

The Ekedahl Center for Nonprofit Excellence: Triumphant First Year

The success of a new venture is never guaranteed. So when the Community Foundation of the Lowcountry (CFL) launched its Ekedahl Center for Nonprofit Excellence in September of 2024, we prepared and hoped for the best. After a year chock full of workshops and training programs, we can proudly report that year one was a resounding success!

Established through the generosity of Dave and Patty Ekedahl, the Center has quickly become a cornerstone for increasing nonprofits' capacity and building the confidence of nonprofit leaders across Beaufort, Jasper, Colleton, and Hampton counties. In its inaugural year, the Ekedahl Center provided local organizations with essential resources, hands-on learning, and transformative leadership development through its one-day workshops and its flagship year-long Nonprofit Excellence in Management & Operations (NEMO) program.

Empowering Nonprofit Leaders Through Learning

The Ekedahl Center's one-day workshops attracted hundreds of local nonprofit executive directors, staff, and board members throughout the year. Each session offered practical tools and insights designed to strengthen organizational effectiveness. Highlights included sessions on Board Development and Governance, Storytelling and Marketing with Purpose, and Developing Logic Models for Grant Writing and Evaluation. These gatherings, led by seasoned consultants and educators such as Neil Sklarew and USCB staff, fostered dynamic peer learning and collaboration during the sessions and were open to follow up conversations with the participants.

NEMO: A Transformative Year of Growth

The centerpiece of the Ekedahl Center's first year was the NEMO program, developed and led by HIGOL (High Impact Growth Oriented Leaders) staff, guided 15 nonprofit leaders through a year-long journey of strategic and operational methods and tools. Participants engaged in six intensive, day-long workshops focusing on board engagement, organizational planning, fundraising, marketing, financial management, and sustainable business models. Each organization also received personalized executive coaching and consulting from HIGOL staff.

NEMO survey results underscored the program's impact on participants: 93% of leaders reported increased confidence in their leadership capacity, 87% saw improved board-executive alignment, and 80% noted better organizational decision-making. Participants described the experience as transformational and reported gains in a variety of functions. As one leader summarized, "We now lead with our strategic plan across all disciplines, and our entire team understands the direction."

Building Capacity for a Stronger Future

The success of the Ekedahl Center for Nonprofit Excellence's programs extends well beyond the classroom. Nonprofits are redesigning governance models, strengthening financial oversight, and engaging boards more deeply in fundraising and mission delivery. Others have launched

collaborative initiatives, such as joint youth programs and shared service models, which increase efficiency and community outreach.

Through the Ekedahl Center's workshops and the NEMO program, local nonprofit leaders are not only gaining knowledge but also the confidence to apply it, transforming their organizations into high-performing, sustainable institutions.

As CFL President and CEO Scott Wierman noted, "The Ekedahl Center exemplifies the Community Foundation's commitment to helping nonprofits achieve greater impact and long-term sustainability. By investing in the people who lead our nonprofits, we're investing in the future of our community."