



Charting the Course

*Career Paths Among Emerging
Health Center Leaders*

INTRODUCTION

California’s community health centers face numerous challenges amidst a vast, complex and rapidly evolving healthcare landscape. Chief among these challenges is the need to adapt to changes in the healthcare system resulting from the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and remain solvent and competitive, all while serving more than four million of the state’s underserved and uninsured residents.¹ Now more than ever, there is a critical need for committed, networked and adaptable individuals to fill executive roles and lead health centers into the future.

To help strengthen health centers’ leadership and long-term effectiveness, Blue Shield of California Foundation partners with the Center for the Health Professions at the University of California, San Francisco to deliver the Clinic Leadership Institute Emerging Leaders program (the program). The 18-month program offers in-person, multi-day seminars and complementary supports—including peer networking, coaching and an applied leadership project—to help emerging leaders grow into executive-level positions within five to eight years. Since 2008, the program has trained five cohorts of diverse participants from health centers throughout California.

In this brief, we focus on the career paths of 94 participants from the first four program cohorts from the time of program enrollment to up to three years after graduation.² We also summarize factors contributing to participants’ career paths, highlight individual participants and their paths, and offer considerations for those pursuing and supporting leadership in health centers.

KEY EMERGING LEADERS PROGRAM OUTCOMES

1. The program has resulted in **greater knowledge, skills and confidence** in areas vital to health center leadership (e.g., broader organizational perspective, managing people and projects).
2. Participants have exhibited **considerable professional growth**, including **12 participants (16%) who have moved into executive leadership roles** (e.g., CEO, COO) earlier than the program’s expected five-to-eight year timeframe.



More senior role



Significant growth in responsibilities



Salary increase of 10% or more



Much greater job satisfaction

3. Participants’ **health centers are stronger** as a result of their program participation (e.g., enhanced readiness for healthcare reform, improved cultivation of leaders).
4. The health centers field has a **growing cadre of capable leaders and an enhanced network** of program participants, their colleagues and their organizations.

CAREER PATHS & PROFESSIONAL OUTCOMES

Sponsored by their health center or consortia, each participant enters the program with varying experiences, educational backgrounds and intentions. While participants are united by their status as emerging leaders in the health centers field, and share a common program experience, every participant's path is unique and dynamic. **Participants may advance in role or responsibilities, or transition organizations during the program or at any time after graduation.** Yet, captured as a snapshot at this point in time, **four common career paths emerge** based on whether and where participants have assumed a more senior role and the extent to which their job responsibilities have increased.³

Emerging Leaders' Career Paths^{4,5}

More Senior Role at Sponsoring Organization

46% of participants

All participants in this path—the most common of the four paths—assume a more senior role in their sponsoring organization and experience considerable professional growth. That is, about half experience significant growth in job responsibilities (56%), a 10% or greater increase in salary (58%) and much greater satisfaction with their job (49%). In addition, around one-quarter move into executive-level positions (27%) or join the senior team (22%).

“I have grown into my new position as Executive Director, and in doing so, have been able to create a strong infrastructure and implement a program for fund development.”

More Senior Role at Another Organization

17% of participants

These participants have moved into more senior roles with substantial professional growth outside of the sponsoring health center.⁶ The majority move to another health center or consortia (75%) or healthcare safety net organization (19%). Three-quarters of these participants experience significant growth in job responsibilities (75%) and much greater job satisfaction (75%), and about two-thirds (63%) earn a salary increase of 10% or more. Additionally, one-quarter transition into executive positions (25%) and about one-third join the senior team (31%).

“The program equipped me with what I needed to grow professionally. I moved [to another health center]...and am now recognized as a leader amongst my executive team.”

Same Role with Increased Responsibility

26% of participants

Participants in this path remain in their same role, with most continuing to work in the sponsoring organization (79%). However, they report “moderate” (71%) to “significant” (29%) changes in job responsibilities, which is indicative of forward progress and preparation for more senior roles. About one-third report a 10% or greater salary increase (29%) and much greater job satisfaction (36%).

“In my career path, I see new opportunities opening. The organization looks to me to fill larger shoes, and then I grow into them.”

Same Role with Minimal Increase in Responsibility

12% of participants

Professional growth is modest among the small number of participants along this path. All remain in the sponsoring organization to date, where they have not assumed more senior roles and report “little” (73%) to “no” (27%) increase in responsibilities. Only about one-quarter report a 10% or larger salary increase (27%) and much greater satisfaction with their job (20%). Many of these participants (60%) pursue additional education during and after the program to further their careers.

“I have learned so much and grown so much professionally and on a personal level... but the speed at which change happens in my organization may not match my new perspective post-program.”

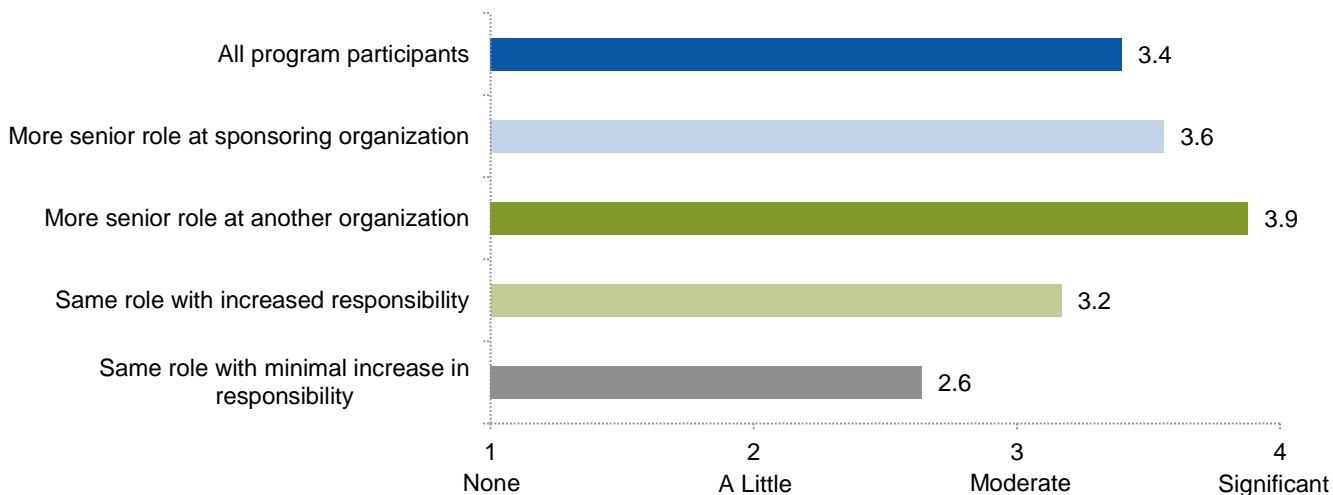
FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CAREER PATHS

There are a number of differences in professional growth among participants in the career paths described on the previous page. Overall, participants who move into more senior roles—especially those who do so outside of the sponsoring organization—experience the greatest growth in salary, job satisfaction and responsibilities such as managing additional projects, sites and staff and representing the organization in regional or statewide venues. In part, time plays a role in career growth—not surprisingly, recent program graduates are less likely to have moved into a more senior role to date—but time alone does not explain the differences in career paths. In an effort to understand variations in individuals’ career trajectories and professional outcomes, in this section we explore contributing factors—program influences, participant and organizational characteristics, education and employment backgrounds, and participants’ career aspirations and perceptions—and their association, or lack thereof, with participants’ career paths. We highlight key differences by career path where relevant.

Program Influences

On the whole, participants credit the program with a substantial contribution to growth in their professional roles, responsibilities and salaries. **As expected, those who experience the greatest professional growth—in terms of more senior roles inside or outside the sponsoring organization—perceive the greatest program contribution.** Participants find that the program’s seminars, personal learning and leadership development plans, and leadership coaching have a particularly strong impact on their leadership effectiveness and professional growth.

The Program’s Contribution to Growth in Roles, Responsibilities & Salary



Participant & Sponsoring Organization Characteristics

Participants are a diverse group representing a range of perspectives and experiences. For the most part, the demographic composition of participants is similar across the four career paths. Across all participants, the average age is 40 years, 63% are non-White and 84% are female. Although there are relatively few men in the program, **men are more likely to assume a more senior role than women** (79% of men and 59% of women), particularly outside of the sponsoring organization.

Participants’ sponsoring organizations range considerably in size, as measured by annual revenues (range: \$234K–\$179M) and the number of employees per health center corporation (range: 3–2,058).⁷ **Participants who assume more senior roles in a different organization tend to come from smaller sponsoring organizations; there are no clear linkages between organizational size and the other career paths.**

Those that leave their sponsoring organization are not necessarily motivated by organizational size, but rather greater leadership roles and responsibilities, better compensation and improved work-life balance.

Education & Employment Experience

Participants have varying levels of formal education when beginning the program, from high school equivalency or less to doctorate degrees. **Participants who advance into more senior roles, particularly outside of the sponsoring organization, are more likely to be highly educated upon entering the program** (i.e., graduate or post-graduate degree). **Those who report the least professional growth since beginning the program are the most likely to pursue additional education and training** to further strengthen their leadership or advance their careers. The types of additional education and training that participants pursue during and after the program vary widely, from continuing education courses (e.g., Electronic Health Record implementation and meaningful use), to professional certificates (e.g., nonprofit management, fundraising) to degree programs (e.g., Bachelor or Master degrees in health administration or business). While professional growth is certainly possible without formal degrees, it may be particularly difficult to move into more senior roles at another organization without higher levels of education.

Key Differences in Educational Attainment by Career Path

	Percent of Participants with a Graduate or Post-Graduate Degree at Program Start	Percent of Participants who Pursue Additional Education During or After the Program
All program participants	42%	41%
More senior role at sponsoring organization	37%	42%
More senior role at another organization	75%	44%
Same role with increased responsibility	35%	29%
Same role with minimal increase in responsibility	27%	60%

Across career paths, participants have a similar duration of experience in the health centers field upon beginning the program, with an average of 11 years in the health centers field, 8 years at the sponsoring organization and 3 years in their current position. However, **those who assume more senior roles tend to have experienced more recent and/or more frequent movement up career ladders**—within or outside their sponsoring organization—even before the program began. This points to the program’s success both in identifying emerging leaders and catalyzing their development.

Participants’ Career Aspirations & Perceptions

At the end of the program, participants are overwhelmingly committed to working in the health centers field and generally report ambitious career goals; most strive to move into a more senior role and feel prepared to do so within five years. Despite these ambitions, some participants lack a clear idea of their career path, feel they may not have the resources and tools needed to drive their career, and are uncertain if they will have an opportunity to advance to a more senior role at their current organization. **Aspirations and perceptions captured at the end of program do not appear to be associated with career outcomes with one notable exception: the intention to work in the health centers field.** Almost all participants have delivered on their commitment to the field regardless of career path, with **94% of participants still in the field** up to three years after graduation and most others (4%) working in the broader healthcare safety net.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THREE PARTICIPANTS & THEIR CAREER PATHS

More Senior Role at Sponsoring Organization: Nereida Morfin



From providing administrative support to joining the senior team, Nereida Morfin has steadily grown into more advanced roles during her seven years at the Borrego Community Health Foundation (BCHF). Prior to beginning the Emerging Leaders program in 2011, Nereida had already transitioned from a receptionist to a financial counselor, to a clinic manager to a regional operations director, where she became responsible for overseeing BCHF's four clinic sites in Riverside, California. But Nereida's upward mobility in the clinic did not stop there. During the program, she was promoted to Vice President of Operations, a move that came along with new responsibilities that include overseeing 10 sites in both Riverside and San Diego Counties, as well as supervising all lead staff.

Nereida has always had a particular knack for solving problems at her health center, which has contributed to her progressive growth at BCHF. During her time in the program she added to her talents, developing greater operational insight, strengthening her understanding and use of data to inform decisions, and learning how to nurture staff relationships. "Thanks to the program, I am confident as a leader... I was able to build my relationships with my employees and other departments." Urged on by the program, particularly her leadership coach, Nereida is now pursuing a Bachelor's of Business Administration to further her leadership and continue to advance her workplace.

More Senior Role at Another Organization: Rosario Arreola Pro



Rosario entered the first Emerging Leaders cohort confident and ready to learn: "I took a leap of faith and the program turned out to be the most fulfilling experience I ever had," she says. Rosario began the program while she was a program development and planning specialist at Tiburcio Vasquez Health Center in Union City, California. While Rosario made strong contributions to the health center during her seven-year tenure, she felt better positioned for more growth at another organization. During her enrollment in the program, she moved to the California Rural Indian Health Board (CRIHB) in Sacramento, becoming the Health Systems Development Director, a substantial promotion from her previous role. When she walked through the door of her new organization, Rosario immediately took on additional responsibilities as a member of the senior team, such as managing a diverse, 12-person group; at her former organization, she had not had a supervisory role.

Three years after graduating from the program, Rosario now influences organizational decisions at CRIHB that impact state and national tribal clinics and clinic consortia and their ability to advocate for the health of American Indians and Alaskan Natives. With the unwavering support of the program, Rosario blossomed into an effective leader who aspires to further her growth and impact at her organization. James Crouch, ED/CEO at CRIHB, explains: "Rosario has gained confidence in her ability to lead others and gained new tools which have improved her management capacity. This leadership has moved the organization forward in the area of health information technology and provided leadership to our network of clinic administrators." Rosario continues to lead by example and plans to pursue supplementary education in health information management to further complement her work with tribal health programs.

Same Role with Increased Responsibility: Amparo Mahler



Twenty years ago, as a young woman with a high school diploma, Amparo Mahler began working in an entry-level position at Neighborhood Healthcare (NHC), headquartered in Escondido, California. Over time, the organization nurtured Amparo's development as a leader, and when she began the Emerging Leaders program in 2010, she had already been working as Chief Operating Officer for two years. Halfway through the program, NHC entrusted Amparo with the enormous task of developing and overseeing the organization's corporate compliance program, a particularly important role in the context of healthcare reform. Amparo immediately turned to the program to build her knowledge about compliance issues and assist her in taking on this new responsibility with skill and

confidence. The program helped mold her as a strategic thinker and has contributed to how she manages her team and works with peer executives. As Tracy Ream, CEO, reflects: "Because Amparo has been in such a key leadership role at NHC, but self-taught, the program accomplished exactly what was needed. It exposed her to the much broader world of leadership beyond health center operations and made a huge difference in how she develops managers and directors to define the culture of the organization, be ready for healthcare reform, and be active in carrying out the strategic plan."

Amparo's tenure at NHC makes her a valuable resource, where the leadership team continually relies on her to manage health center processes of high importance, such as leading EHR implementation and the organization's Patient Centered Medical Home efforts. Amparo is proactive in seeking opportunities for professional growth that help situate her organization for success, and she is proud to serve as a role model for other emerging leaders at NHC.

CONSIDERATIONS

Drawing upon learnings about leadership development, health centers and the Emerging Leaders program—particularly the findings in this brief about career paths and the factors that influence individuals' trajectories—we offer some considerations for supporting emerging leaders and strengthening leadership in the community health centers field. The opportunity is ripe for action at the individual, organizational and field level to capitalize on the tremendous potential embodied in these developing leaders and the overall field.

Identify committed individuals who aspire to hold leadership roles and are well positioned for growth.

While ambition does not guarantee career movement, it is difficult to progress along a career continuum without self-motivation and commitment to pursuing one's path over time. Therefore, clearly articulating the intentions and expectations of organizations and leadership supports goes hand in hand with an up-front investment to gauge individuals' professional aspirations and potential. When considering the leadership pipeline, take into account the need to diversify organizational leadership in ways that more closely represent health center staff and patient populations.

Build and customize leadership support plans to facilitate career growth. Specific needs and areas for growth vary for each emerging leader. Individual development plans will support emerging leaders along their desired career path, whether that's to become the next CEO or gain more responsibility in their current position. A tangible plan empowers individuals to shape their own path alongside their superiors and peers, and provides all parties with a map of emerging leaders' desired destinations and the steps needed to get there. It is important to revisit this plan periodically to assess career path progress and related challenges and opportunities.

Provide ongoing support for learning and professional development. Guided by organizational needs and opportunities and emerging leaders' development plans, offer a variety of supports to prepare leaders for their next steps. From leadership coaching, to trainings, to applied leadership projects, to support for returning to school for degree programs, there are numerous ways to invest in leaders' futures. The cost, in human and

financial resources, can and should be shared by leaders, their organizations and other supporters of the overall field.

Ensure that career paths are clear and accessible. Many health centers need to be more intentional about clarifying and articulating career paths that are distinct, reachable and aligned with organizational needs and gaps. Regardless of organizational size or participant characteristics (e.g., educational background, gender), develop and “right size” multiple career ladders so that emerging leaders seeking professional growth have adequate opportunity for advancement. Create a space that enables role expansion, whether in small increments or larger leaps, to keep emerging leaders engaged and growing even when more senior roles are not readily available.

Nurture the network. Strengthen and support connections among emerging leaders within and across health centers over time. Maintaining momentum and engagement among the cadre of future leaders is critical to sharing learnings, broadening exposure to leadership development supports and paths, and opening up doors to new career opportunities. A stronger network of emerging leaders nourishes not only the leaders themselves, but their organizations and the health centers field.

¹ Capital Link. 2013. California Community Clinics: A Financial and Operational Profile, 2008-2011.

² The total participant population size across the first four program cohorts is 99. Of these, 5 participants were excluded from the analysis because they were already CEOs upon entry into the program or are currently unemployed. The data for the 94 participants represented in the analysis includes survey responses collected at the end of the program and annually thereafter; some participants also participated in qualitative data collection via interviews and focus groups.

³ The term “more senior roles” often, but not always, refers to changes in job title/position.

⁴ These data represent participants’ self-reported survey responses about assuming a more senior role or position, experiencing “significant” growth in job responsibilities, obtaining a 10% or greater salary increase, and gaining “much greater” satisfaction with their job.

⁵ The career paths are mutually exclusive; that is, each participant is represented in only one of the career paths. The percentages of participants across the four career paths total 101% due to rounding.

⁶ In general, participants transition directly into a more senior role when they change organizations, though it is possible to advance in role at some point after starting at a new organization.

⁷ Data on annual revenue and the number of employees per health center corporation were obtained from the following source: www.guidestar.org. The data represent available data for each participant’s sponsoring organization in the year the participant began the program, with one exception: 2010 data were used for 2011 participants since 2011 data were unavailable.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

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