








Through a collaborative peer forum, this capacity-building program empowers mid-level nonprofit leaders serving Hanover Township residents, building a strong peer network, enhancing professional development, facilitating shared learning, and supporting individual and agency goals.

Partner Agencies: Association for Individual Development (AID); Ascension Center for Mental Health; Centro De Información; Children's Advocacy Center (CAC); Community Crisis Center; Easterseals DuPage & Fox Valley; Ecker Center; Hanover Township Youth & Family Services; Maryville Academy; Northwest Center Against Sexual Assault; PADS of Elgin

Capacity-Building Priorities

The program commenced in the fall of 2024, featuring discovery calls with executive leadership from eleven agencies funded by the Hanover Township Mental Health Board. In addition to identifying a candidate from their agency, these discussions also helped pinpoint desired capacity-building areas for mid-level leaders:

-  **Ambition and Drive:** The determination to achieve goals, coupled with a willingness to go beyond expectations.
-  **Risk-Taking:** The ability to make calculated decisions that involve potential risks and rewards, with the goal of achieving organizational objectives.
-  **Strategic Thinking:** Big picture thinking about the long-term implications of decisions and developing plans that align with goals.
-  **Interpersonal Leadership:** Establishing strong, trustworthy relationships, demonstrating empathy, and navigating the challenges of leading former peers.
-  **Community Engagement:** Actively build relationships and partnerships with the communities served.

Key Insights from Candidate Discovery Calls

Prior to the program's launch, each candidate engaged in an discovery call to identify personal goals and specific needs. These conversations revealed several recurring themes:

- Professional Growth and Leadership Aspiration:** Candidates frequently expressed a desire for leadership development, aiming to enhance their skills and take on greater responsibility.
- Navigating Staff Management and Team Dynamics:** A recurring challenge was managing staff, addressing performance issues, guiding a younger team, and a positive work environment.
- Prioritizing Well-being and Preventing Burnout:** Leaders recognized the demanding nature of their roles and emphasized the importance of personal well-being, work-life balance, and implementing strategies to prevent burnout.
- Valuing Networking and Collaboration:** The importance of building connections with peers, sharing resources, and collaborating on challenges to maximize community impact.
- Seeking Clarity and Direction:** Many expressed a need for greater clarity in their roles, responsibilities, and future paths.

By providing a platform for collaboration, targeted professional development, and a focus on individual and team well-being, the forum has empowered mid-level leaders to be more effective, confident, and resilient.

Key Accomplishments and Impact

- Enhanced Leadership Skills:** Partners gained valuable insights through self-assessment, peer feedback, and discussions on leadership capacities.
- Establishing a Peer Network:** The forum has created a supportive network for sharing experiences, challenges, and best practices.
- Increased Knowledge Sharing:** Agency spotlights and discussions have broadened the understanding of services facilitating better coordination.
- Focus on Well-being and Resilience:** The forum has prioritized well-being, providing strategies for burnout prevention and self-care.
- Effective Partner Consultations:** Partner consultations have proven invaluable, resulting in specific recommendations such as streamlining processes, solutions for staff management challenges, and the launch of programs with limited resources.

Impact Stories: Internal Leader Succession Planning

Investing in the development of mid-level leaders not only enhances skills but also establishes a pipeline of qualified internal candidates, ensuring smoother leadership transitions and organizational continuity. Two recent examples highlight the forum's role in supporting leadership succession:

Ryan (Hanover Township, Director Designee Human Services) found the forum's networking opportunities and non-judgmental support invaluable. "I did not know one person around that table when we first started meeting and now I feel like there are many that I could reach out to if needed." The forum's emphasis on reflection also supported Ryan in approaching her work with a fresh perspective, enhancing her leadership capabilities.

Deidra (Association for Individual Development, Director of Behavioral Health Services) shared how the forum provided validation, boosted her confidence, and combated feelings of isolation, proving crucial as she transitioned into a director role. Collaborating with the other forum partners has led to direct improvements in community services. In her words, "Connections are powerful...who you know, how you engage and collaborate help us not only as individual leaders but bring benefit to our whole organizations. It gives opportunities for communities to thrive."