

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2025-2026 Program Evaluation




BACKGROUND

Launch Carolinas was created to address one of the Carolinas' greatest opportunities: strengthening the capacity of nonprofit leaders while transforming relationships between philanthropy and the organizations working closest to community challenges. Launch Carolinas intentionally brings together non-profit and philanthropic leaders in sustained, trust-based partnerships that foster learning, collaboration, and long-term systems change.

The inaugural cohort included 12 Non-Profit Leaders (NPLs) and 12 Strategic Thought Partners (STPs) representing leading philanthropic organizations across North Carolina and South Carolina. Over an eleven-month period, participants engaged in four immersive onsite workshops, seven virtual learning sessions, monthly individualized strategic partnership meetings, on-demand technical assistance, and ongoing peer learning centered on seven core leadership competencies: strategic planning, board governance, fundraising, financial management, human resources, community engagement, and evaluation. To support engagement and organizational improvements, each non-profit leader receives \$185,000 over four years, receiving \$35,000 in the first year and \$50,000 each subsequent year.

The Year One evaluation demonstrates that this approach is doing more than building leadership skills—it is strengthening organizations, expanding regional networks, and creating new pathways for collaboration between philanthropy and nonprofit leaders.

YEAR ONE AT A GLANCE



12

Non-profit leaders
from NC and SC -
6 from each state



12

Foundation
leaders from NC
and SC who serve
as strategic
thought partners



11

Months of
leadership and
organizational
development
sessions



8/10

Net Promoter
Score, or
participant loyalty
score on a ten-
point scale



4.3/5

Overall participant
satisfaction on a
five-point scale

BUILDING CONFIDENCE, CAPACITY, & COMPETENCIES

Strong nonprofit organizations require more than funding—they require visionary leaders, resilient organizations, trusted partnerships, and access to influential networks. Launch Carolinas is intentionally investing in all four.

Non-Profit Leaders demonstrated moderate-to-high gains in confidence, competency, and organizational capacity, particularly in areas they identified as their greatest challenges entering the program—including fundraising, human resources, financial management, and evaluation.

Strategic Thought Partners likewise described learning from Non-Profit Leaders, gaining deeper insight into community realities, and bringing new ideas back to their own organizations. These relationships helped reduce traditional power dynamics while expanding professional networks across sectors and across both Carolinas—creating the foundation for stronger regional collaboration.

The value of Launch Carolinas extended well beyond individual professional development. Participants reported implementing organizational changes that improved governance, strengthened operational systems, enhanced communication with boards and donors, improved data use, and increased organizational readiness for long-term sustainability. Many also described increased confidence in leading organizational change, navigating complexity, and making strategic decisions.

Equally important, participants developed a trusted peer network that reduced isolation, encouraged collaboration, and created lasting relationships among nonprofit and philanthropic leaders. These connections are expected to continue through alumni engagement and future cohort activities, extending the program's value well beyond the first year.

RETURN ON INVESTMENTS



Individual

- Increased leadership confidence
- Expanded competencies
- Stronger decision-making and problem-solving
- Greater strategic perspective



Organizational

- Improved governance and systems
- Stronger strategic planning
- Enhanced financial and evaluation understanding and capacity
- Greater operational effectiveness and accountability



Ecosystem

- Stronger nonprofit-philanthropic partnerships
- Increased trust and collaboration
- Expanded cross-state connections and networks
- More alignment and collective impact

LOOKING AHEAD

The inaugural cohort demonstrated that Launch Carolinas is a high-impact leadership development model with measurable benefits for NPLs, STPs, and the broader non-profit ecosystem. Like any new initiative, Year One also generated valuable insights that will strengthen future cohorts.

- **Clarify STP roles and expectations** by providing more consistent expectations, guidance, and tools to ensure a more uniform experience across partnerships.
- **Increase opportunities for cross-sector networking** by creating intentional interactions between NPLs and multiple STPs, broadening access to expertise, networks, and philanthropic perspectives.
- **Create an inclusive curriculum** by expanding learning opportunities for STPs and incorporating educational content and facilitated discussions that address the unique roles of funders while strengthening bidirectional learning.
- **Make room for development and innovation** by soliciting and exploring, and, where appropriate, testing novel processes and frameworks within core curriculum topics that show promise but are not yet fully developed.
- **Adjust pacing** to allow deeper reflection and discussion of content by allocating more time for implementation support, peer learning, and technical assistance for new concepts within their organizations.
- **Require and routinize monthly evaluation** by integrating it into program activities.
- **Maximize alumni engagement** by supporting the development of alumni meetups, reliable communication channels, and resource hubs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Launch Carolinas is funded by a coalition of foundations committed to regional growth, including: Anonymous Trust, Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina, BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation, Central Carolina Community Foundation, Dogwood Health Trust, Hollingsworth Funds, Mary Black Foundation, Power:Ed, Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina, The Duke Endowment, and United Way of the Midlands.

For the full report or more information about Launch Carolinas, visit www.launchcarolinas.org or contact GOODSTOCK Consulting at adminsupport@goodstockconsulting.com.





LAUNCH CAROLINAS

Leadership Accelerator Program

Strengthening Non-Profit Leaders and Funders for Lasting Impact