



Evaluation of the SLA program – Cohorts 1–3 summative report

16 September 2024

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This artwork was developed by Marcus Lee Design to reflect Nous Group's Reconciliation Action Plan and our aspirations for respectful and productive engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SILA has established itself as a pioneering leadership program for for-purpose CEOs. Participants across all cohorts have consistently referred to SILA as one of the best leadership programs they have experienced, both in Australia and overseas. This is reflected in the SILA net promoter score (NPS), which has an average of 90 for the first three cohorts. For context, an NPS score above 80 is seen as a world class result.¹

SILA continues to live up to its claim as a disruptive and innovative leadership program. Its impact extends well beyond the individual CEOs to their organisations and the broader ecosystem. This is by design. SILA's systemic impact is what distinguishes it most from other leadership programs.

This summative report² assesses the impact of SILA across the first three cohorts. A summary of findings is provided to the right. Further details on the findings and recommendations follow.

“ I loved that it [SILA] was multi-dimensional - that is exactly what made it so good!
– Cohort three alumnus ”

¹ Qualtrics, *What is a good Net Promoter Score?*

² This report draws on analysis of evaluation data from cohorts one, two and three, and seven additional engagements with SILA alumni and program stakeholders.

SILA delivers significant and enduring benefits to CEO participants. It is a transformative program. Participants consistently report four key outcomes: new or stronger CEO networks that offer reassurance and advice; a greater focus on their ecosystem that deepens their social impact; increased confidence and new practices that strengthen leadership; and wellbeing improvements that make leadership easier to sustain. SILA alumni have reiterated these benefits both one- and two- years post program completion as they continue to reap the rewards of their investment into the program.

SILA delivers positive outcomes for organisations through creative disruption. It acts as a systemic intervention that goes beyond the individual to disrupt whole organisations. All CEOs reported long term positive benefits for their organisations, with many implementing tangible changes post-program. The sabbatical was particularly helpful for clarifying the importance of succession planning. Although negative SUL experiences sometimes caused short-term challenges, ultimately SILA delivered positive outcomes for organisations.

The ecosystem impact of SILA continues to increase. SILA has sown the seeds for broad systemic impact, with momentum building as more cohorts graduate. SILA is growing an unparalleled network of sector leaders. The network has already resulted in tangible collaborations and connections between organisations that is likely to result in ecosystem impact. Organisations have increased their focus on the system due to SILA. Time will tell what this increased focus will lead to. The mobility of CEOs and SULs across the sector has also carried SILA learnings to new organisations, broadening the impact of SILA across the ecosystem.

There are three key reasons why SILA has had such a profound impact. The three reasons reinforce each other:

- The focus on adaptive leadership and relationships, magnified through the retreats, allows participants to be vulnerable and build deep and meaningful connections with each other.
- The unique combination of evidence-based and complementary program elements delivered over a sustained period strengthen leadership knowledge and practice.
- The creative disruption of the sabbatical, which forces CEOs to stop and reflect deeply on themselves and their organisation, forces leaders across their organisation to learn new skills and take on new responsibilities, and unearths critical insights to support succession planning.

SILA 2.0 should reinforce SILA's core elements and evolve its impact.

SILA should maintain a geographic cohort, continue to deliver the unique combination of elements, and continuously improve delivery based on cohort feedback to reinforce what has made the program special. To evolve the program to make it even more effective, SILA can:

- Design and deliver a **for-purpose leadership conference** to enable alumni networking and share learnings with the sector
- Establish and maintain a **platform for alumni engagement** to allow alumni to connect, reflect on learnings and share new content post program completion
- **Refine the selection process** based on applicant characteristics to increase diversity and focus on the individuals and organisations that will benefit most from the program.

“ This program is a magnificent investment into the system.
– Program stakeholder ”

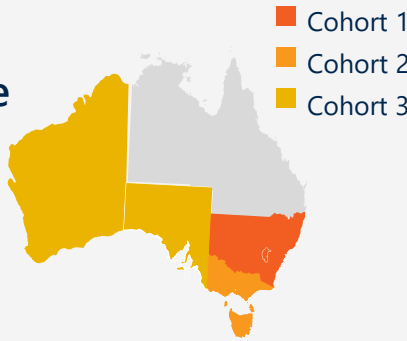
2. OVERVIEW OF COHORTS

Overall, the cohorts of CEOs and for-purpose organisations have been diverse. This infographic provides a snapshot of cohorts 1, 2 and 3 of CEOs, SULs and their organisations.

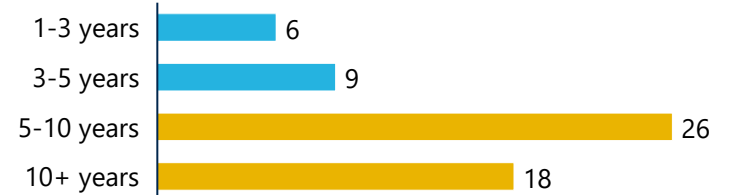
70 CEO Participants

23 Cohort 1
24 Cohort 2
23 Cohort 3

From five states and one territory



CEO tenures varied between 1 and 10+ years with the majority having been CEO for **5+ years**



*out of 59 survey respondents

- 1** participant identified as **Indigenous**
- 1** participant identified as having a **disability**
- 1** participant identified as **nonbinary**

70 SULs participated, from diverse experience backgrounds, including:

HR
Operations
Research
Programs
Marketing
Economics
Partnerships
Casting

Some were experienced Deputy CEOs, some were not

42 FEMALES OUT OF **70** CEOs

ORGANISATIONS HAD EVENLY SPREAD REVENUE SIZE

<\$1.5M \$1.5M-\$3M \$3M-\$5M \$5M-\$10M \$10M-\$25M \$25M+



*out of 59 survey respondents

CEO AND SUL MOVEMENT ACROSS COHORTS

56 CEOs remain in the roles they had when they undertook the program



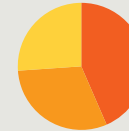
18 from Cohort 1
17 from Cohort 2
21 from Cohort 3

14 CEOs moved on to new opportunities either during or after the program



5 from Cohort 1
7 from Cohort 2
2 from Cohort 3

23 SULs moved on to new opportunities either during or after the program



10 from Cohort 1
7 from Cohort 2
6 from Cohort 3

A range of sectors participated, including:

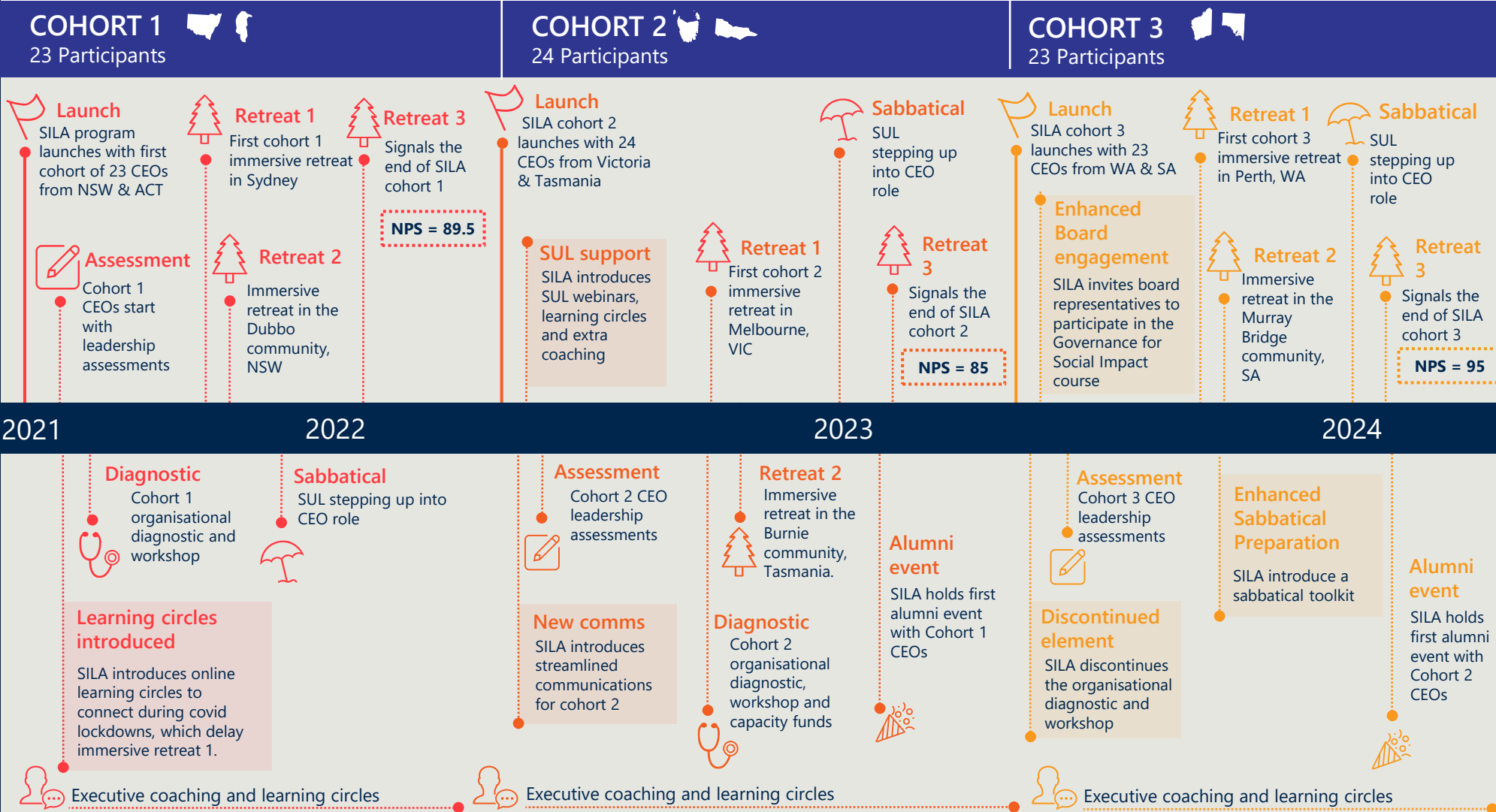
ENVIRONMENT SECTOR PEAKS
HEALTH EDUCATION SOCIAL WELFARE
PHILANTHROPY DISABILITY ADVOCACY
ARTS AND CULTURE CHILDREN AND YOUTH

56 organisations service regional, rural and remote areas



SILA has evolved its delivery model over three cohorts.

Now in its fourth year, the program has become a well-established, well-regarded model for social impact leadership development.



SILA delivers significant and enduring benefits to participants.

SILA is a transformative program for the participating CEOs. SILA has positively impacted multiple aspects of participant's professional and personal lives. The benefits of SILA have endured well beyond the program's conclusion, reinvigorating and sustaining participants' leadership purpose.

Overall assessment: Strong positive impact on participants.



The program empowers participants and broadens their focus. Interviews across cohorts consistently reflected four key benefits for participants:



NEW OR STRONGER CEO NETWORKS THAT OFFER REASSURANCE AND ADVICE

Participants often spoke to the value of the SILA network and reported drawing on their cohort for advice and support. In post program surveys, 100% of respondents agreed that they now had a network of for-purpose CEOs. Participants have maintained these relationships long term. Several cohort one and two alumni noted that they continue to draw on their learning circles and the broader cohort for advice (see ecosystem impacts for more detail).



A GREATER FOCUS ON SYSTEMS THINKING THAT DEEPENS THEIR SOCIAL IMPACT

Participants report a greater focus on systems thinking following the program. Retreat two particularly stayed with participants across cohorts, as it pushed them think about their place in the broader for-purpose ecosystem. In addition to re-energising participants, the sabbatical also provided them with the opportunity to think more critically about their role in the system.



INCREASED CONFIDENCE AND NEW PRACTICES THAT STRENGTHEN LEADERSHIP

The program positively impacted participant's confidence levels. In post program surveys, 100% of respondents agreed to some extent that they could make a difference in their organisation and across the sector by using what they had learned. The program's focus on adaptive leadership and new concepts and frameworks were critical to help participants step into their authority and increase their effectiveness as social sector leaders.

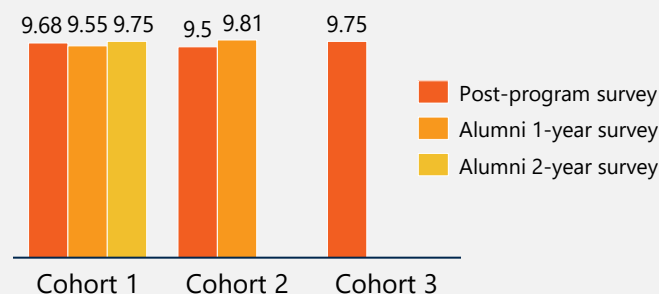


WELLBEING IMPROVEMENTS THAT MAKE LEADERSHIP EASIER TO SUSTAIN

93% of survey respondents agreed to some extent that they could better manage their wellbeing because of the program. A year later in the alumni survey, 89% of respondents agreed they had maintained these gains. Participants shared that SILA had influenced them to change or introduce new behaviours and role model wellbeing to their broader organisation. One interviewed participant shared that they rewrote their workforce plans to have a greater focus on wellbeing.

The program has a long-lasting impact on alumni. The program continues to have lasting benefits on participants' personal and professional lives as highlighted through alumni engagements and survey responses. As shown in the graph below, participants' likelihood of recommending SILA to their peers remains relatively constant one- and two-years post program completion.

How likely are you to recommend the program to another social purpose sector CEO?*



“

The program equipped me with tools I still use on a daily basis.

- SILA cohort one alumnus

”

“

The program really helped me grow in my confidence as a leader.

- SILA cohort two alumnus

”

* Score out of 10. Post-program survey – Cohort 1 n=19, Cohort 2 n=20, Cohort 3 n=20; Alumni 1-year survey – Cohort 1 n=11, Cohort 2 n=16; Alumni 2-year survey – Cohort 1 n=10.

SILA delivers positive outcomes for organisations through creative disruption.

SILA is a systemic intervention that goes beyond the individual to disrupt whole organisations. This intentional disruption is ultimately constructive, serving to build organisational resilience and deliver significant long-term benefit, despite (or perhaps due to) potential short-term discomfort.

Overall assessment: Positive impact on organisations.



All CEOs reported positive benefits to their organisation. More than half the alumni from cohorts 1 and 2 reported tangible organisational improvements and a positive impact on organisational culture and performance from the program. They also overwhelmingly reported that the investment of time and effort into the program was justified.

Across participant alumni surveys for cohorts one and two:*

- **82%** of respondents agreed to the program having a **positive impact on organisational performance**.
- **89%** of respondents agreed to the program having a **positive impact on organisational culture**.
- **96%** of respondents have **invested more in leadership development** of their executive team.

CEO participants have implemented tangible changes to their organisation post SILA. This includes:

- Updating organisational strategies, restructuring the organisation or implementing new ways of working.
- Implementing internal 'step up' processes and in one case a SILA-style sabbatical program for senior leaders.

Organisations better understand the importance of succession planning. Those that experienced difficulties around the sabbatical consistently reflected the program was ultimately worth doing, as it revealed weaknesses in succession planning that they could address early. They now understand the importance of a succession plan and have a better idea of the attributes a future CEO of their organisation would need to succeed.

SUL experiences varied but were ultimately net positive. CEOs, SULs and Board members reported three common challenges across cohorts:

SULs feeling **overwhelmed** and experiencing **burnout**

SULs lacking sufficient **support** internally and from SILA

Tension between CEOs and SULs in returning to original roles upon return

Despite these challenges, CEOs, SULs and Board members recognised several positive impacts on SULs and the wider organisations:

Increase in **SUL confidence** in their leadership and abilities

Greater **appreciation** for CEO role, sometimes leading to stronger relationship with CEO

A shift to more **systems-level thinking** for SULs, further enabled by coaching

Opportunity for SUL to experience the role and **clarify level of interest** in becoming a CEO there or elsewhere

Boards testing and further appreciating the importance of **succession planning**

Boards now better understand the **attributes for success** for the CEO role within the organisation

Program changes have enhanced the experience and outcomes for organisations. Program inclusions, such as the sabbatical toolkit, coaching, SUL learning circles and webinars, and Governance for Social Impact course for boards have been positively received by participants and organisations. Despite these changes, participants, SULs and board members noted further supports for organisations would improve the overall program impact.

* Alumni 1-year survey – Cohort 1 n=11, Cohort 2 n=16.

The ecosystem impact of SILA grows with every cohort.

SILA has sown the seeds for broad systemic impact, with momentum building as more cohorts graduate. Although some impacts may take time to fully materialise, even at this relatively early stage — two years after Cohort 1 —promising ecosystem impacts have emerged.

Overall assessment: Early signs are positive and on track to achieve strong ecosystem impact. 

SILA is growing an unparalleled network of connected for-purpose CEOs. The network has already resulted in tangible collaborations and other support between organisations that is likely to result in ecosystem level impact (see anecdotes below). Participants have leveraged their learning circles, group chats and regular catchups to build and maintain strong relationships with their SILA peers. **100%** of all cohorts' post-program survey respondents intend to maintain connection with other participants. **96%** of cohorts one and two 1-year alumni survey respondents maintained these connections.*

Connections and collaborations between SILA participants and alumni

An alumni cohort still meets regularly for dinners

One participant acting as a special advisor to another participant organisation

Two organisations collaborated on an event

A participant referred their board member to another participant's board

A cohort one learning circle still meets regularly to do their exercises

Whatsapp group chats for each cohort continue to be utilised to request and share advice

One organisation benchmarked their restructure to another's

A participant recommended the program to two Queensland-based peers

Organisations have increased their systems-level focus. CEOs, SULs, and Boards have reframed their conception of their roles and their organisation's position in the ecosystem. In the two-year alumni survey, **67%** of respondents cited enhanced systems thinking as the program's most significant and enduring impact on their leadership. Additional examples include:

Some participants noted that they have or are **rewriting their strategic plans** to be more systems-oriented

GSI participation has increased boards' ecosystem focus and support for their CEOs to actively consider and engage in the wider ecosystem

Some **SULs learnt more about systems leadership** through conversations with their coaches and CEOs and are actively implementing it in their roles

CEO and SUL mobility has expanded SILA's impact to new organisations.

14/70 CEOs

23/70 SULs



changed roles during or since completing the program

Reasons for moving to different organisations include SILA influence and natural factors. Regardless of the reason, the mobility across organisations has enabled participants and SULs to introduce their learnings from the program to new organisations. Some SULs indicated that their experience on the program inspired them to aspire to CEO roles, and in one case, to run for parliament. We anticipate this impact accelerating through increased movement across the ecosystem over time.

* Post-program survey – Cohort 1 n=19, Cohort 2 n=20, Cohort 3 n=20; Alumni 1-year survey – Cohort 1 n=11, Cohort 2 n=16.

SILA 2.0 should reinforce SILA's core elements and evolve its impact.

Alumni and stakeholders engaged as part of this review highlighted the positive impact the program continues to have on individuals, organisations and the ecosystem. The program should continue to maintain the elements that have made SILA special. There are three recommendations on how the program could evolve to enhance its impact.

Recommendations to reinforce the elements that have made SILA special

- 1 Maintain the **geographic focus** of the program.
 - State/territory cohorts enable participants to build and maintain stronger connections with peers due to existing networks.
 - The opportunity to participate in a certain year/cohort once every four years builds excitement and anticipation for the program.
- 2 Continue to deliver the **unique combination of elements**.
 - The combination and growing integration of diverse elements make the SILA program unique.
 - The current set of elements – retreats, sabbatical, coaching, assessments and learning circles for participants and the organisational capacity funds*, SUL coaching and GSI – are appropriate and effective.
 - Removal or reduced focus on any of these elements would likely compromise participant experience and program effectiveness.
- 3 Maintain a focus on experimentation and continuous improvement.
 - CSI has effectively adapted the program over time in line with participant experiences, feedback and evaluation findings.
 - CSI should continue to drive these changes between cohorts.[^]

Recommendations to evolve SILA and enhance its impact

- 4 Deliver a **for-purpose leadership conference**
 - The conference will enable cross-cohort networking through closed sessions for SILA alumni. Many participants and alumni saw great promise in the potential to network with CEOs from other cohorts. Once cohort 4 ends, SILA will have over 90 for-purpose CEO alumni.
 - Nous recommends that SILA extends the conference and increases its impact by inviting the broader sector to participate, potentially in part of the conference. This will help share learnings and promote SILA to the broader sector through open sessions. SILA could draw on alumni and the course materials to run panels or practical sessions to share insights and learnings on for-purpose leadership to influence the broader sector. The conference can support SILA to attract high-quality future applicants.
- 5 Establish and maintain a **platform for alumni engagement**.
 - Develop an alumni platform (e.g. via the existing LMS) for participants to connect and SILA program team to share content and curate experiences post program. Through this platform, SILA can:
 - Encourage alumni to reflect on their learnings and share insights with other alumni
 - Share new content or insights from current cohorts (e.g. through alumni webinars)
 - Coordinate activities for alumni (either for individual cohorts or across cohorts).
- 6 Refine the **selection process** based on applicant characteristics.
 - Continue to focus on promoting CEO diversity. For example, SILA can engage appropriate peak bodies to promote the program to organisations with diverse leadership.
 - Consider recruiting participants/organisations that will achieve the most benefit from the program and can cope with the sabbatical period. For example, SILA can consider:
 - Placing more attention on the appropriateness of proposed SULs
 - Aiming to have most participating organisations within the \$3m–\$25m size by revenue range
 - Being more discerning of small organisations with low FTE to minimise disruption.

* Participants did not indicate that capacity funds need to increase beyond the inflation-related adjustments that the SILA team is making.

[^] See Cohort three evaluation report for latest suggestions on program improvement - Extending retreat 3; Providing further guidance for coaching and capacity fund use; Including SULs in an in-person element, potentially retreat 1; Adding a combined coaching session for CEO and SUL upon sabbatical return.

6 Appendix

Two personas reflect the common experiences and impacts across the cohorts.

Nous combined common participant, SUL and organisational experiences to develop two personas.



The reinvigorated leader

The CEO had been in their role for 12 years. Their organisation has an annual revenue of \$10M-\$25M. The CEO has an experienced Senior Executive Team.



The empowered leader

The CEO had been in their role for 3 years. Their organisation has an annual revenue of <\$1.5M. The small size of their organisation means they still wear 'many hats' in their CEO role.

Outcome and impact on individual leaders

- The long-term CEO returned re-energised and recommitted to their role, with new approaches to maintaining their wellbeing.
- They appreciated the opportunity to step back and reflect on their role in the broader ecosystem. They greatly value the supportive peer network they built through the program.

- The CEO derived personal value, learning new concepts and frameworks, and gaining inspiration and helpful peer support, particularly from more experienced CEOs.
- They feel more confident in their role and better equipped to proactively address organisational vulnerabilities revealed during the sabbatical.

Outcome and impact on for-purpose organisations

- The program had a positive impact on organisational performance. Good preparation and planning for the sabbatical made for a smooth, supported transition and staff embraced the opportunity to collectively 'step up'.
- The SUL was inspired and enjoyed the program, despite wanting more content, coaching and in-person opportunities. Upon the CEO's return, minor tension arose over the delineation of responsibilities.
- The SUL embraced the opportunity to become a CEO at another for-purpose organisation based on the benefits of SILA.
- While some board members engaged with the program, others were unclear on its benefits. Since the SUL's departure, they have had to reconsider their succession plan.

- There was limited visibility into the program across the organisation, who consequently did not acknowledge its value. During the sabbatical, the SUL took on the CEO role in addition to their role, impacting no other roles within the organisation.
- The SUL reluctantly took on the role as there were no other options. The sabbatical was challenging and overwhelming, as they juggled their original role and the CEO's duties. They still felt the experience was worthwhile as it confirmed that they do not aspire to be a CEO. The board's need for a succession plan became clear during this period.
- Two board members completed the GSI, creating a shared language with the CEO. The board members and CEO have introduced concepts from SILA and GSI to the rest of the board.

Outcome and impact on social purpose ecosystem

- The CEO took a more systems-focused view within their organisations and has collaborated with a SILA peer organisation.
- The SUL used their learnings from the program to review and update their new organisation's strategy and structure.

- The CEO maintains strong cohort ties through their learning circle group. The CEO has collaborated two of their SILA peers.
- The CEO remains unclear on how to re-orient their organisation to become more systems-focused. They expect this will emerge over time as they engage more with ecosystem stakeholders.



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PEOPLE



PRINCIPALS



COUNTRIES