



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 or call 800-834-0717 x700.

ALIGNING CULTURE TO DELIVER ON MISSION

Louisiana Public Health Institute has experienced rapid growth—and growing pains. What could HCM best practices bring to the table?

An interview with Joe Kimbrell
CEO, Louisiana Public Health Institute

The Louisiana Public Health Institute (LPHI) was established in 1997 by two Louisiana Office of Public Health officials, Eric Baumgartner and Joseph Kimbrell, to be a partner and convener of organizations seeking to improve population-level health outcomes. Starting with modest seed support, LPHI has grown to manage a portfolio of approximately \$35 million in government grants, contracts and philanthropic contributions.

“We didn’t want just a strategic plan. Culture drives the future.”
Joe Kimbrell

According to Joe, who joined LPHI officially as CEO in June 2000, the culture of the organization has driven its growth, and will drive its future. Over the past few years, Joe and his leadership team had been focused on clarifying their strategy, “looking ahead,” he says, “not at one-off projects but holistically ... how does everything fit towards advancing the mission? And how do we manage our people, our culture, to do a whole lot better job on delivering to improve health and wellbeing?”

Enter The Kresge Foundation, a longtime supporter of LPHI, 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). LPHI was chosen for a pilot grant along with five other high-potential nonprofits. LPHI’s engagement with AchieveMission, which employs the six-month consulting, coaching and training program Talent Initiative, began in March 2015.

We sat down with Joe to check in on LPHI’s progress and to learn from their experience.

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

JK: We had been working with an external consultant on our strategy and culture, in what I would say was the most comprehensive look at LPHI since we founded the organization. We had recently restructured our program work as portfolios, rather than divisions, in order to remove operating barriers and facilitate the work of cross-functional teams. The restructuring was necessary because, for example, health systems projects often may have a community health aspect and vice versa. We immediately saw that working across the organization calls for new and different expectations of accountability.

In addition, our rapid growth had consequences. It highlighted the need to improve our internal systems. We felt ourselves being pulled in the direction of shorter term, operational issues.

Organization development is an area we had been focused on. Human capital is so critical to moving from good to greater. We wanted to take our practice to a new level of support. I got the [invitation] letter from Kresge, and I was thrilled. The timing couldn't have been better. The stars were aligned!

AM: Did you have specific goals?

JK: We wanted to work on hiring—ensuring our ability to attract high-level talent from both a content and a leadership perspective. This is imperative as we tackle increasingly complex public health-related issues.

We also wanted to take our staff management to a new level. Improve our performance appraisal system. How can we manage highly motivated people and keep them? So we chose to engage with

“An underlying goal was to align our goals throughout LPHI. We are one organization working toward the mission, but how does our individual work contribute?”

AchieveMission on Talent Acquisition, Performance Management, Leadership and Decision-Making, and Succession Planning.

AM: Who from LPHI has been involved?

JK: Our Human Capital Management Council represents many constituencies. LPHI's senior leadership team, and the broader leadership and management teams. A diversity of tenure levels, racial and ethnic diversity. But our priority was to make certain

that a wide range of roles—that is, both management and delivery staff—were included.

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

JK: The idea of real-time coaching and feedback resonated with us as a way to encourage lifelong learning in our organization. We're about to undertake our first LPHI-wide talent review process, beginning with the leadership team. Again, it's a new level of accountability. Very different.

An underlying goal [of the human capital management work] was to align our goals throughout LPHI. We are one organization working toward the mission, but how does our individual work contribute? The competencies work really helped. *My* goals and the organization's goals are the same. This idea

is cascading through LPHI.

I should also note that those in leadership positions will have succession plans, including me. And the Board gets it and likes it.

AM: Any revelations?

JK: Now that we have a plan, we are thinking about human capital in a more comprehensive way. We were aware of the potential but [without this work] we would have been creeping along, not quite sure of how to proceed. Now we have data, it's evidence-based. We are realistic and operationally focused. We know where to go over the next three years. We will proceed methodically and it will make all the difference.

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

JK: They are very disciplined. They are experts in their work and are exceptional facilitators. And they are great people ... we have built a very trusting relationship.

AM: What has been most valuable to you—the strategy work or the implementation work?

JK: Well, it's a bit of both. You have to have a plan. We were clear around where AchieveMission would engage with us in the implementation. Now we see that the ability to integrate all the pieces is very complex. We've experienced how important the coaching role [that the AchieveMission team plays] is during the launch.

“If you don't make human capital a priority, you're going to be stagnant or disappear.”

AM: Do you have any advice for other nonprofit CEOs who are thinking about leadership and talent?

JK: Do the methodical work. There's nothing more important than managing your human capital. And you can't do it top-down, people need to be happy and feel like they're growing and learning.

Nonprofits are not easy to run ... there's nothing more important than this. If you don't make human capital a priority, you're going to be stagnant or disappear.

I give Kresge great credit for seeing the need. This is game-changing ... a great gift. It will strengthen us in ways we don't even know yet.

Note: AchieveMission and LPHI would like to thank LPHI COO Sarah Gillen, who participated in the interview and provided many useful insights that enhanced our conversation.