POSSIBILITY LAB

Participant reflections on the potential of the Leading From Within network
What might we accomplish together that we can’t accomplish alone?
On November 1, 2017, more than 140 Leading From Within (LFW) alumni and partners came together for Possibility Lab, a one-day gathering designed to facilitate learning, connecting, and exploring possibilities for how this community of social sector leaders might grow its impact.

This document is intended as a planning resource for the more than 30 Possibility Lab participants who have volunteered to lead the LFW network into its next phase; it presents participant reflections on what seeds were planted at Possibility Lab and what the LFW network might work to accomplish going forward.
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Introduction
The Leading From Within (LFW) network

The Leading From Within (LFW) network is comprised of social sector leaders from throughout Santa Barbara County including:

- Alumni and participants from all four of Leading From Within’s leadership development programs
  - Courage to Lead (CTL) – seasoned executive-level social sector leaders from Santa Barbara County
  - Emerging Leaders (ELP) – emerging professional social sector leaders from Santa Barbara County
  - Katherine Harvey Fellows (KHF) – emerging community leaders from diverse professional backgrounds in Santa Barbara County
  - Leading For Community Impact (LCI) – social sector leaders from Santa Maria, Lompoc and other northern Santa Barbara County communities
- Partners including LFW staff, board, instructors, consultants, mentors, speakers and funders

38% (149 participants) accepted LFW’s invitation to participate in Possibility Lab

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introduction
Possibility Lab: Exploring the potential of the LFW network

Since 2008, Leading From Within (LFW) has been investing in and connecting community-minded leaders across Santa Barbara County. On November 1, 2017, LFW invited alumni and participants from all four of its leadership development programs along with some of its organizational partners to Possibility Lab: a one-day gathering to explore the possibilities for how this community of leaders might grow its impact on each other, their organizations, their communities, and the broader region. More than 140 leaders who focus on advancing the common good and improving local communities came together– professional and volunteer, emerging and experienced, from the nonprofit, business and government sectors.

LFW contracted with Zach Anderson and David Sawyer from Converge, a network of professionals with expertise in complex collaborations www.convergeforimpact.com. Zach and David facilitated a full day of high-engagement activities designed to cultivate connections among the participants. The program included a formal presentation on complex collaboration as well as multiple conversations structured to foster trust and invite dialogue about issues facing the Santa Barbara County social sector.
Planning the next phase of the LFW network

At Possibility Lab, LFW didn’t prescribe precise intended outcomes from the day; instead, they focused on setting conditions that would allow participants to connect, learn and explore collective possibilities.

At the end of the day, more than 30 participants volunteered to come together to lead the LFW network into its next phase. In early 2018, this network leadership group will convene to continue the conversations that began at Possibility Lab and to create a plan for the next steps in network cultivation.
A questionnaire about the potential of the LFW network

The day after Possibility Lab, LFW administered a questionnaire (see Appendix B) that asked for participant stories about connections made, perspectives shifted and potential collaborations that may have begun during the event. The questionnaire also asked respondents to share what they might like to see the LFW network do in the future.

Thirty-six percent of participants responded to the questionnaire. LFW contracted with Lisa Bass to conduct a thematic analysis of questionnaire responses. This document presents excerpts of participant questionnaire responses, categorized by theme.

For each theme reported, this document includes illustrative quotes and identifies how many participants provided questionnaire responses that reflect the idea. The data tables in Appendix A detail the program affiliation (CTL, KHF, ELP, LCI, Partner, Anonymous) of respondents by theme.
A planning resource for the LFW network leadership group

The LFW network leadership group that emerged from Possibility Lab will be able to draw upon this document when they meet in early 2018 to plan the next phase of the network.

Section 2 highlights what seeds were planted on the day of Possibility Lab in terms of new or deepened relationships, shifts in perspective and potential collaborations. Should they take root and flourish, these seeds could enhance the impact of social sector leaders in Santa Barbara County.

Section 3 summarizes participant reflections on what the broader LFW network might accomplish. It details a range of potential objectives for the LFW network including operating as a learning network, directly addressing social sector issues, and/or fostering emergent collaborative change efforts.

The data tables in Appendix A can be used to quickly reference the content of this document. They provide a summary of themes and a count of questionnaire responses that reflected each theme.
What SEEDS were planted?
What SEEDS were planted at Possibility Lab?

Relationships: Participants reported that they began or built upon existing relationships during Possibility Lab. Participants felt that these connections have the potential to be additive to their social sector work in Santa Barbara County. (47 of 53 respondents)

Shifts in Perspective: Participants reported that they deepened their thinking or shifted their perspectives about community issues, systemic issues in the local social sector, and/or strategies for addressing complex regional challenges. (43 of 53 respondents)

Potential Collaborations: Participants planned to grow their individual or organizational impact by working with others. During Possibility Lab, they made plans to coordinate existing efforts and explored opportunities to develop new efforts. (21 of 53 respondents)
RELATIONSHIPS

Leaders reported that they:

• strengthened relationships

• explored opportunities to align passions, interests and resources

• cultivated potential staff, volunteer, board and donor relationships

• inspired one another

47 out of 53 total questionnaire respondents shared a story about a relationship that they began or built upon at the Possibility Lab that they feel might have the potential to be additive to their social sector work or interests in Santa Barbara County. One participant reported that they did not begin or build upon a relationship. Five respondents did not comment on relationships in their questionnaire responses.
Leaders reported that they strengthened relationships

“Over the last few months, a Foundation representative and I had been wanting to connect, meet in person and talk more about our mutual work. Possibility Lab gave us the space and the permission to meet in a positive atmosphere and discuss the exciting potential of our work together. We developed a friendship in our short time together and I don't think that would have happened at a normal coffee meeting.”

Ashley Costa
Executive Director, Lompoc Valley Community Healthcare Organization
ELP Alum

“Strengthening connections with members of my own healthcare sphere was crucial and very helpful.”

Robert Janeway
Provider Contracts Manager, CenCal Health
KHF Participant
Leaders reported that they explored opportunities to align passions, interests and resources

"Paul Lynch from Cage Free Productions and I spoke for almost an hour after the conference. We established quite a few shared interests and opportunities to share our networks with each other."

Kiah Jordan
Founder, Impact First Financial
KHF Alum

“How somebody that I’ve known for years as a name and face only, became a vivid, three-dimensional, caring member of my community, and I’m rather optimistic about the fit between the things she’s passionate about and various needs I’m aware of in my existing network.”

Dan Fontaine
Executive Director, Wilderness Youth Project
CTL Alum
Leaders reported that they cultivated potential staff, volunteer, board and donor relationships

“I was able to talk with and get to know several Santa Maria based people. My non-profit is looking to make our board truly countywide so those connections could prove very helpful.”

Liam Murphy  
Partner, Hayes Commercial Group  
Board Member, Child Abuse Listening and Mediation (CALM)  
KHF Alum

“I shared information with and about a local organization (Promotores) to facilitate finding a new home and revenue source for services.”

Sandra Copley  
Active community volunteer, retired Director of Maternal Child Adolescent Health at Santa Barbara Public Health Department  
CTL Alum

“As a funder, I'm always looking for great nonprofits doing great work in Santa Barbara. This meeting was a perfect opportunity to connect with their leaders.”

Christine Smith  
Trustee, Wave Foundation  
LFW Funder

“I have a promising new lead for recruiting bilingual staff.”

Dan Fontaine  
Executive Director, Wilderness Youth Project  
CTL Alum

5 questionnaire responses
Leaders reported that they inspired one another

“I had several opportunities to spend a few moments with people I knew but had not seen or spent time with recently. Being reminded of some of the great work being done elsewhere in the community by people I admire boosts my own creativity.”

Geoff Green
CEO, Santa Barbara City College Foundation
KHF Alum

“I found the day to be particularly empowering. Seeing the huge community of LFW participants that has evolved, being encouraged to trust and collaborate with each other, and being reminded that we are all capable of making real change was incredible.”

Molly Kemper
Special Events Coordinator, Scholarship Foundation of Santa Barbara
ELP Alum

“Most of my personal impact came as sparks for my own ideas as I listened throughout the day. My proactive follow up on these is key.”

Anonymous respondent

9 questionnaire responses
SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE

Leaders reported that they:

• developed their perspectives about systems issues in the social sector

• deepened their understanding of strategies for approaching complex challenges …

• … and the time and attention needed to make meaningful change

• shifted their perspectives about community efforts or issues in Santa Barbara County

• developed an understanding of across social sector efforts

43 out of 53 total questionnaire respondents shared a story about a shift in perspective or deepened understanding that they attributed to their participation in Possibility Lab. Three leaders identified that they did not experience a shift in perspective. Seven respondents did not comment about shifts in perspective in their questionnaire responses.
Leaders reported that they developed their perspectives about systems issues in the social sector

North/South County Divide

“It was eye opening to have been a part of the North/South Divide conversation. It motivated me to be more vigilant rather than passive in working to find ways to address the divide, either through my daily work or through networks that I am a part of.”

Saul Serrano
Coordinator, South Coast Task Force on Youth Safety, Community Action Commission
ELP Alum, LFW Board Member

Resource Scarcity Mindset in the Social Sector

“My feeling is that a false narrative of “too many nonprofits” feeds a related false narrative that our overpopulated sector is all fighting for a limited sized pie, so therefore we need fewer organizations at the table. I think we’re looking at our sector wrong, and applying too much of our customer/consumer values to tricky social problems that can’t be distilled down to a Coke vs Pepsi taste test. Possibility Lab gave me time to better articulate my discomfort on this narrative, and I’m reflecting on how to best challenge it.”

Sigrid Wright
CEO, Community Environmental Council
KHF Alum, CTL Alum, LFW Board Member

“I think there are still two very different mindsets about nonprofits and support/capital for community change work. The resource scarcity mindset is still holding back big picture thinking in this sector.”

Sharyn Main
Senior Director of Community Investments, Santa Barbara Foundation
LFW Partner/Funder

13 questionnaire responses
3 respondents
Leaders reported that they deepened their understanding of strategies for approaching complex challenges...

Trust is a critical foundation for effective collaboration

“The concept of trust as being a baseline for authentic relationships and effective collaboration rings very true based on my experience.”

Zahra Nahar-Moore
Compliance Counsel, Direct Relief
ELP Alum

Innovation comes from the fringes

“I love the concept shared early in the day that 'Innovation comes from the edges, the fringes, the people who might not normally be invited'. Because I work with partners by invitation only, am I ignoring those fringes? And how do I fill that void?”

Catherine Brozowski
Executive Director, Audacious Foundation
ELP Alum

A network approach can facilitate common connections, dialogues, and solutions

“The slide from Converge’s presentation that depicted an issue as opposed to an organization at the center of a network shifted my perspective about how to think about how we do collaboration and the role of the foundation I work for in making that happen.”

Nancy Swanson
Executive Director, Linked Foundation
KHF Alum, LFW Board Member
... and the time and attention needed to make meaningful change

Coordinating effective collaborations requires time and attention

“As nonprofits, we often depend on collaboration to complete our work. Putting the appropriate time and effort into coordinating these efforts is vital to success.”

Megan Birney
President, Unite to Light
ELP Alum

Meaningful change occurs over a long timeframe

“I was reminded that big changes happen as a series of small changes, over time and with an individual or group holding the “true north”.”

Ann Hutchins
Financial Coach
LFW Volunteer and Donor
Leaders reported that they shifted their perspectives about community efforts or issues in Santa Barbara County

“My perspective on the housing crisis has definitely been affected. Initially, I thought my role was insular: a relationship between me, my clients, and the market. Now I see the issue is much more complex and how many micro issues are at play here. Employee retention for the social sector, Airbnb and its role in the community.”

Casey O’Toole
Partner, The O’Toole Group at Keller Williams Realty
ELP Alum

“I learned more about the city’s rationale and hopes for the new art project at the freeway underpass and it shifted my entire outlook on it.”

Julie Sorenson
Vice President of Customer Service, Sprigeo
Community Outreach Consultant, Leading From Within
KHF Alum
Leaders reported that they developed an understanding of commonalities across social sector efforts

“There wasn't an immediate shift so much as there was an increased awareness and how many other people have the same concerns regarding various issues.”
Carrie Wanek
CFO, Foodbank of Santa Barbara County
CTL Alum

“It's less a shift in one issue area but rather a shift in how I see the commonalities across all the issue areas. There was remarkable resonance and similarity in what people shared from their work in disparate sectors with my experience in the sectors I have most experience with.”
Carl Palmer
Executive Director, LegacyWorks Group
Courage to Lead Alumnus
POTENTIAL COLLABORATIONS

Leaders reported that they:

- made plans to coordinate existing efforts
- explored opportunities to develop new efforts

21 leaders shared stories about opportunities that emerged for them to grow their impact by working with others. Six leaders identified that they did not encounter an opportunity for a potential collaboration. 27 respondents did not comment on specific potential collaborations in their questionnaire responses.
Leaders reported that they made plans to coordinate existing efforts

“Cal-SOAP helps low-income high school students understand how they can get help paying for college costs. CalFresh can help certain low-income college students with one part of their costs: paying for food. If CalSOAP can explain CalFresh in the context of student aid, it might a) be one more reassurance about costs that could help students to take the leap to college, and b) help CalFresh counter some eligibility myths and get help to more of those who need it.”

Dennis Tivey
Departmental Business Specialist II, Department of Social Services, Santa Barbara County
KHF Participant

“I made a connection with Ed France of the Santa Barbara Bicycle Coalition that I’m excited about, because I hope to see his agency and mine collaborate to promote bicycle use among Public Housing residents.”

Alice Villarreal-Redit
Resident Services Supervisor, Housing Authority of the City of Santa Barbara
ELP Alum

“A potential transport issue for my clients may have been solved; I may be able to open a unique service to a new relationship formed yesterday.”

Michael Heck
Project Coordinator, Community Solutions, Inc.
LCI Alum

16 questionnaire responses
Leaders explored opportunities to develop new efforts

“Discussion with John Glanville / Maps.com about the possibility of creating a visually engaging map that reflects the assets and needs of the social sector in Santa Barbara County so that gaps and opportunities for leverage can be more easily identified and pursued.”
Anonymous respondent

“I had time to spend with another social investor and we were able to discuss how we want to move a collaboration forward in women’s health. We also met others who could possibly be involved with that effort.”
Nancy Swanson
Executive Director, Linked Foundation
KHF Alum, LFW Board Member

“During the circle-up at the end, Rob Skinner passed me his contact info after we each shared our skills and ideas. I think, and hope, that we can collaborate on a vision of growth for strategic philanthropy and impact investing in the Santa Barbara community.”
Kiah Jordan
Founder, Impact First Financial
KHF Alum

5 questionnaire responses
What are POSSIBILITIES for the purpose of the broader Leading From Within Network?
What are POSSIBILITIES for the purpose of the broader Leading From Within Network?

Learning and connecting
• Building relationships and holding space for dialogue
• Learning about complex collaboratives and systems change
• Intentionally diffusing LFW leadership practices throughout the social sector

Directly addressing social sector issues
• Advocating for people who work in the social sector
• Addressing the North County/South County Divide

Fostering emergent collaborative change efforts
• Creating the space for subgroups to come together and supporting their emergent change efforts
LEARNING AND CONNECTING

Leaders identified the network’s potential for:

• building relationships and holding space for dialogue
• facilitating learning about complex collaboratives and systems change
• intentionally diffusing LFW leadership practices throughout the social sector
Building relationships and holding space for dialogue

Twelve respondents identified that there is great value in bringing together leaders from throughout the county to “dialogue, inform, and inspire positive changes in our community.” (anonymous respondent)

“What emerged for me was the prevalence of individuals from the key "stakeholder" groups with whom my organization interacts constantly. Sometimes, we are in disagreement or conflict; other times, in collaboration. But everyone was there. The network, if cared for and fed, and if inclusive of all sides of our issues, can be what makes the county unique and forward leaning. The value to me of the day was in creating the space for candid conversations in an atmosphere of trust.”

Mona Miyasato
CEO, County of Santa Barbara
Partner/Guest Speaker

Four of the respondents felt the best contribution of the network would be to focus solely on learning and relationship building, trusting that impact efforts would develop organically.

“I truly believe that the best thing we can do is provide the space for these leaders (and others not affiliated with LFW) to gather a couple of times a year, hear from some exciting thinkers/speakers/doers, and then have time to just talk.”

Geoff Green
CEO, Santa Barbara City College Foundation
KHF Alum

possibilities
One leader further specified that a LFW learning network could support ongoing learning and dialogue about systems level change.

“Therefore, continued conversations about what is possible when we get together and approach opportunities and challenges at a systems level.”

Anonymous respondent

The design committee for Possibility Lab convened on November 27, 2017 to debrief the event and reflect on questionnaire responses. One item that came up during the discussion was the potential for Leading From Within to provide a fellowship or grad level program focused on social innovation in Santa Barbara County or on higher-level collaborative and cross-sector leadership skills. (Other discussion items regarding the potential purpose of the network were reflected in questionnaire responses and are otherwise addressed in this document.) Should discussions around this possibility continue, The Durfee Foundation Stanton Fellowship could inform such an effort. (See What If: Insights From a Decade of Philanthropic R&D)
Two leaders identified that the network could broaden its impact by purposefully infusing the Santa Barbara County social sector with the leadership practices that LFW cultivates through its programs.

“I hold the possibility of the LFW network bringing our leadership practices and ways of being into the broader community -- to set the tone for trusted relationship, deep listening, intentional collaboration and heartfelt humanity.”

Judy Hawkins  
Founder, Ruby Road Leadership  
CTL Alum

The Kansas Leadership Center model could inform such an effort.  
http://kansasleadershipcenter.org/
DIRECTLY ADDRESSING SOCIAL SECTOR ISSUES

Leaders identified the network’s potential for:

• advocating for people who work in the social sector
• addressing the North County/South County Divide

Leaders also suggested that the network explore additional systems change topics including the potential of impact investing (1 questionnaire response) and helping philanthropic funders and nonprofits work more effectively together (1 questionnaire response).
Advocating for people who work in the social sector

“I want the LFW network to focus on identifying the needs of nonprofit employees and then engaging the network in opportunities to advocate for changes in policy and practices in the nonprofit and government sectors that would help address those needs: key among them being housing and pay.”

Ben Romo
Executive Director, First 5 of Santa Barbara County
KHF Alum, LFW Board Member

“As a non-profit employee and maturing millennial, I see how housing issues could make it difficult for me to stay in Santa Barbara while serving in the social sector. I'd like to see if we can build more discussion around this important topic. It's going to affect the vibrancy of our community.”

Cameron Gray
Transportation and Climate Specialist, Community Environmental Council
ELP Alum
Addressing the North County/South County Divide

“I had always thought that the North County/South County Divide was an issue that only impacted those and was only attempted to be solved by those in the North. It was so refreshing to have an honest conversation at Possibility Lab about the divide and one that held me accountable for my misconceptions. I feel hope for solutions potentially developed through the LFW network.”

Ashley Costa  
Executive Director, Lompoc Valley Community Healthcare Organization  
ELP Alum
FOSTERING EMERGENT COLLABORATIVE CHANGE EFFORTS

Leaders identified the network’s potential for:

- creating the space for subgroups to come together and supporting their emergent change efforts
Creating the space for subgroups to come together and supporting their emergent change efforts

“I would like to see us pick up this process and extend it deeper to explore the possibilities. I’d like to feel out the richest partnership opportunities and help make them happen.”

Carl Palmer
Executive Director, LegacyWorks Group
CTL Alum

“More deeply explore the roles of (and collaboration of) nonprofit, government and business in collaborative projects and community change efforts.”

Sharyn Main
Senior Director of Community Investments, Santa Barbara Foundation
LFW Partner/Funder
More to come

After coming together at Possibility Lab to consider *What might we accomplish together that we can’t accomplish alone?* the LFW network is poised to move into its next phase. The participant experiences and reflections compiled in this document represent an initial exploration into the potential of the broader LFW network and promise to inform the continued conversations as leaders plan to grow their collective impact.
Appendices

A. Data Tables
B. Questionnaire
APPENDIX A: Data Tables

The numbers listed in the data tables indicate the number of participants by program affiliation whose questionnaire responses reflected the theme.

• **CTL** - Courage to Lead participants or alumni
• **KHF** - Katherine Harvey Fellows participants or alumni
• **ELP** - Emerging Leaders participants or alumni
• **LCI** - Leading for Community Impact participants or alumni
• **Partner** - staff, board, instructors, consultants, mentors, speakers and funders
• **Anon** - Anonymous questionnaire respondents

Thematic analysis of questionnaire response data was conducted with Dedoose.

**APPENDIX A: Relationships Data Table**

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<th>Theme</th>
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<td>... and the time and attention needed to make meaningful change.</td>
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APPENDIX A: Potential Collaborations Data Table

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<th>KHF</th>
<th>LCI</th>
<th>Partner</th>
<th>Anon</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total Respondents to Questionnaire</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders reported that they made plans to coordinate existing efforts</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders reported that they explored opportunities to develop new efforts</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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## APPENDIX A: Network Possibilities Data Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># Respondents That Addressed Theme</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents to Questionnaire</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Learning and connecting

- Building relationships and holding space for dialogue: 12 (3, 1, 2, 1, 3, 2)
- Focusing solely on learning and relationship building, trusting that impact efforts would develop organically: 4 (2, 0, 1, 0, 1, 0)
- Learning about complex collaboration and systems change: 1 (0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1)
- Intentionally diffusing LFW leadership practices throughout the Santa Barbara County social sector: 2 (1, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0)

### Directly addressing social sector issues

- Advocating for people who work in the social sector: 5 (1, 3, 0, 0, 1, 0)
- Addressing the North County/South County divide: 2 (0, 2, 0, 0, 0, 0)
- Impact investing: 1 (0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0)
- Helping philanthropic funders and nonprofits work more effectively together: 1 (0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0)

### Fostering emergent collaborative change efforts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># Respondents That Addressed Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fostering emergent collaborative change efforts</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: Questionnaire

• You invested a day in Possibility Lab. On a scale of 1 (Very Low) to 5 (Excellent), please rate the value of the Possibility Lab day for you?

• What did you find most valuable from your Possibility Lab experience?

• What could have been done better at Possibility Lab? What didn't work as well as it could have?

• Share, if you can, a story of a relationship that began or was built upon at Possibility Lab, one that you feel has the potential to be additive to your social sector work or interests in Santa Barbara County.

• Share, if you can, one or more potential micro-collaborations that may have emerged, where you found that you or your organization might grow your impact by working with others. We invite you to be as specific as you can here.

• Share, if you can, a story of a shift in your perspective about a community issue or challenge in our region as the result of the day. And how might that impact you going forward?

• Share, if you can, a possibility that emerged for you as you reflect on the bigger network? What, if anything, might you like to see the LFW network (or some subgroup of it) do in the future?
Acknowlegdements and Credits

It took a village to put on Possibility Lab. Leading From Within would like to acknowledge:

• The Possibility Lab Planning Committee (Lisa Bass, Jason Dominguez, Paul Lynch, Danna McGrew, Maritza Mejia-Wilson, Carl Palmer, Jennifer Reitz, Ben Romo, Ken Saxon, Saul Serrano, and Sigrid Wright)

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• Lisa Bass for her evaluation and research support

• California State Assembly member Monique Limon for speaking at the event

• Montecito Bank & Trust and Bartlett Pringle & Wolf for their hospitality sponsorship of Possibility Lab

• All the participants of Possibility Lab, who gave a day to this experiment in leadership networking and collaboration without fully knowing the agenda and what would happen there

Credits:
Analysis and reporting by Lisa Bass
Photography by Sarita Relis
Graphic design by Elissa Schloesser, My Visual Voice
Editing by Gabriella Klein

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Santa Barbara, California

leading-from-within.org