

RELISH YOUR ROLE

YOUR NONPROFIT SURVIVAL GUIDE:

**Suggested Steps to
Keep Your Sanity and
Protect Your Organization**



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Leadership Coach for Women
Nonprofit Executive Directors

There is no playbook for leading a nonprofit in these unprecedented times.



It is hard not to feel panicked as a nonprofit leader and have your mood swing from anger to sadness to hopelessness to outrage.

The shifting landscape prompted by executive orders, funding freezes, value shifts, and the shuttering of federal agencies may be hitting you hard. You are facing major strategic decisions regarding your programs, staffing, messaging, and plotting ways for sustainability.

Leading through chaos requires a steady hand and clear vision. You cannot be expected to have all the answers on how to lead under these circumstances.

Like everyone else in the nonprofit field, I have had to shift my focus to learn more about survival tactics to be helpful to my clients.

As a leadership coach, I focus on patterns of behavior and messages. The information on the following pages comes from my knowledge of crisis management and the themes I am hearing from other nonprofit leaders to maintain their sanity while positioning their organization to survive the daily assault on the work of nonprofits.

It is hard to stay focused and hopeful, but you are a powerful leader and there are people and resources available for you to make it through these strange times.

Read on...



Become an Expert on Your Organization's Finances

Now is the time to fully understand your organization's financial position. You may have outsourced oversight and/or daily cash-flow operations, but the times demand you have deep knowledge of your funds so you can plan contingencies if necessary.

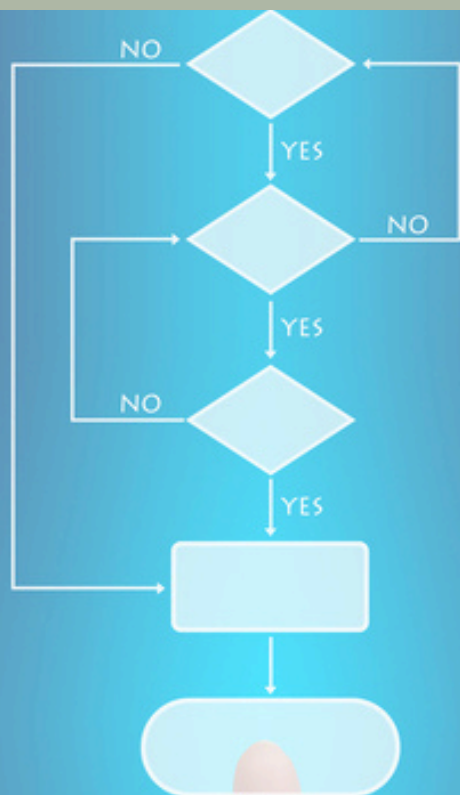
Key financial areas to monitor:

- Understand how any federal freeze on a grant source directly impacts your organization.
- Be aware if your grant funds are reimbursement or upfront payments.
- Know your cash-on-hand balances.
- Be clear if any of your funds allow flexibility to shift funding to cover shortfalls.
- Know if there are cash reserves, and the penalties if you draw on those funds.
- Assess the financial value of your in-kind contributions that may need to be re-evaluated.
- Become aware of all your organization's debts and assets.
- Identify those funds that have been promised but have not yet been received.
- Assess how well you have diversified your funding sources and where you can expand underrepresented areas.

It's time to gain control of your ledger sheets.

While finances may be your least favorite aspect of your leadership responsibilities – you cannot afford **not** to have in-depth knowledge of the finances of your organization.

Prioritize Services



Contingency planning requires you to prioritize your portfolio of services, programs and initiatives. You may need to make some hard decisions if you have to shrink your organization's footprint. Your decisions will be stronger with the benefit of advanced planning.

Factors to consider when prioritizing services:

- How crucial are they to the core mission.
- What is supported by a designated stable funding source.
- Can the service stand alone or is it dependent upon other organizational activity.
- Are there similar services within the community.
- Are the skill sets of the staff transferable to other programs.

Now is the time to take an objective assessment of what is crucial to your organization.

It probably feels like identifying which is your favorite child and no executive director wants to make those choices, but a savvy leader knows the service landscape and can make strategic decisions when conditions require.

Clarify Your Staff Messaging



You may be a leader who shares everything with your staff, or you may be more protective regarding the information you decide to share. Regardless of your individual style, you have to be responsive to your staffs' legitimate need for current and accurate status updates.

Understandably the staff is concerned about the clients you serve and the issues your organization addresses. They are likely to be worried about their own livelihood. You need to share the information that you know to keep rumors and conjecture to a minimum. Whatever information you have received from your funding sources they need to know.

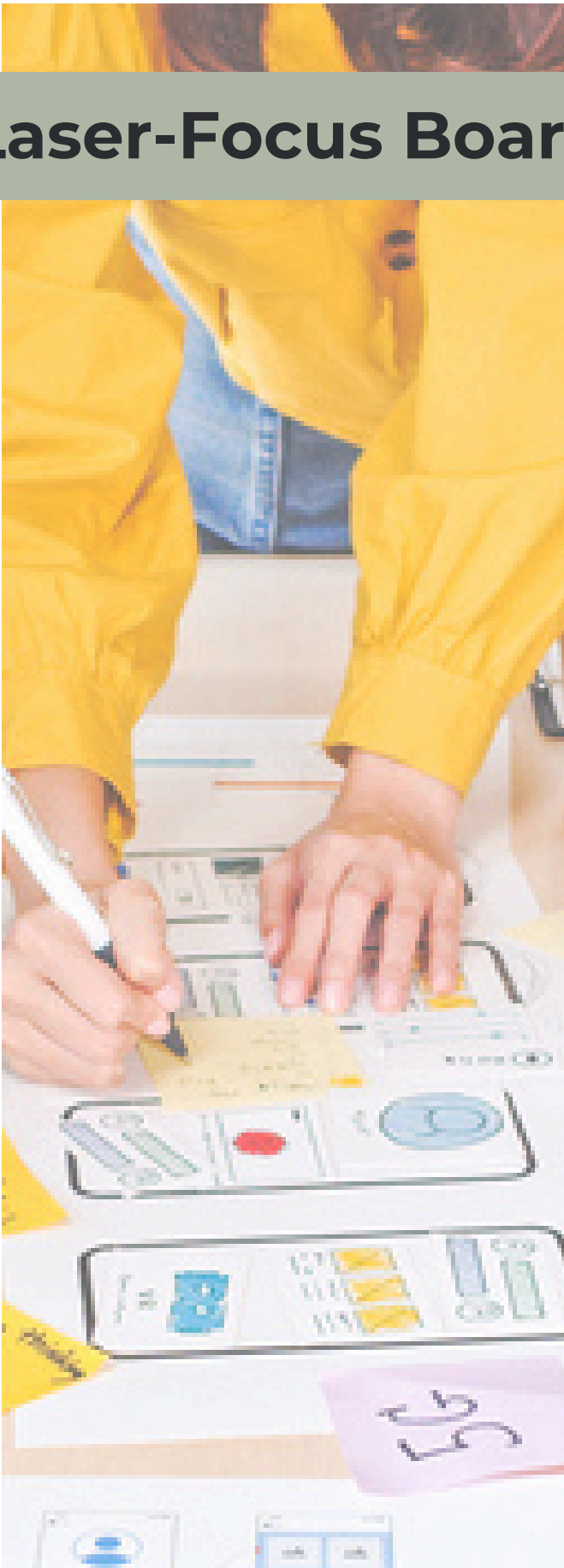
You cannot predict the future. However, your staff, will appreciate you sharing solid, fact-based updates as well as your candid acknowledgement of what you do not know.

Share with them the steps you are taking to prepare for threats to funding and anticipated timelines.

If you do not fill their need for information they will seek it elsewhere, most likely from less informed sources.

These times demand consistent, frequent and fact-based communication with your staff.

We all hate difficult conversations and conveying bad news, but your staff deserves to know where things stand.



Laser-Focus Board Requests

Your Board members are volunteers with their own lives, and they may not be aware of how scary things feel for you right now as a nonprofit leader. If you have had trouble getting them to follow through on commitments and meeting timeframes in the past, now is the time to approach them deliberately and strategically.

This is an important time for board action, they have the ability to make an impact with local elected officials, community and business leaders, funders and the community at large. Most likely you are facing not only funding uncertainty but the attack on many of the values which characterize your organization. You need their voices focused on behalf of both your organization, and the issues you address. Make sure they are educated on what is directly impacting your organization right now and the consequences of those events.

Once you have a shared understanding of the environment, partner with them to determine how to best leverage their influence. You do not want your Board out ahead of you or lagging behind, so you must set aside time for education and discussion.

This time commitment most likely means other activities they had planned for the next few quarters will have to be put on hold.

**You need your Board focused
and aligned with you in a
plan of action.**

Working with your Board may be a source of frustration, but it is an important asset you want to thoughtfully deploy when the focus of your organization's work is under attack.

Stay Close to Your Funders

Hopefully your funding is diversified with a robust mix of grants, individual donors, business support and revenue generating activities. If your organization is overly reliant on one source of funding, it is past time for you to develop an array of revenue sources.



You may receive funds directly from the federal government, or these funds are passed through to a state, regional or local public sector agency. Hopefully you have a relationship with the agency which distributes the funds and you can reach out to them for status updates and/or the decision-making process impacting the status of the funds. Use the relationships you have cultivated to keep you informed.

Philanthropic organizations have also been affected by federal actions. Many are adjusting their funding cycles and re-examining their priorities in light of Washington actions. Reach out to them and serve as an information source for them on the local impact of federal action. Let them know your needs, if they will grant flexibility in moving funds around, lessening a match requirement or expanding a grant cycle. They may be unable or unwilling to accommodate you, but it is important to express your needs and help shape their understanding of the local impact.

Talk to your individual donors, let them know how your organization is faring. Do not give into the temptation to paint a picture which is bleaker than the reality. Again, your goal is to be a trusted truthful partner.

Communicate your appreciation for their support and the realities you are facing in fulfilling your role as a trusted partner.

Invest in your relationship with your funders, keep them informed and connected to your organization.



Reach Out To Partners

You are not experiencing this time of great uncertainty alone. In all likelihood the partner organizations you work with are dealing with the same issues. Partnerships become even more important when one is under attack.

Your partnerships have never been more important. Working in collaboration with your partners you can strategize how to minimize the impact of shrinking services. It makes a difference when you can educate the community through shared statements. There is power, impact, and security in collective action.

It is also important not to undermine your partners as competition for resources becomes more intense. Your partners may provide opportunities for cost savings, increased efficiency of service provision and a potential landing space for staff.

As a leader you can model collaboration and strength through solidarity.

If there is a positive outcome to the current environment it is the reminder that there is power in collective action.

Identify Areas of Needed External Expertise



As you work out various scenarios, you need the best information possible to understand your options. There is a business component to your nonprofit organization with legal, real estate and financial implications that are crucial to consider. Part of your survival plan must include what expertise you and your Board need to make wise, informed decisions.

Potential expertise needed:

- Legal expertise – specifically related to employment issues, bankruptcy, contracts, handling transfers and sales, copyright information.
- Accounting expertise to inventory all assets, liabilities and obligations, IRS filings and audit close-outs.
- Communication expertise to develop messaging to donors, the community and stakeholders.
- Real estate expertise to assess the value of any owned property.

Taking all elements of your organization into consideration, informed by expert opinions increases your ability to make wise decisions.

These are not activities one should undertake lightly but as a good steward of your organization, it is smart to identify the expertise you might need in the future.

Practice Self-Care



You may fluctuate from obsessive doom-scrolling to pure escapism through binge watching the Real Housewives. Both reactions are understandable. Know when you need a break from tracking the latest executive orders and grant yourself the grace to do whatever it is you do to practice self-care. You have to stay healthy to steer your organization.

Self-care may look like taking a break from the news, maintaining your physical workout routines, scheduling time to step away from your work and submerging yourself in activities which bring you joy.

Be particularly mindful of your sleep habits and make sure you are getting enough rest. No one thinks well when they are tired.

Pay attention to your eating habits, when we are stressed, we tend to eat too much or too little or the wrong things. Be conscious of your diet and get the proteins and vitamins you need.

Find some way to maintain a level of physical activity level which will increase your energy.

Do not martyr yourself to the cause, stay healthy and prioritize your physical and mental health.

This is the moment to put into practice a healthy work/life balance, it will keep you effective and ready to address all the obstacles thrown your way.



What is Your Next Step?

Take a breath and know you are not alone in navigating the current climate. There is a lot to figure out, but you have mastered challenges before. But, let's face it, even in the best of times, it is hard to be a woman leader of a nonprofit, and the last few years have been crushing.

A **90-minute crisis management strategy session** can help you apply the steps outlined in this guide to your specific situation.

You do not have to do this alone. I know firsthand the challenges of keeping all the plates spinning and can help you strategically respond to the current climate as well as deepen your leadership skills.

You deserve support and guidance in your nonprofit leadership role.

Explore if this is the right time for you to receive individual support.

I'll be in touch to give you access to my calendar for a complimentary Discovery Call.

I cannot wait to talk with you.



Nancy Fournier Ph.D.
Nonprofit Leadership Coach



Meet Nancy

Leading a nonprofit is exhausting and the pressure is tremendous. Given the uncertainty of funding, constant staff issues, maintaining programs quality, and managing the board, it can be overwhelming.

You can confidently navigate crisis, lead your staff, manage your Board- but you could probably use some support to meet all the challenges of your job..

That's where I come in.

I am a former nonprofit executive director with over twenty years of consulting and coaching experience all focused on strengthening leadership. I have unique insights into the challenge of woman nonprofits leaders. I can help you maintain your sanity and regain your joy in leadership.

I can help you master all the complexities of leading a nonprofit organization for maximum impact.

Isn't time for you to get the support you deserve?

Reach out for a thought partner, you do not have to do it alone.

Nancy's Professional Background and Education

- Ph.D. in Public Administration/ Leadership, Virginia Commonwealth University
- MA in Social Work, University of Chicago
- BA in American Studies, Vassar College
- Leadership Certification, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Services, University of Virginia
- Annie E. Casey Nonprofit Leadership Fellow
- Nonprofit Leadership positions spanning two decades
- Faculty at University of Richmond Nonprofit Management Institute
- Trainer for Council on Nonprofit affiliates in seven states