

Interim Leadership

IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

The State of Interim Leadership—
and the Shared Knowledge Moving
the Profession Forward

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Taking Nonprofit Organizations to Higher Ground in Their Service to Others®

Interim Leadership in the Nonprofit Sector

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1. Executive Summary

The **State of the Interim Leadership Profession 2025** reflects a field whose identity is gaining clarity and cohesion. Across a national town hall, four focus groups, interviews, and cross-sector research with more than 100 interim leaders from the U.S. and Canada, participants described a profession that is better understood—especially in regions with active networks—and increasingly recognized for its distinct role in nonprofit transitions. This report builds on our inaugural “*State of the Profession*” study published in 2023.

Interim leaders describe a profession that is becoming increasingly more connected.

Academies, regional networks, alumni communities, and peer circles are creating a stronger sense of belonging and shared practice. This network weaving has helped interim leaders develop common language, shared expectations, and clearer pathways into the work.

At the same time, the environment in which interim leaders serve has grown more demanding.

Nonprofits are entering transition amid sustained burnout, leadership churn, outdated systems, hybrid-work challenges, funding instability, and rollback of some equity commitments. Many organizations are also carrying cultural strain or unresolved trauma. Interim leaders increasingly step into contexts where stabilization and cultural healing are as essential as operational leadership.

A consistent message across all conversations is that **board readiness remains the determining factor** in whether an interim engagement succeeds. Boards that understand the interim role, plan for transition, and engage in governance reflection create the conditions for interim leaders to stabilize the organization and prepare it for its next leader.

In many ways, **this report represents a crowdsourced effort in which practitioners shared insights that shaped a set of standards and principles for the profession.** These reflect the commitments interim leaders described as central to their work—mission-centered practice, cultural awareness, structured process, ethical integrity, strong board partnership, equity focus, and purposeful closure—and offer a common reference point for the field.

Finally, the report highlights four opportunities to strengthen the profession:

- **Expand understanding of interim leadership**, using shared definitions and impact stories.
- **Position interim leadership as a strategic tool** for succession planning, governance reflection, and mergers.
- **Strengthen the ecosystem around interim leaders** through network building, education pathways, shared tools, and collaboration with search partners and capacity builders.
- **Center equity and cultural awareness**, recognizing the organizational histories, identities, and community dynamics that shape transitions.

Together, these insights affirm that **interim leaders are essential partners during times of uncertainty**, helping nonprofits move from a storied past toward a stable, confident future with stronger governance, clearer direction, and healthier cultures.

“Our holy grail is that when an interim is brought in, the organization has better outcomes.”

2. What’s Changing: The 2025 Landscape

Interim leadership in 2025 reflects a field whose identity is becoming clearer and whose community is growing stronger, even as awareness remains uneven across regions. Compared with our 2023 baseline, interim leaders report stronger networks, clearer language for describing their work, and greater credibility in places where boards have experienced successful transitions. At the same time, external pressures—burnout, funding instability, hybrid-work tensions, and uneven commitment to equity—make organizational transitions more complex. The core work of interim leadership remains consistent, but the conditions surrounding that work have intensified.

We asked Town Hall participants to compare how they are experiencing various themes in interim leadership:

How to Read Our State of the Profession Snapshot

- **Better** — Clear improvement since 2023
- **Same** — Little or uneven change
- **Worse** — Conditions have deteriorated since 2023

Comparing 2023 Results to 2025

Theme	Status	Summary of reflections
Sector Conditions		
The Nonprofit Workplace DEI and Funding	● Worse	Interim leaders are entering organizations facing deeper systemic challenges. Burnout, staffing shortages, the scaling back of DEI investment, and funding instability make transitions more complex.
The Roles and Values of Equity and Diverse Lived Experiences	● Worse	Awareness is high, but meaningful progress has not occurred. Structural inequities continue, in many cases getting worse because of disinvestments in diversity-related programs. BIPOC interim leaders report unique challenges in board dynamics.
Board Readiness for Leadership Transition	● The Same	Succession planning remains inconsistent. Many boards still wait until crisis hits. When boards are trained, they partner well with interim leaders, but this is not yet common practice. <i>See page 4 for more on boards.</i>
The Interim Leadership Profession		
Appreciation of Interim Leadership	● Better ● The Same	Awareness is rising unevenly. People “in the know” recognize it, especially in regions with strong networks or prior positive experiences with interim leadership. Some confusion remains around “interim,” “acting,” and “fractional,” but the overall trend is clearly upward.

<p>Acknowledgement of the Transformational Impact of Interim Leadership</p>	<p>● Better</p>	<p><u>Anecdotal evidence continues to grow that interim leaders strengthen governance, systems, and culture.</u> Organizations that have experienced an interim are recognizing the strategic value of interim leadership. The opportunity lies in helping more organizations experience this effect.</p>
<p>Partnerships with Funders, Associations, and Search Firms</p>	<p>● Better ● The Same</p>	<p><u>Increasingly search firms are supporting interim engagements.</u> Funders support interim leaders at around the same rate as before. While many interim leaders are members of capacity building networks (such as nonprofit state associations), participants cited interest but a lack of real collaboration with these organizations.</p>
<p>Professional Growth</p>		
<p>Well-being and Community among Interim Leaders</p>	<p>● Better</p>	<p><u>Peer networks and alumni groups are expanding,</u> reducing isolation and strengthening professional connection. Interim leaders are benefitting from the organic community-building and network weaving that is happening across the United States and Canada.</p>
<p>Workforce Access and Sustainability</p>	<p>● The Same</p>	<p><u>Interest in interim work is growing and networks are strengthening.</u> but entry pathways remain uneven, regular compensation concerns persist, and burnout continues.</p>
<p>Professional Growth and Development</p>	<p>● Better ● The Same</p>	<p><u>Demand for coaching, mentoring, and structured training is strong.</u> Access to development opportunities varies widely across regions and networks.</p>
<p>Overall Direction of the Field</p>	<p>● Better</p>	<p><u>Professional identity, connection, and shared practice are strengthening</u>—even as the nonprofit environment becomes more challenging.</p>

Five Insights that Describe the Interim Leadership Profession Today

1. **Sector instability and the resulting organizational instability are making interim assignments more complex and emotionally demanding.**
2. **Interim leadership is more recognized,** with regional differences.
3. **Boards remain the determining factor** in whether transitions succeed or stall.
4. **The professional identity of interim leaders is strengthening** through shared standards and growing networks.
5. **The field is developing** through community building and network weaving, creating clearer pathways and shared understanding.

Boards: The Deciding Factor in Interim Executive Success

According to virtually every participant in the study, **Board readiness** is the single greatest influence on whether an interim engagement succeeds. Interim leaders often inherit organizations where the board has waited until crisis hits, “backing into” an interim placement rather than planning for one. Confusion between *interim*, *acting*, and *fractional* roles remains common. Many boards underestimate the value of an intentional transition period.

When boards understand the interim role—through training or prior positive experience—interim leaders can function as true strategic partners. In these settings, boards create the conditions for success: strengthening governance, clarifying roles, supporting staff, and gaining clarity about what the organization needs in its next leader.

How Board Function Shapes the Length of an Interim Placement

The length of an interim placement often reflects how effectively the board is functioning during transition. **On average interim leaders serve 10 months, with individuals giving the span of a typical interim placements in a range between 6 and 14 months.** The clearer and more prepared the board, the smoother and more predictable the transition. The less prepared the board, the longer and more complex the interim period tends to become.

What Boards Can Do

- **Invest in board development.** Build effective governance practices before a transition occurs, including attention to planning, assessment, and reliable financial oversight.
- **Plan for a transition before it happens.** Treat interim leadership as part of responsible succession planning—not just a crisis response.
- **Understand the roles of the interim executive job.** Distinguish between interim, acting, and fractional positions and align expectations accordingly.
- **Educate themselves on the potential impacts of successful interim leadership.** Learn what interim leaders do, how they support transition, and what a successful engagement requires.
- **Create conditions for success.** Provide clear authority, communicate openly, and support the interim in stabilizing the organization.
- **Use the transition period well.** Engage in governance reflection, clarify roles, and prepare for a successful permanent search.

“Anecdotally it seems that the longer a CEO is in place, the shorter the following CEO serves. The board doesn't take the time to find the right person. They are essentially backing into an interim placement. The following CEO becomes an ‘accidental interim.’”

3. Defining Interim Leadership Today

An interim leader is a temporary, mission-centered executive who enters an organization at a pivotal moment to stabilize operations, guide people through change, and prepare the conditions for the next leader to thrive. As a knowledgeable outsider with “fresh eyes,” they bridge the space between a storied past and a sustainable future—managing today’s needs while advancing longer-term priorities. Their work is not about holding space for themselves, but about building clarity, capacity, and confidence for what comes next.

This definition reflects what practitioners described the role to be across the focus groups and national town hall. In 2023, interim leaders emphasized their profession as one that creates space for organizational transformation, that interim leaders are change experts. This year’s conversations built on that foundation towards the development of common messaging about interim leadership. Participants described a role that is both disciplined and adaptive—rooted in mission, grounded in service, and focused on preparing the organization for what comes next.

Interim leaders described holding **several tensions** at once, including:

- **Maintaining day-to-day operations while adapting systems for a stronger future**
- **Building trust with staff** while sometimes **reshaping or strengthening the team**
- **Collaborating with the board** while **supporting board education and development**
- **Honoring an organization’s history** while **helping it prepare for its next chapter**
- **Providing stability in uncertainty** while **guiding needed change**

Across all groups, interim leaders emphasized that **culture—not strategy—is the real center of transition work**. Strategy may guide direction, but culture determines what is possible. Interim leaders repeatedly described culture as the deepest point of leverage in an organization: shaping trust, decision-making, communication, belonging,

WHAT INTERIM LEADERS SPEND THEIR TIME DOING

Participants highlighted several core responsibilities they perform consistently during assignments:

- Operations and staffing
- Finances and budget oversight
- Board governance and decision-making
- Communication and rebuilding trust
- Culture and HR issues
- Systems and establishing priorities
- Healing the organization in what, to many, feels like acting as a therapist

On average interim leaders serve 10 months, with typical interim placements falling in a range between 6 and 14 months.

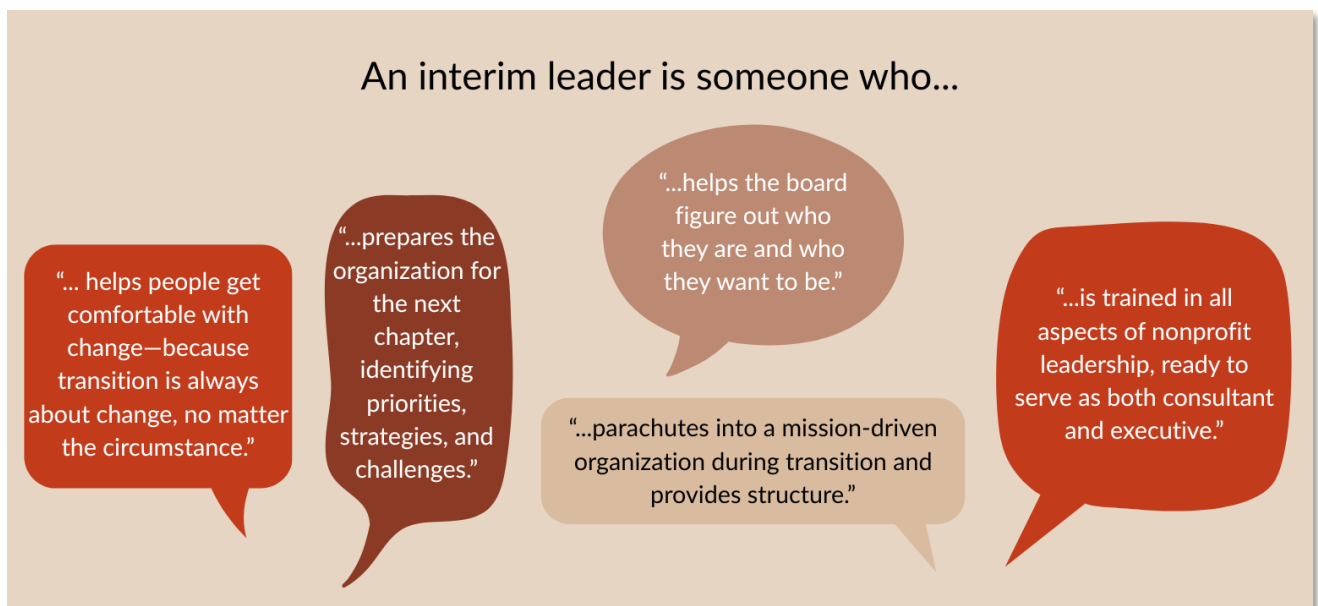
and the organization's readiness for change. As one participant noted, "Every interim engagement is a culture engagement." This reality places cultural assessment and cultural healing at the core of interim leadership.

These balances—between transition and transformation—sit at the heart of interim leadership.

What is an interim leader?

Participants offered consistent themes when defining the role:

- **A bridge between past and future** – creating space between leaders and carrying forward what matters.
- **A guide through change** – helping people understand transition and move through it with clarity.
- **A stabilizer and systems builder** – repairing or building the systems an organization needs for the long term.
- **A capacity builder** – developing boards and staff and preparing the next leader to succeed.
- **An independent mission-centered force** – temporary, impartial, and focused entirely on the organization's purpose.
- **A fresh, honest assessor** – naming issues openly because they are not invested in long-term politics.
- **A catalyst for clarity** – helping boards understand who they are, what they need, and where they are going.
- **An expert in transition** – entering at moments of disruption and providing stability, structure, and confidence.



Legal Relationship: Employee or Consultant

Participants described significant variation in how interim leaders are engaged across the country. Ever-changing state employment laws, combined with varying interpretations of Internal Revenue Service tax codes, paint a diverse picture of the types of contractual relationship and employment status that nonprofits form with individuals or teams serving as interim leaders for their organizations.

In some jurisdictions, interim leaders must be hired as **employees** according to state law. In other states, organizations use a mix of **temporary employee** and **independent contractor** arrangements. These decisions are shaped not only by organizational preference, but also human resource policy, signing authority, federal IRS worker-classification benchmarks, and state-level criteria.

Differing viewpoints regarding the preferable legal relationship for an interim leader will remain, by design, a source of national incongruence and debate within the profession.

Perspectives

Reasons some interim leaders prefer (or require) employee status

- They want to be part of the staff team with clear authority and defined protections
- They prefer the legal and insurance coverage that comes with employee status
- They believe employee status reduces risk for both the organization and the interim
- Some states legally require interim leaders to be employees

Reasons some interim leaders prefer consultant/independent contractor status

- They see interim leadership as consulting work rather than temporary employment
- They value independence and the ability to work across multiple clients
- They prefer the flexibility of a consulting structure

Several participants in the research study estimated a roughly **70/30 mix** exists between employee and contractor roles, though this varies widely by region. This dialogue underscores the depth with which interim leaders consider their role and how intentionally they navigate their place within the organizations they serve.



4. The Interim Ecosystem

Interim leaders do not work in isolation. They serve within a broader ecosystem shaped by the conditions nonprofits face and the emerging infrastructure that supports interim leadership across the country. While recognition of interim leadership is growing in some regions and networks, the environment in which interim leaders work has become more volatile—and the support systems around them remain uneven across the country.

A. The Nonprofit Environment

Most nonprofits are small and resource challenged. It is common for nonprofits to be working beyond their capacity in the best of times. Interim leaders are now entering organizations experiencing deeper structural strain. Participants described:

- **High burnout and turnover**, with many staff exhausted from ongoing instability
- **Hybrid work challenges** that make communication, cohesion, and culture-building difficult—especially for a temporary leader stepping in midstream
- **Funding volatility and retrenchment in equity commitments**, creating emotional and cultural complexity
- **Unresolved organizational issues**—outdated systems, unclear roles, governance gaps, and culture challenges that have accumulated over time

Many participants noted that workplace trauma is now a consistent part of transition work. Staff, boards, and communities often carry accumulated strain from instability, conflict, or broken trust, meaning interim leaders must navigate environments where emotional dynamics are as present as operational ones.

These sector-wide pressures shape the starting point of nearly every interim assignment. Interim leaders often begin their work by stabilizing day-to-day operations while simultaneously guiding change. Participants frequently described this dynamic as “flying the airplane while building it.” The work requires both operational steadiness and skilled change navigation.

Fortunately, interim leaders aren’t flying the plane in the dark. Organizations such as BoardSource, Standards for Excellence Institute, Association of Fundraising Professionals, National Association of Social Workers, American Society of Association Executives, and Imagine Canada are examples, among many, that set the standards for nonprofit organizations throughout North America.



B. The Infrastructure Supporting Interim Leaders

Interim leaders work within a constellation of support systems that are becoming more connected across the United State and Canada. Network leaders highlighted growing collaboration, shared tools, and coordinated efforts that make it easier for interim leaders to learn from one another and stay supported.

Training and Certificate Providers

Three organizations currently offer **structured education and certificate programs** for interim leaders. They provide shared frameworks, tools, and preparation for the role:

- **Interim Executives Academy at Third Sector Company** — offers certificate training programs, continuing education, and placement and support for interim nonprofit leaders nationwide. www.interimexecutivesacademy.com
- **Interim Executive Institute at Support Center** – a capacity-building organization offering training and guidance for leaders navigating executive transitions. www.supportcenteronline.org
- **Interim Management Institute at Armstrong McGuire** — a consulting and advisory firm that provides transition support and a certificate program for interim executives. www.armstrongmcguire.com

“There are regional differences. Urban and coastal communities may have a strong understanding of interim leadership, that more rural and interior communities do not.”

These programs contribute to a more consistent understanding of interim leadership practice across the field.

Regional Networks

Across the country, interim leaders connect through a number of regional networks. In this context, networks refer to professional development gatherings, peer learning spaces, and convenings that are open to the broader interim leadership community, rather than formal membership organizations. While these networks are often associated with a geographic region, regional boundaries are informal and porous. Collaboration across regions is common, and many interim leaders participate in multiple networks through virtual offerings and shared events.

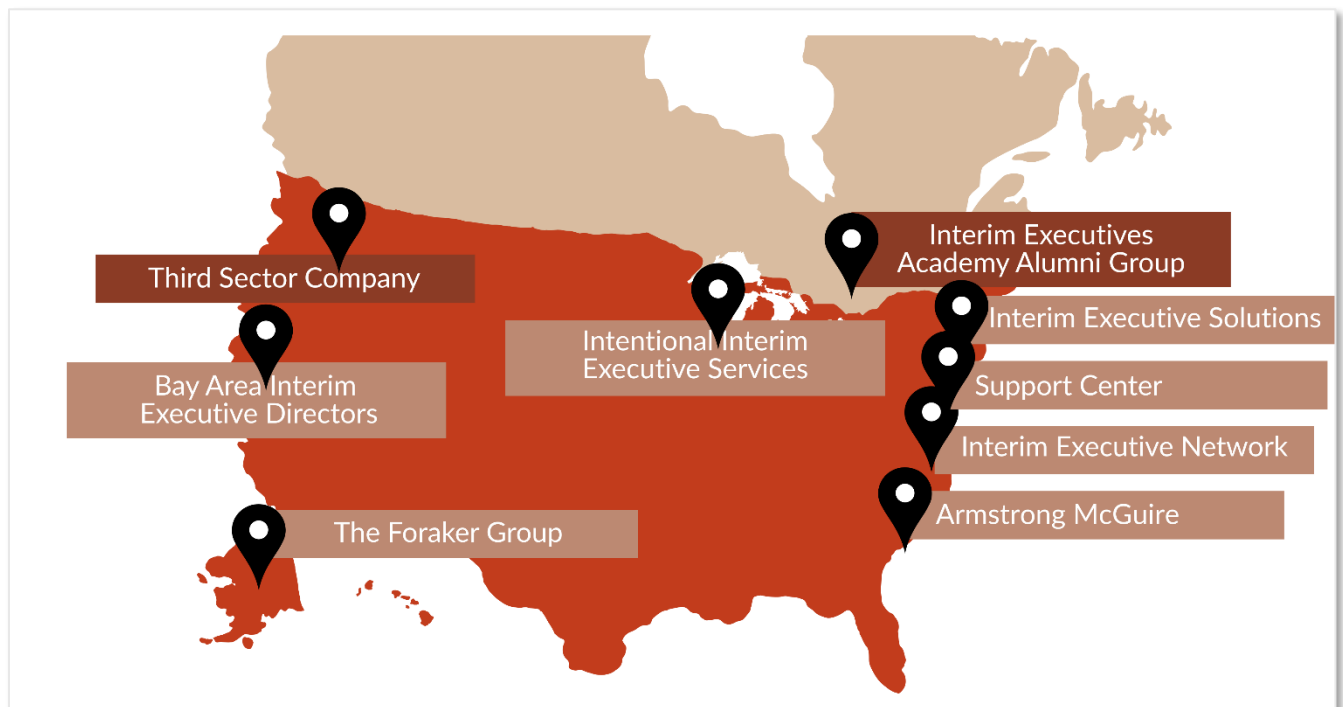
For one network of about 50 participants, about half are fully interim leaders and half supplement their work and incomes in other ways. Not all have received formal training in interim work.

Example Regional Networks

Region	Network Name	Link
Alaska	The Foraker Group	https://forakergroup.org
Bay Area CA	Bay Area Interim Executive Directors	https://www.bayareainterims.com
Great Lakes	Intentional Interim Executive Services	https://interimexecutivedirectors.com
Mid Atlantic	Interim Executive Network	https://interimnonprofitexecs.com
New England	Interim Executive Solutions	https://interim-exec.org
New York	Interim Executive Institute Support Center	https://www.supportcenteronline.org
Southeast	Armstrong McGuire Interim Management Network	https://www.armstrongmcguire.com
West	Third Sector Company Interim Executives Academy	https://interimexecutivesacademy.com

Some of these networks have spawned alumni groups, such as Interim Executive Academy alumni who remain networked in greater Toronto and throughout Canada.

Regional Networks across North America



Additional interim networks certainly exist, and we welcome knowing about them. Participants thought that there may be networks hosted by universities and nonprofit networks.

National nonprofit associations and federated organizations—such as YWCA or National CASA—are part of larger networks that offer a range of professional development opportunities. These

A TREND OUTSIDE THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

Nonprofit interim leadership is part of a broader, well-established practice of supporting organizational continuity during times of transition.

Government agencies today regularly rely on interim or acting leaders to maintain continuity during leadership transitions, vacancies, or appointment processes.

Churches have long used interim pastors, particularly in the Midwest, where funders actively support the practice.

Within **corporations**, roughly 20% of incoming CEOs were named on an interim basis, according to a recent *Forbes* article.

One participant noted that **public and private schools** use interim leaders as a way “to try someone out.” This falls outside general interim standards, but it demonstrates how interim leadership is an accepted leadership continuity practice across many sectors.

associations often provide general nonprofit leadership education. Some also offer consultant or interim pools and affinity groups for interim leaders, such as United Way in partnership with Interim Executives Academy and Third Sector Company.

Core Activities That Support Successful Interim Leadership

When looking at the full range of interim leadership supports, a common set of activities emerges. Taken together, these efforts help both interim leaders *and* organizations move through transition with greater clarity and stability:

		
Interim Training and Job Preparation	Network Meet-ups and Peer Learning Groups	Topical Conversations and Knowledge-Sharing Forums
		
One-on-One Coaching and Peer Mentoring	Placement and Referral Services	Board Development and Staff Support Consultation



Where Nonprofits Find Interim Executive Leaders

Another way to think about the ecosystem in which interim leadership operates is by looking at how they get hired. Participants in our study named four primary ways and identified the following examples:

1. Interim Placement Organizations: *These named organizations maintain active pools of vetted interim leaders and place them regularly:*

- Armstrong McGuire
- Arts Consulting Group
- Foraker Group
- Interim Executive Solutions
- Support Center
- Third Sector Company
- Valtas Group

2. Search Firms with Interim Pools: *Executive search firms increasingly place interim CEOs, CFOs, COOs, and development leaders, particularly with their search clients:*

- Koya Partners
- Raffa / Marcum
- Scion Nonprofit Staffing
- Valtas Group

3. Regional Interim Networks: *Peer networks and alumni groups that provide reliable referrals:*

- Armstrong McGuire Interim Network
- Bay Area Interim Executive Directors
- Interim Academy Affinity Groups
- Interim Executive Network
- Interim Executive Solutions
- Intentional Interim Executive Services
- Support Center
- Third Sector Company

4. Word-of-Mouth Referrals: *Still one of the most common pathways:*

- Community Foundations
- Former EDs
- Retired executives
- United Ways
- Consultants
- Board and community recommendations

It was suggested during our conversations with interim leaders that forming a relationship with the Network of Nonprofit Search Consultants would be an important future consideration.

www.nnsc.org

“Search firms make good partners for interim leaders.”

The interim ecosystem is evolving. Nonprofits face increasing complexity, while support systems for interim leaders continue to develop. As regional networks grow and training pathways expand, interim leaders are better positioned since our previous study to support organizations in transition. At the same time, gaps in board readiness and geographic access to interim professional development underscore the need for even stronger alignment and collaboration across the sector.

5. Strengthening the Profession: Standards and Principles

Across all focus groups and in the town hall, interim leaders called for advancing and advocating a common set of professional expectations associated with professional interim leadership for nonprofit organizations. Discussion groups called out for a general set of standards and principles that reflect the profession’s collective wisdom and offer a starting point for greater consistency and quality across interim engagements. These 10 standards reflect the insights of practitioners who are actively shaping the field, offering a shared foundation upon which the field can continue to build.

Standards for Interim Nonprofit Leadership

Standards define the professional expectations and practices that ensure interim leadership is carried out with consistency, integrity, and measurable quality.

1	<p style="text-align: center;">CENTERING A MISSION OF SERVICE</p>	<p><u>Interim leaders act in service of the organization’s mission and community.</u> Their role is temporary and selfless—focused on advancing purpose, not position. They are not a candidate for the job.</p>
2	<p style="text-align: center;">FOCUSING ON FUTURE-READINESS</p>	<p><u>Interim engagements are designed to prepare organizations for what comes next.</u> Leaders strengthen governance, systems, and culture so that the next executive begins on solid ground.</p>
3	<p style="text-align: center;">ADVANCING BOARD GOVERNANCE</p>	<p><u>Interim leaders collaborate with boards as internal consultants</u>—modeling effective governance, helping members understand change, and building long-term leadership capacity.</p>
4	<p style="text-align: center;">DEMONSTRATING PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY</p>	<p><u>Interim leaders operate with transparency, independence, and adherence to ethical and legal standards.</u> They maintain clear contracts, avoid conflicts of interest, and uphold confidentiality and fairness.</p>
5	<p style="text-align: center;">LEADING A METHODICAL PROCESS</p>	<p><u>Interim work follows a deliberate framework</u>—assessment, stabilization, and transition—while adapting to each organization’s context. This ensures clarity, consistency, and progress.</p>

6	ELEVATING EQUITY AND CULTURAL AWARENESS	<u>Interim leaders are “guests” in a new culture</u> and approach the work with humility, curiosity, and respect. Because culture is the primary driver of organizational behavior, interim leaders attend to how people relate, communicate, and make decisions. They center belonging and psychological safety, honor lived experience, and recognize how identity, trauma, power, and history shape the transition environment.
7	MODELING EXEMPLARY NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR	<u>Every engagement strengthens the organization’s leadership capacity.</u> Interim leaders model executive behavior, coach staff and board members (and sometimes community members), clarify roles and decision-making processes, and transfer knowledge that builds confidence, competence, and lasting organizational resilience.
8	CULTIVATING DATA & LEARNING INFORMED DECISION-MAKING	<u>Interim leaders use data, feedback, and reflection to assess progress and improve performance.</u> They contribute insights from each engagement to advance the collective understanding and impact of interim leadership.
9	PRACTICING PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL CARE	<u>Interim leaders sustain their practice through peer networks, shared learning, and attention to wellness.</u> The profession’s strength depends on connection, reflection, and mutual support.
10	ASSURING SUCCESSFUL CLOSURE	<u>Each engagement ends with an intentional handoff process</u> —capturing lessons, documentation, and recommendations to ensure continuity and readiness for the next chapter.



Principles Guiding Interim Leaders

Principles describe the core beliefs and values that guide how interim leaders approach their work and make decisions during times of transition. The 2023 State of the Interim Professional included a core set of principles now advanced by Interim Executives Academy:

Interim Management is Purposeful: Focusing the entire goal of interim leadership on advancing an organization's cause.

Interim Management is Transformational: Fostering processes and structures that support people to build new capacities to make their own best decisions to further evolve the cause.

Interim Management is Methodical: Demonstrating well-defined leadership processes that are evidence-based and measurement-oriented.

Interim Management is Profound: Building authentic diversity, inclusion, equity and access by identifying and addressing preconceptions that exist in an organization's culture.

In addition to these principles, participants in this study named two closely related principles that reflect how interim leadership is practiced in real-world settings. These principles surfaced across focus group discussions and complement—rather than replace—the core framework.

Interim leadership is Strategic: Interim leaders make intentional choices that position the organization for its next chapter. They assess what matters most, focus attention where it will have the greatest impact, and align people, systems, and governance toward a realistic path forward.

Interim leadership is Agile: Interim leadership is rooted in professional discipline yet remains flexible and responsive to each organization's context. Like a jazz ensemble, it blends structure and improvisation to meet changing needs.

These standards and principles come from interim leaders themselves. They are not fixed rules, but a synthesis of the themes and practices that surfaced again and again across conversations. They reflect what effective interim leaders tend to do, while still allowing room for the flexibility and judgment each organization deserves. They offer a common foundation for helping nonprofits navigate transitions with greater clarity and confidence.



6. Looking Ahead: Recommendations and Opportunities

In 2023, practitioners identified seven opportunities to advance the interim leadership profession. 2025 conversations reaffirmed the importance of these themes while offering practical ways to continue the work. **Participants emphasized that the core needs remain the same—greater understanding of interim leadership, stronger pathways and support, deeper attention to equity, and closer collaboration across the ecosystem—but the urgency has grown as nonprofit conditions become more complex.**

The following opportunities build directly from the 2023 recommendations, incorporating what interim leaders named in this year’s focus groups and national town hall.

“Our collaboration will make the pie bigger for everyone.”

1. Educate boards and nonprofits about the value of interim leadership through consistent communication across the country

To paraphrase one participant, we “grow the pie” when interim leaders market the concept, not individual practitioners. Advancing the field starts with helping more boards and nonprofits understand what interim leadership is and makes possible.

- Use shared definitions of interim leadership across the profession, drawing on the descriptions included in this report.
- Share impact stories to increase awareness of how interim leaders contribute to organizational sustainability.
- Add information about interim leaders and leadership to organizational websites.
- Actively educate boards so they understand the opportunity for interim leadership the next time their organization faces a transition

These ideas reflect a shared belief that awareness is the first step toward expanding access and strengthening the profession.

2. Position interim leadership as a strategic organizational development opportunity for organizations advancing community impact missions

Interim leadership plays a steadying and clarifying role when organizations move through transitions. Interim leadership can be positioned as a strategic resource that strengthens organizations:

- Embed interim leadership in succession planning
- Use transitions as opportunities for reflection and renewal
- Engage interim leaders during mergers or founder transitions for candid, unbiased guidance
- Encourage funders and capacity-building partners to lift up interim options as part of healthy practice. They can help make the case for interim leadership

Together, these insights affirm interim leadership as a purposeful tool that improves decision-making and supports long-term organizational health.

3. Strengthen the ecosystem supporting and advancing interim professionals

Participants emphasized the value in network weaving across the U.S. and Canada. By strengthening the ecosystem around interim leaders, we build capacity for both the profession and the nonprofits served by it. Participants identified two sets of actions: those that support interim leaders directly, and those that help organizations and partners understand and adopt interim leadership as an option.

A. Strengthen support and connection for interim leaders

- **Convene network leaders at least annually** to learn from each other, share resources, fill gaps, and further strengthen relationships. Third Sector Company, in commissioning of this report, has invested in an important effort that should be continued.
- **Continue to map** where interim leaders work and networks operate so networks can continue to weave together
- **Highlight** education programs providing interim credentials
- **Encourage** regional meet-ups, alumni networks, and peer circles that build community
- **Offer mentoring, coaching, and support**, particularly for new interim leaders and BIPOC leaders
- **Share** articles, tools, outreach methods, and more so others can be inspired and be more efficient to growing their network
- **Measure impact** whenever possible, using the power of crowdsourcing to share data and stories

These steps build clearer pathways, stronger relationships, and more consistent support for interim leaders across regions. In a profession defined by decentralized networks rather than a single governing body, momentum grows through the relationships interim leaders create —by sharing what works, learning from one another, and staying linked across geography

B. Build understanding and collaboration among organizations and partners

- **Partner** with funders, search firms, community foundations, board trainers, and United Ways (among others) to increase awareness about interim leadership

- **Engage** capacity-building organizations, such as nonprofit state associations, as education partners as they lead trainings on topics such as board effectiveness, succession planning, and leadership transition.
- **Demonstrate** through stories and examples how interim leaders strengthen organizations

Together, these ideas reflect a shared belief that a stronger ecosystem helps interim leaders do their best work—and helps more organizations access skilled leadership during transition.

4. Center equity and cultural awareness in transition work

Interim leaders often step into organizations at moments when culture, identity, community relationships, and staff dynamics feel especially tender. Participants underscored the need for interim leaders to navigate these dynamics with care:

- **Acknowledge** the cultural and community context interim leaders step into
- **Approach** organizations with humility as a “guest” in a new culture
- **Recognize** the unique challenges BIPOC and LGBTQ+ interim leaders experience in board relationships
- **Support** boards as they reflect on identity, values, and community relationships
- **Hold** space for conversations about power, culture, and accountability during transition
- **Increase education on trauma-informed practice** since many interim leaders step into organizations where past harm, conflict or loss shapes people’s responses
- **Name** when equity commitments are shifting or retrenching, and help boards understand the implications for staff and community

These reflections underscore that centering equity is not an add-on—it sits at the heart of effective transition leadership and is essential to preparing the organization for a healthy next chapter.

Closing Reflection

Across all conversations, participants expressed optimism: the field is gaining visibility, and more organizations are recognizing the stabilizing, clarifying work that interim leaders offer. At the same time, they affirmed that the seven recommendations from 2023 still describe the path forward. Continued progress will come from shared learning, stronger networks, and a collective commitment to helping nonprofits navigate transition with clarity and confidence.

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IN APPRECIATION

Third Sector Company is very proud to commission this report as the only ongoing national research effort devoted exclusively to the advancement of quality interim leadership to benefit charitable organizations, professional associations and congregations in transition.

I personally thank my interim executive colleagues for volunteering their experiences and expertise to participate in this effort, solely aimed at raising the bar of knowledge to benefit every professional interim leader and the organizations across the nation that support them.

A special thank you to Nancy Bacon for her continuing support to bring fairness, transparency, accountability and authenticity to this collective effort. I sincerely hope this information will help to elevate every interim professional to higher ground in their service to others.

Thank you very much.

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