

Improve the lives of  
kids and families



Strengthen the leadership  
of your community,  
city, or state



Get results faster



# LEADERSHIP **IN ACTION** PROGRAM

The Annie E. Casey Foundation



# Getting Results

**The Leadership in Action Program** starts with a commitment to making a difference for disadvantaged children and families in a state, county, city, or neighborhood. It gathers and mobilizes key leaders, managers, and residents in public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and community groups to work collaboratively in *new ways*. It provides training and support so that together, they can pick up the pace of change and get concrete, measurable results. Not someday, now. **The Leadership in Action Program** develops a plan of action to tackle stubborn issues that undermine the prospects of children and families. The program pays particular attention to the enduring gaps that divide communities by race and class, and helps people find practical ways to close those gaps. Not just talk. Action and results.

# Building Leaders

In the process of getting real results for kids and families, the *Leadership in Action Program* delivers hands-on training for people from a wide range of fields and positions who are already working hard to improve the prospects of disadvantaged kids and families. Agency managers, educators, business people, leaders of nonprofits, public officials, parents, child advocates. People with the know-how, resources, and willingness to play an active role.

The *Leadership in Action Program* strengthens leadership and management skills and helps leaders learn to collaborate more effectively, move more quickly toward common goals, and use data to develop action plans and measure progress. Participants work on real issues in real time, building strategic relationships and marshalling and aligning resources. Importantly, the experience fosters the capacity of organizations, agencies, systems, and communities to sustain change efforts not just for the current budget cycle, but for years to come.



# Accelerating Change

In collaboration with the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#), a local partner—such as a city task force, a governor’s subcabinet, or a citizens’ group—first agrees to anchor an initiative focused on a particular result (e.g., increasing the percentage of children entering kindergarten ready to learn or decreasing the number of low birthweight babies).

The local partner then invites up to 40 participants to join the effort because of the ideas, influence, and resources they bring to the table and the vital roles their organizations can play in making change happen. It is a diverse group of participants, typically from state and municipal government, managers of public agencies, nonprofit directors, business people, child advocates, community leaders, and residents. What they share is a common commitment to ensuring families and kids do better.

Guided by the *Leadership in Action Program* faculty, the group then takes part in nine, two-day sessions over the course of 14 months. They confront real barriers, develop action plans, identify low- and no-cost solutions, and enlist new partners. They team up between sessions to take action, putting theory into practice. Through rapid cycles of planning, action, and reflection, they learn to assess what’s working and, when needed, make changes. The program provides participants everything they need—the tools, the framework, and the skills—to accelerate progress on a result they care passionately about.

The *Leadership in Action Program* allows participants to contribute to a level of community change that no individual or organization could never realize alone.

People grow. Organizations shift. Families and children benefit.



## leadership in action in baltimore

In 2003, 50 educators, public officials, and community leaders in Baltimore began participating in the *Leadership in Action Program*. Their goal: to ensure that all children in Baltimore entered school ready to learn. Data revealed that only 27 percent of Baltimore's children were “fully ready to succeed in school” when they started kindergarten. The *Leadership in Action Program* provided a process, data, and a framework that helped Baltimore do better and see results faster.

“The *Leadership in Action Program* galvanizes people around goals and teaches them problem-solving, leadership, and real collaboration,” says Dr. Nancy Grasmick, Maryland state superintendent of schools. “The *Leadership in Action Program* is an effective tool to help communities get real results.”

*Leadership in Action* participants in Baltimore launched the *Countdown to Kindergarten* campaign to build support among parents, caregivers, and educators for school readiness efforts; distributed 7,000 packets of pre-kindergarten registration and school readiness materials; and provided children's books to family child care providers and outreach workers. The campaign's vision and can-do attitude attracted public and private financial support for its long-term goals.

By the end of the first year, *Leadership in Action* participants could point to a 13 percent increase in the number of young kids entering school healthy and ready to learn, an increase of over 50 percent from the previous year. The leadership of men and women in the *Leadership in Action Program* contributed to the improving trend. “Leadership matters. It always matters,” says Dr. Grasmick. “We often don't nurture it or develop it in a systematic way. *Leadership in Action* helps to do that.”

# Developing Skills

Participants in the **Leadership in Action Program** develop skills in four core areas.

*Results-based accountability* They learn to use a simple and powerful framework that asks: what difference do you want to make, what actions will you take to achieve it, and what progress is being made?

*Leading from the middle* They learn to recognize the resources, authority, and influence they have and to bring their leadership to bear on the issues they care about.

*Collaborative leadership* They learn how to strengthen relationships and align their resources with other leaders and organizations to achieve greater results.

*Race, class, and culture dialogue* They examine data to better understand inequalities related to race, class, and culture; learn how to engage others in constructive dialogue and develop strategies to address disparities; and take action to close the gaps.

# Are You Ready?

The **Leadership in Action Program** makes the biggest difference in states, counties, cities, or communities that are ready for change. Answering these questions can help you understand your readiness to bring the *Leadership in Action Program* to your area.

1. Do you have a clear goal, like “all children in our community will start school ready to learn,” or “all families are economically secure,” or “all children are connected to stable families”?
2. Do you have access to existing data that indicate how things stand now (i.e., how many families have jobs with benefits) in relation to what you want to achieve (i.e., all families are economically secure)?
3. Are there people and organizations you can point to who are working on this issue, even if they are from another field or approach it from another direction?
4. Are there people in the community (professionals, community activists, residents, or volunteers) prepared to dedicate themselves to making a real difference on this issue?
5. Are there elected officials and top leaders in community organizations and public agencies who will lend their active support to realize the goal?
6. Are there organizations, partnerships, and networks that will carry out recommendations and decisions made by participants in the *Leadership in Action Program*?
7. What difference do you think the *Leadership in Action Program* could make for you and your community?

## leadership in action in san antonio

City officials in San Antonio launched the *Leadership in Action Program* in an effort to promote the financial stability and success of families in the city's poorest neighborhoods, home to 380,000 mostly Latino residents. In a departure from business-as-usual, the program invited residents of the neighborhoods to work with city officials, agency heads, and professionals to come up with strategies that could help families do better—a lot better—in the crucial areas of housing, food, health, and economic well-being.

Bringing community voices into the change process was exceptionally powerful. One of the residents tapped was Teresa Barajas. Barajas is a *promotora de buena vida* (promoter of good life) with the Edgewood Family Network. She works as a volunteer outreach worker for women's health and domestic violence prevention, and knows her neighbors and their problems firsthand. "The people I work with are often desperate for help. I thought if I educated myself more, I could do more for them," she says. EFN offers residents education in language, health, culture, and computer skills. "I feel that education is key."

Her participation in the *Leadership in Action Program* has "opened up a larger space for me," she says, and connected her with other leaders, organizations, and resources for her community. "Sometimes women come to EFN looking for help when they have a great need. We try to help connect them to organizations or clinics. Some of these connections came from *Leadership in Action*. We've taken a big step and gone faster in making these connections because of it."

Barajas is one of eight *promotoras*, all residents of the target neighborhoods, who take part in the *Leadership in Action Program*, alongside city officials and other professionals. "We felt awkward at first, as if we didn't belong," she says. "But the others came in touch with the reality of our neighborhoods through us, and we saw they really wanted to hear from us. It's a two-way street now. We're learning from them, and they're learning from us."



#### THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of UPS, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).

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“It makes sense for companies like Boeing to engage in efforts to make sure children in our communities start school ready to do well. [The Leadership in Action Program](#) offered a process by which people of differing backgrounds and agency aims could learn to work together. The program helped bring various interests together around the table and showed us how we could each contribute toward reaching our common goal.”

Bill Moody, Boeing  
Participant in the Leadership in Action Program, Southern Maryland



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