



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION OF UTAH

SOCIAL SECTOR SABBATICAL 2023 FINDINGS

Three months after selecting participants for the Community Foundation of Utah's (CFU) inaugural Social Sector Sabbatical, six nonprofit executives took a two-week paid leave from their organizations. Participants were provided a \$5,000 grant from CFU to help compensate key staff, including the Executive Director/CEO, during the Sabbatical period. The goal of the Sabbatical was to provide these leaders with time and space away from their daily responsibilities to pursue bold new ideas and consider solutions to the ongoing day to day challenges they face.

While the Sabbatical period officially concluded in October 2023, additional convenings of the cohort will continue into 2024 to understand the initiative's impact on participating individuals and their organizations. Initial feedback was provided by participants in the months leading up to and following the Sabbatical period. The following report summarizes preliminary findings surrounding key indicators, self-reported confidence levels, and future considerations for the offering.

Key indicators

- Sector retention and career growth
- Perceptions of organizational resiliency and organizational potential
- Time allocation
- Leadership confidence
- Achievements and goals

Overall, nonprofit executives felt the Sabbatical offered a beneficial and necessary leave of absence for them to invest time in themselves and think strategically about the future of their organization. Supported by their respective boards, as well as designated senior management personnel stepping into gaps during the Sabbatical, 2023 Sabbatical participants reported the following benefits post-sabbatical.

Self-reported findings on average

- Participants felt 18% more confident in organizational resiliency
- Participants spent 19% less time on organizational strategy
- Participants were 20% more confident in their organization's ability to achieve its strategic vision

Future considerations

The following highlights participant feedback and considerations for future Sabbatical offerings.

Increase opportunities for cohort convening and connection

- Participants expressed a desire for additional peer engagement leading up to and following the Sabbatical period.
- Significantly, as Executive Directors (EDs) and CEOs within their organization, participants noted not having peers in the space to discuss navigating personal and professional challenges.

Extend the Sabbatical period

- Research has found that two-weeks is typically the minimum amount of time a leader needs to fully unplug from their organization. Therefore, a longer Sabbatical period may be beneficial for individuals to fully reflect, reset, and reimagine their roles and their organizations.
- Explore funding options to match or build upon the Sabbatical grant award provided by CFU.

Succession planning

- Offering the Sabbatical simultaneously with the Invest in Success (IIS) initiative, allowed EDs and CEOs to more confidently step away for the two-week period. IIS better equipped senior level staff members with resources and skills to step into leading the organization.
- The two-week period also helped EDs and CEOs, at different levels, reflect on and set intentions for their future role within the organization.

It will take time to fully understand the impact of this initiative, however CFU will continue to explore these preliminary findings:

The importance of creating permission and a process by which nonprofit leaders are encouraged and incentivized to step away from their work.

- For most participating organizations, implementing a Sabbatical was not a resource barrier problem.
- Anecdotally, broader support was given by staff and board members when the Sabbatical was “awarded” by an external organization.

Leaders want to connect and collaborate with peers, but space must be intentionally created to facilitate this.

In summary, nonprofit executives are eager to invest in themselves and their organizations, but often do not have the time, resources, or legitimized “permission” to do so. The Sabbatical, and comparable initiatives seeking to invest in social sector talent, offer a designated space and guided facilitation for relational networking and personal reflection to occur. CFU continues to explore options for empowering these leaders and providing them with the space and resources to lead across Utah’s social sector.

