

Co-Creation: People Invest in What They Help Create

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A White Paper for Fulcrum Nonprofit Leadership

Nonprofit leaders spend considerable time thinking about engagement. How do we engage our board? How do we keep volunteers involved? How do we deepen donor relationships? How do we create greater commitment among staff and community partners?

Perhaps part of the answer comes before engagement.

People are far more likely to invest in something they helped create.

Co-creation is a leadership discipline that intentionally invites stakeholders into the process of shaping ideas, strategies, programs, solutions, and opportunities. Rather than developing something internally and then asking others to support it, co-creation asks an important question much earlier: *Who should help us build this?*

Too often, nonprofits present stakeholders with finished products. A strategic plan is developed and presented to the board for approval. A program is designed and volunteers are recruited to implement it. A fundraising initiative is constructed and donors are asked to fund it. Staff members are handed priorities they had little role in shaping.

Then we wonder why engagement is lacking.

There is an important difference between **asking someone to support your idea and inviting them to help create our idea.**

Co-creation does not mean surrendering leadership or allowing every stakeholder to make every decision. Effective leaders establish clear parameters, identify the right voices, and create meaningful opportunities for participation. They recognize that consultation without influence is not co-creation. If people are invited into a process but their ideas cannot meaningfully affect the outcome, engagement can actually decline.



The opportunities are everywhere. Invite board members to help shape strategic priorities rather than merely approve them. Engage staff in designing the systems they will use. Ask volunteers how programs could become more effective. Bring community members into conversations about the services intended to benefit them. Involve donors and prospective donors in exploring opportunities before presenting a completed funding proposal.

The result is more than better engagement. Co-creation brings additional perspectives, expertise, creativity, and lived experience into the work. It creates shared ownership.

And ownership changes behavior.

People advocate for what they helped build. They contribute expertise to what they helped shape. They give time to what they helped imagine. They invest resources in what they helped make possible.

For nonprofit leaders seeking deeper engagement, the question may not simply be, **"How do we get people more involved?"**

A better question might be: **"What are we creating without them that we should be creating with them?"**

For more information about Fulcrum Nonprofit Leadership, please visit our website at www.fulcrumleader.com or reach out to us directly via email at hello@fulcrumleader.com.