Leadership Academy for Middle Managers

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, December 2018

National Child Welfare Workforce Institute
Learning, Leading, Changing

Children's Bureau
Acknowledgments

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For more information: Please visit the NCWWI website at www.ncwwi.org

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Introduction

Child welfare faces exceptional leadership challenges. All child welfare levels require expertise, and agency leaders must set an agency vision, chart a course for ongoing organizational development, and support a workforce straining to improve outcomes in the face of unreasonable workloads and high turnover. Yet many child welfare leaders have inadequate leadership experience, education, or training, a deficiency that may cause them to retreat to a compliance-driven, problem-focused, and people-processing approach to leadership.

The NCWWI Leadership Academies provide supervisors and managers with opportunities to become the expert child welfare leaders that they strive to be. Academy graduates across the country are pioneering positive changes in their agencies and strengthening child welfare practice effectiveness to support the success of children, youth, and families. If implemented as designed, supervisors and managers who complete the academies will become nimble leaders, able to identify and tackle both technical and adaptive challenges and to support their organization in achieving its full potential.

About the Leadership Academies

The Children’s Bureau funded the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI) to build leadership capacity and support change at all levels throughout the child welfare system. From 2008 to 2018, NCWWI developed, implemented, and refined two leadership academies: Leadership Academy for Middle Managers (LAMM) and Leadership Academy for Supervisors (LAS).

LAMM provides an in-person leadership development program for mid-level managers that includes preparation over a 14-week period prior to training and coaching for up to six months after training.

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LAS offers an online training program for supervisors with one-year minimum experience. Cohorts of participants spend 36 hours online, and an additional minimum of 9 hours in synchronous learning networks to provide an opportunity for supervisors to share their progress and receive peer and instructor feedback.

Overall, participants have found the leadership academies to be relevant and valuable to their jobs. Evaluation results show that LAMM participants significantly increased application of leadership behaviors, including making informed decisions to position their organizations for success, giving staff more autonomy and professional development opportunities, increasing collaborative and consensus-building efforts, and implementing innovative practices and translating visions to actions. LAS participants increased application of leadership behaviors, including setting priorities and managing resources, encouraging collaborative and inclusive units, utilizing more collaborative and consensus-building efforts, and adapting to changes implemented.

The majority of the curricula and training materials are available online in formats that allow agencies to easily customize the content. If these materials are altered, please be sure to continue to cite the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute.³

**Fundamental Content**

While each academy addresses the specific needs and proficiency levels of its targeted population, the academies also share fundamental content that provides graduates with exposure to the key concepts needed to effectively lead change in child welfare agencies. Through the varied concepts in the curricula, learners are exposed to a cohesive and comprehensive set of competencies that they apply to the implementation of change in their agencies. This shared content provides organizations that utilize both academies an opportunity to develop a common language agency-wide. Shared content includes:

- **NCWWI’s Leadership Competency Framework** reflects the multidimensional nature of the child welfare field and the corresponding complex and diverse body

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³ Recommended citations are included on each product.
of knowledge and skills. It describes the approach and resource documents used as the basis for the NCWWI competency framework, and, for each competency, offers a definition and a proficiency ladder, as well as examples for each level.

Adaptive Leadership,\(^4\) by Heifetz, develops the skills to take people outside their comfort zones, assess and address the toughest challenges, and effectively facilitate the change process.

Strengths Based Leadership,\(^5\) by Rath and Conchie, identifies three keys to being a more effective leader: knowing your strengths and investing in others’ strengths, getting people with the right strengths on your team, and understanding and meeting the four basic needs of those who look to you for leadership.

Cultural Humility\(^6\) is the “ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the [person].” Cultural humility differs from other culturally based training ideals because it focuses on self-humility rather than achieving a state of knowledge or awareness.

The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) Implementation Framework offers an approach to support effective implementation of sustainable change efforts.

NCWWI’s Workforce Development Framework helps child welfare leaders understand best and promising workforce practices for developing and supporting a competent, committed, and diverse workforce, as well as an inclusive and welcoming workplace.

Change Initiatives are a critical tool for hands-on learning. Applying new learning to agency work is an essential element of adult learning. Change initiatives provide a structured way to do this. The use of change initiatives allows those trained to become increasingly comfortable with the process of change—a process they can


use whenever they identify an area needing transformation. They also act as a vehicle for connecting the workforce to the agency’s mission and serve to surface the barriers to sustainable change in the jurisdiction’s infrastructure, communication gaps, and decision-making. Evaluation data show that participants appreciated learning from change initiatives, but needed leadership buy-in and agency supports to implement them fully.

Implementation Considerations

Agencies should engage in an implementation and sustainability process right for them, knowing that efforts may change over time and the plan may need adjusted to accommodate new realities. Whatever implementation process your agency uses, make sure it is thorough, strategic, and flexible for long-term sustainability. Organizations may choose among multiple implementation approaches such as the Getting to Outcomes\(^7\) approach or guidance provided by the National Implementation Research Network. The following is a list of specific implementation considerations for the NCWWI Leadership Academies. Visit NCWWI’s Change Implementation Resource Category for more information about various approaches to implementation.

1. **Executive-level support.** Initial and ongoing support, involvement, and resources from the executive level provide a critical foundation. Without this support, portions of the academy will be hard to execute successfully, which will limit the academy’s effectiveness. The greater the commitment, the more engagement and motivation for change across the agency.

2. **Vision and goals.** Use a collaborative implementation team representing all stakeholders to develop a shared vision to ground the work and improve the potential for sustainability.

3. **Organizational assessment.** Employ an assessment such as the Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessment (COHA) to establish readiness for a baseline for evaluation and for a foundation from which to build a workforce development plan.

4. **Agency culture and climate.** A more positive organizational culture and climate will facilitate success while a punitive culture will negatively impact success.

5. **Infrastructure.** Strong infrastructures for communication and decision-making processes contribute to the successful implementation and sustainability of leadership academies.

6. **Generate commitment and buy-in.** Engage all levels of the organization and community stakeholders from the very beginning. The importance of this first critical step cannot be overemphasized as it will impact the sustainability of your Change Initiative.

7. **Use coaching.** Early implementation experiences and participant feedback indicated that an additional component, coaching, would result in improved program effectiveness. Managers needed the support that coaching provided to apply the skills they learned during training to the implementation of their Change Initiative and other ongoing work (i.e., transfer of learning).

Your agency may choose to implement one or both academies. Specific implementation guidelines for delivering the LAMM follow. If interested, the [LAS Implementation Guide](https://www.myncwwi.org) is available on MyNCWWI.org.
Leadership Academy for Middle Managers (LAMM)

Academy Goals

Overall goals include:

- Knowledge and skills for effective leaders to succeed in child welfare
- Best practices in change management, including implementation science, conflict management, and stakeholder engagement
- Strategies to support a comprehensive approach to workforce development
- Characteristics of a results-oriented culture and how to use/interpret data to lead for results

Look for a complete list of the course objectives in the curriculum. You may also find it helpful to review the fundamental content listed in the introduction above.

The LAMM consists of a variety of learning components that work together to prepare mid-level managers to effectively lead in the child welfare field. These supports ensure participant readiness; promote critical thinking and reflection; support the transfer of learning; and facilitate the successful implementation of participants’ Change Initiatives. We recommend implementing all learning components for the best results.
Readiness coaching initiates the relationship between trainer-coaches and LAMM participants. This phase of LAMM coaching prepares participants and their agencies for the work ahead, a pre-training preparation process that has been shown to promote transfer of learning back on the job\(^8\). LAMM trainer-coaches benefit as well, since the information they learn from participants informs the training content and delivery. This brings about a more open, collaborative, and productive learning environment for coaches and participants alike. Trainer-coaches schedule three individual calls with each manager before the in-person training to familiarize participants with the training schedule and content; set a tone for the training that emphasizes reflection and critical thinking; and communicate the importance of the leadership agenda. Review the LAMM Coaching Manual for additional details on the content to discuss during each call.

Pre-work assignments take approximately 10 hours to complete. These expectations include viewing the online Introductory Module before their first coaching call; developing a draft of the Change Initiative Worksheet prior to their second coaching call; and completing a StrengthsFinder Assessment before their third coaching call.

The training is taught in person. There are two versions, a 5-day curriculum and a 3-day curriculum, which provide examples of how to break apart the content to meet the needs of your agency.

Post-training coaching focuses on supporting the transfer of learning to the workplace and facilitates the successful implementation of sustainable change. The participant establishes coaching goals and negotiates a schedule for calls with the coach. Typically, coaching is one hour a month by phone over a period of six months. Review the LAMM Coaching Manual for additional details.

Microlearnings provide short (2–9 minutes), digestible, optional online courses that can facilitate increased retention of concepts taught at training and provide practical ways of applying new behaviors and practice in the workplace. Find

them on MyNCWWI.org and look for the Microlearning Tool Kit (coming soon!) that provides guidance on the variety of ways they can be utilized.

Workplace and peer support helps to encourage supervisors of participants to support, coach, and provide feedback to participants on executing their Change Initiative.

Why Implement LAMM?

The combination of teaching methods and curriculum content truly has a powerful, lasting impact on participants.

This independently evaluated academy has shown that participants:

❯ Significantly increased application of leadership behaviors
❯ Implement their Change Initiatives (78%, implemented or were in progress toward Change Initiative implementation in 12 months)
❯ Continued to refer to the tools and skills they learned after finishing the academy


NCWWI has also documented best practices for the trainers throughout the curriculum and in the coaching manual to guide the work of the coaches. This implementation guide along with the curriculum and training resources listed below will ease the heavy workload associated with developing a competency-based leadership development program.

“There has been a 400% increase in CASA volunteers that are tribal as a direct result of what was learned at LAMM. I am so thankful for the training I received!”

“As a division, the LAMM is helping us to grow highly effective leaders in child welfare in our state.”

“Hands down the best management and supervisory training I’ve ever attended.”
Trainer Materials
Curriculum
LAMM Coaching Manual
Welcome Letter Template*
Logistics Timeline Template*
Logistics Video Script*
Giving Work Back Video*
Posters

PowerPoint
Day 1 PowerPoint
Day 2 PowerPoint
Day 3 PowerPoint

Handouts
Training Handouts
Change Initiative Worksheet
Vision Statement Template
Logic Model Template
Action Plan
Professional Development Plan

*Only available for 3-day curriculum.

LAMM Logistics and Planning Checklist

The NCWWI team is not currently funded to provide onsite supports to jurisdictions who would like to implement the LAMM. The following checklist offers step-by-step guidelines for considering the logistics of planning a Leadership Academy for Middle Managers for your agency.

GET BUY-IN

The first step is to get the commitment and full support of the executive team. In addition to support of the executive team, successful implementation also includes commitment and support from:
• Supervisors responsible for overseeing the managers that will be attending the academy
• Training team
• Continuous quality improvement/evaluation personnel
• External partners that would be impacted (e.g., university partners, community stakeholders)

2 DECADE THE OVERARCHING GOAL

Before communicating with participants, the agency must decide if all the Change Initiatives will be related to an overarching agency goal. If yes, this goal needs to be finalized by leadership and communicated to participants’ supervisors. Supervisors would then guide the selection of the Change Initiative to ensure that it supports the implementation of this larger agency goal AND is within the participant’s scope of responsibility. This process will create maximum impact as each participating manager will focus on a Change Initiative within their scope of responsibility that supports the agency’s overarching goal. For additional information, we recommend reviewing the Change Initiative Worksheet.

3 DECIDE WHO WILL PARTICIPATE ON THE PLANNING TEAM

Successful implementation happens when those impacted by the training participate in planning. Consider including training directors, directors/supervisors of participants, potential recipients of training, HR specialists, university partners, and any others who will be impacted. Who is appropriate in your state or jurisdiction?

Possible Roles:

• Project Leader – Ensures effective implementation on time and within agency resources; provides oversight to trainers and coaches; regularly communicates to all involved stakeholders (critical role)
• Trainers – Determines how LAMM fits into the overall training plans; customizes curriculum to ensure it reinforces / fits in with existing
training and meets the agency’s needs; effectively trains to the curriculum

- **Coaches** – Prepares participants before and after training; regularly communicates and follows up with participants

- **Directors/Supervisors of Participants** – Determines the application/recruitment process; communicates the value of LAMM; ensures the supervisor of participants understands the overarching goal and can help their employee determine an appropriate Change Initiative prior to starting the academy

- **Administrative Support** – Provides logistical support; tracks participation (pre-work, training, coaching, etc.)

- **Technology Assistant** – Provides online access to participant materials and troubleshoots technological difficulties

- **Evaluation Support** – Evaluates the extent to which participants learn critical training and leadership competencies and transfer learned skills to the job

### SELECT THE TRAINERS/COACHES

LAMM provides a learning environment in which middle managers feel motivated and supported to take risks in pursuit of the technical and adaptive challenges of leading sustainable systems change. It is important to select experienced trainers who have:

- A sophisticated understanding of child welfare and child welfare leadership.
- A working knowledge of the programs that address the needs of children, youth, and families, the workforce, stakeholders, funding, and political dynamics.
- Been in child welfare management or worked closely with managers.
- Been involved in systems change themselves and have an informed knowledge of the dynamics of systems change from a management lens.
We recommend building a team of diverse trainers with a variety of presentation styles. Selecting trainers who reflect the cultural range and different learning styles of participants enhances the learning environment. Effective LAMM trainers will understand adult learning preferences and address and deliver training through the different modalities.

The scripted curriculum helps trainers teach the content with fidelity, so this curriculum requires selecting trainers who are willing to follow a script and to bring it alive with their own experiences. They must commit to learning not only their own sections, but also learning how other trainers’ sections inform and impact their sections. Set the expectation that trainers will fully engage during the entire training and help one another (e.g., walking around during activities, writing notes on flipcharts, etc.).

Two trainers can teach LAMM, but we recommend three, especially while trainers are learning the content.

Coaching facilitates successful implementation and transfer of learning. While the trainers and coaches can be different individuals, we have found that trainers who provide coaching before, during, and after the in-person LAMM training are often better able to provide continuity with the LAMM content and build on existing relationships with LAMM participants. Utilize the LAMM Coaching Manual to determine how to best incorporate this pre- and post-training.

### CUSTOMIZE THE CURRICULUM

Begin with a full review of the curriculum with the individuals who will have key roles in the implementation. The review process offers an opportunity to establish a shared vision on how this leadership development academy fits with agency priorities and identify ways that it should be modified to meet the agency’s resources and time frame. LAMM offers two versions of the classroom training, a 5-day curriculum and a 3-day curriculum, both of which can be customized to meet the needs of your agency. At this time, you’ll also need to decide how to evaluate the academy to identify success, gaps, and
any changes you may need to further your goals. Refer to LAMM Evaluation Guide for evaluation strategies and suggestions.

SET THE TIMELINE

To ensure effective delivery, we recommend developing a logistics timeline to manage the timing of the various components of the academy, which includes notifying participants, the completion of evaluation components and pre-work assignments, the delivery of logistics videos, and the timing of readiness coaching. For an example, download our template, which is also included in the zipped folder labeled trainer materials.

The LAMM has lots of moving parts, so someone on the team should make sure the team is on track and, if not, discuss what needs to happen to alter the timeline without negatively impacting participants.

RECRUIT AND SELECT PARTICIPANTS

LAMM does not teach basic management, so you may want to select middle managers who have experienced basic management development and demonstrated the desire and ability to grow and change. You may also want to select managers who share a similar level of knowledge and ability, as well as similar authority and responsibility.

In order to participate fully, managers must be motivated to implement mission-driven, strategic Change Initiatives that have been prioritized by agency leadership. This “hands on” work cements the transfer of learning.

Consider your goals in implementing LAMM as you identify your target audience. Will you open LAMM to all experienced managers through voluntary enrollment? Ask for managers to submit competitive applications? How will you motivate managers to participate? Get their buy-in for completing all components of the academy?
NOTIFY PARTICIPANTS

Fourteen weeks prior to training, send participants a welcome letter explaining all the required pre-work, training details, and contact information. View our welcome letter template, which is also included in the zipped folder labeled trainer materials.

PRE-WORK ASSIGNMENTS, LOGISTICS VIDEOS, AND READINESS COACHING

- **Pre-work assignments** start 13 weeks out from in-person training and take approximately 10 hours to complete. These expectations include viewing the online Introductory Module before their first coaching call; developing a draft of the Change Initiative Worksheet prior to their second coaching call; and completing a StrengthsFinder Assessment prior to their third coaching call.

- **Logistics videos** are sent 13 weeks out, 9 weeks out, 4 weeks out, and 2 weeks out from training. While the welcome letter conveys all the logistic and preparation information, we’ve found that it is not enough. Participants become overwhelmed by the pre-work and may ultimately not finish it before training, which will impact the effectiveness of the training. We recommend creating short (range from 1–3 minutes) videos that are sent at various intervals (see Logistics Timeline Template) that communicate what should be done to date and what they should be working on now. This just-in-time strategy significantly increased the pre-work completion rate. Your team will need to develop these videos to customize them for each cohort. Under trainer materials, we’ve provided a script template, along with links to sample videos, to help guide your development process. If creating short videos aren’t an option, then find other ways to break the content up into smaller chunks during the pre-training months.

**Readiness coaching** starts 10–12 weeks out from training. Review the LAMM Coaching Manual for additional details on what should be discussed during each call.
IN-PERSON TRAINING

- **Training space**: The training space will need to include a break-out room for activities; various electrical outlets for participant laptops; adequate wall space to post flip charts; enough tables to provide room for participants and their laptops; and Wi-Fi. You’ll also need a screen, projector, projector cart/table, small table under screen for trainers, presenter computer, flip chart paper, and stands.

- **Technology**: During in-person training, participants use laptops to access training materials. Often participants write notes on the notes section of each slide for future reference. The group can toggle between slides, handouts, and other resources as the discussion moves back and forth between documents. To enable the use of laptops, trainers must prepare such materials as participant PowerPoint slides, handouts, and resources in a flash drive or portal format for participants to download onto their laptops before the first day.

- **Curriculum**: Only trainers receive the curriculum, which lays out a pathway for trainers to follow each day or portion of a day and includes information, scripts, and notes that support the training process.

- **PowerPoint**: Participants receive copies of the PowerPoint slides that trainers use in the classroom.

- **Participant handouts**: Participants also receive copies of all handouts for each day in sequence.

FOLLOW-UP WEBINAR AND POST-TRAINING COACHING

- **Host a follow-up webinar** for each cohort to help participants reflect on what they learned, refocus on their Change Initiative after training, and discuss with colleagues how to put their ideas into action. Remind participants about the resources on MyNCWWI.org that can support implementation.

- **Post-training coaching** starts shortly after training. Review the LAMM Coaching Manual for additional details on what should be discussed during each call. Participants can also be referred to the microlearnings to help them apply a training concept and/or to develop shared language with their implementation team.
- **Workplace and peer support** encourages participant supervisors to support, coach, and provide feedback to participants on executing their Change Initiative. Also, consider setting up lunch & learns or learning circles to support implementation, communication, and peer support.

The results of the evaluation of the Leadership Academy for Middle Managers over the past ten years indicate that the NCWWI was successful in establishing an in-person learning academy for child welfare middle managers and that participants demonstrated learning gains that persisted over time. Participants’ progress toward implementing Change Initiatives provide evidence that participants transferred their knowledge and skills to the workplace, resulting in positive changes for their organizations. Additional supports provided by the LAMM through resource dissemination, peer networking, and coaching were found to be significant factors in sustaining managers’ ability to implement change. These findings indicated that while the LAMM training promoted learning transfer, continual application of learned skills was maintained through strong self-motivation and supportive work environments.