.
[Read more](#)
- **A Time of Crisis: As Nonprofit Leaders Face Extraordinary Challenges, Here's What They Are Saying**
Shares insights from nonprofit leaders on current challenges and needed support.
[Read more](#)





Thank you!

Ali Carella, Ph.D.
carella@lapiana.org

La Piana
CONSULTING