



***The Kresge Foundation - AchieveMission Pilot to Strengthen Human Capital Practices in High-Potential Nonprofits***

*In early 2015 The Kresge Foundation partnered with AchieveMission in a pilot program to build the foundational elements of leadership development and human capital management in promising grantees. The core of the program, Talent Initiative, is a consulting, coaching and training engagement that helps organizations establish the leadership, culture and structure they need to implement their strategies and drive meaningful social change.*

*Six organizations were chosen for the pilot in a unique application and assessment process. For more information about AchieveMission and Talent Initiative, visit [www.AchieveMission.org](http://www.AchieveMission.org) or call 800-834-0717 x700.*

## **SUCCESS, SUCCESSION AND SALSA**

*The Latin American Youth Center was set to position its next generation of leaders to take the organization forward. But how?*

An interview with Lori Kaplan  
President & CEO, Latin American Youth Center

The Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) first began providing services in the late 1960s, and was incorporated as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization in 1974. Lori Kaplan began as a volunteer at the LAYC in 1979 and was offered the job as Executive Director in 1987; her title was changed to President & CEO in 2013. After years of iterative process—“nonprofits go through spurts of growth and, at times, retrenchment,” she says—opportunities for LAYC to scale now abound. Yet Lori “needed help in getting myself and others over a hump, ways of thinking about change ... opportunities to push our thinking.”

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**Lori Kaplan**

Enter The Kresge Foundation, a longtime supporter of LAYC, with a unique invitation: to apply for a grant to build and implement the foundational elements of leadership development and human capital management in the organization, and to work with nonprofit consulting firm AchieveMission to identify the challenges and develop strategies to engage, position and support the organization’s next generation of leaders (see insert). LAYC was chosen for a pilot grant along with five other high-potential nonprofits. LAYC’s engagement with AchieveMission, which employs the six-month consulting, coaching and training program Talent Initiative, began in June 2015.

We sat down with Lori mid-engagement, to check in on LAYC’s progress and learn from their experience.

**AM: Why was the Kresge invitation so compelling for you?**

**LK:** Well, we knew what we needed to be working on but were not quite sure how to start. Our strategic plan revealed that we needed to focus on talent and related systems. I’m not sure I knew what it meant.

We are always focused on programs, but of course I recognize that the beauty and salsa of our organization is our people. I know that we need to position the next generation of leaders, people who see themselves as part of the future of LAYC. I knew we needed a structure and succession plan. Before the Kresge grant came along, we were planning to try to get through it on our own, building on prior work we had done. But we really weren't seeing a light at the end of the tunnel.

Now, several weeks into our Talent Initiative engagement, it's hard to know how we would have done it. The depth begins to give intentionality to our thinking and doing. You don't know what you don't know.

**AM: What did you expect to work on?**

**LK:** There's a lot of conversation happening in the sector about talent. But it all seemed a bit elusive, hard to wrap my hands around it. Appreciating people, neutral performance management, etc. ... unless

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you have coaches or an executive director or Board members who are trained in these areas, you just don't have the expertise. The Talent Initiative process allows you to pick some areas of focus, they are based on the results of the surveys done by the AchieveMission team.

We chose Organizational Structure, with emphasis on succession; Performance Management; Cascading Goals through the organization; and Investing in Talent. I would have chosen more, but it is a structured process and that's what the time allows for!

**AM: Who from LAYC is involved?**

**LK:** Well, again, I wanted to engage a large team, more people than the process allows. Make sure that every area of LAYC got attention, not just the Mother Ship. In the end, I focused mainly on making sure that we included members of our senior team who see their future at LAYC—who have five to 10 more years to give to the organization at least. Within that group I made diversity a priority: ethnic, geographic diversity especially. Eventually, we will involve a much larger group—at our findings retreat, on committees, through our cascading process. I am committed to that.

**AM: What are the important insights you're taking away from the work?**

**LK:** I myself am only on one working team, but I know that we are all still surfacing issues. One distressing thing is that our staff feels that our systems make it harder to work, not easier. Infrastructure is always a challenge when resources are limited. You feel bad, you want to change things. A lot I knew anyway ... there are so many issues; it's just so hard. It was stuff I had pushed under, but now is the time.

**AM: Any revelations?**

**LK:** We are a multi-region, multi-side organization with a couple hundred employees and AmeriCorps members, \$15 million operating budget. We're still in the planning phase, but in the Organizational Structure group we had come to the table thinking about reorganizing LAYC around programs.

We are in three jurisdictions right now but we want to grow outside of that, assuming the resources exist. We realized that we have been acting as if we were going to stay exactly as we are—and even so, it’s not necessarily working. With encouragement from the AchieveMission team, we’ve started to think that if we want to scale, and even replicate a model nationally, then maybe we really are a national organization. Shouldn’t we claim that and look at what that means?

So now we are thinking about organizing around geography. And people are rolling up their sleeves, they’re open to thinking differently. That’s a really big one.

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**AM: What is the AchieveMission team’s part in all of this?**

**LK:** The first thing I want to say is that they are very jargon-free. You don’t need a translator to make their ideas real for people. That’s very important ... and they’re not shy about suggesting an answer, they’re willing to share an insight or what they’ve seen. They keep the ball rolling, not letting us languish in indecision or not getting it done. A lot of expertise is being brought to bear. It’s easy to have confidence.

**AM: We’ve mostly talked thus far about the engagement from the point of view of you as member of a working team. How are you feeling as the leader of LAYC?**

**LK:** Before you start there is a leap of faith. Now I understand and see the process. We are getting the help we need to think about succession in all different ways. This place will be so well positioned for success: the right structure; able to attract talent; a strong bench. I am extraordinarily relieved.

In the end, communication will be the key. There will be raised expectations around what we can deliver. I will have to temper them against the resources we have available. We will choose the low-hanging fruit with our three-year [Human Capital Management Strategic] Plan as a living document and work on all of the issues in the context of our three-year implementation plan.

**AM: Lori, do you have any advice for other nonprofit CEOs who are thinking about leadership and talent?**

**LK:** Yes: make this a priority. There are lots of trends that we have to respond to, topics that interest us, our Board, our people. Measuring outcomes. A few years ago, TQM [Total Quality Management]. But remember: 75% of your budget is people.

Don’t let this be superficial; it changes lives. Extra help, money, time to engage meaningful, not just respond to external demands. Not superficially, or it will show.

This engagement will get us to a great place. I am very optimistic ... we’ll all be really happy.