



# 20 Years Strong

Supporting Nonprofits to Achieve  
Life-Changing Outcomes for  
Children and Families

## Fair Chance's Praxis Partnership Capacity Building Program: **Evaluation Brief**

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# Evaluation Brief

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Guided by a vision where every child succeeds and recognizing the critical role that community-based organizations play in uplifting children, youth, and families experiencing poverty through supportive services and resources, Fair Chance's mission centers on building the organizational capacity of small, community-based nonprofits in Washington, DC serving children, youth, and families. This mission is deeply rooted in recognition of how structural racism has contributed to the historic under-resourcing of communities of color.

Founded in 2002, Fair Chance has grown to serve over 200 community-based nonprofit organizations working across DC, and most recently, in Prince George's County, Maryland, through four capacity building programs varying in length, intensity, and content to meet the diverse needs of nonprofits at different stages of development - at no cost to the organization.

In 2021, Fair Chance contracted the national evaluation firm Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to conduct a study of its flagship capacity building program, the **Praxis Partnership Program**. **The evaluation found that this unique capacity building model has a measurable effect on the performance of community-based organizations and supports sustained organizational improvements across time.**

## KEY FINDINGS

- Nonprofit revenue grew by nearly **\$1 million**, on average, over five years. In addition, participants' **revenue was 176% higher**, on average, than a control group of similar organizations over time.
- The majority of nonprofits increased the number of children, youth, and family member participants by average **106%**.
- 90% of participants **grew their capacity in at least four of the eight capacity areas**.
- Executive Directors' reported increases in **knowledge (93%), confidence (88%) and skills (87%)**, resulting in strengthened leadership that catalyzes organizational growth.

# Praxis Partnership Program Model Overview

The Praxis Partnership Program is designed for organizations exiting the start-up phase of the nonprofit lifecycle and in need of targeted support to strengthen organizational infrastructure and sustainability. Reflected in Exhibit I, five distinct elements set the Praxis Partnership Program apart from traditional “one-size-fits-all” capacity building consulting engagements, as further described in the following narrative.



*Exhibit I. Praxis Partnership Program Elements*

**Capacity areas provide a foundation for capacity building work.**

Drawing upon research and decades of experience in nonprofit organizational development, Fair Chance’s capacity building offerings

center on eight organizational capacity building areas that are essential to nonprofit effectiveness, growth, and sustainability (as shown in Exhibit II). At the start of the program, Praxis participants are paired with a Fair Chance Capacity Building Specialist (CBS) to identify key areas for growth through a proprietary organizational assessment where the Executive Director (ED) rates their organization on 132 items grouped into the eight areas of practice. While the ED ultimately determines the direction of the engagement, assessment results (coupled with an analysis of the organization’s needs and unique context) guide the development of a highly customized work plan focused on strengthening organizational capacity in four of the eight areas included in the assessment.

**Exhibit II. Praxis Partnership Program Eight Capacity Areas**



**The Praxis Partnership Program is intensive and customized.** The Praxis Partnership, a capacity building program, was designed as an intensive 12-month engagement with a customized work plan as a guide. Praxis participants engage in intensive coaching/working sessions with their CBS comprised of 2-hour weekly check-ins throughout the year. Fair Chance also offers ongoing learning and sharing opportunities to current participants as well as alumni programs to foster networking and peer support. On average, Fair Chance estimates that organizations receive approximately eight hours of support per week, or a total of 400 hours over the course of the entire program – at no cost to the nonprofit.

**The Praxis Partnership Program seeks to create an optimal match between participants and their CBS.** Fair Chance prioritizes CBSs with lived experiences in the DC area, as well as familiarity with the nonprofit landscape. Fair Chance’s intentional hiring practices help to ensure that CBSs share a strong commitment to racial justice and equity-informed practices. Fair Chance also engages CBSs in a purposeful training program grounded in their philosophy of capacity building, which centers equity and relationships of trust. Combined, these practices reflect the experience and expertise of Praxis Partnership Program CBSs.



# Praxis Partnership Program Impact

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This evaluation, reflecting Fair Chance's first external evaluation of its flagship Praxis Partnership Program, surfaced significant and impressive findings related to the program's impact, and also demonstrated Fair Chance's enduring commitment to its nonprofit partners and the greater DC area.

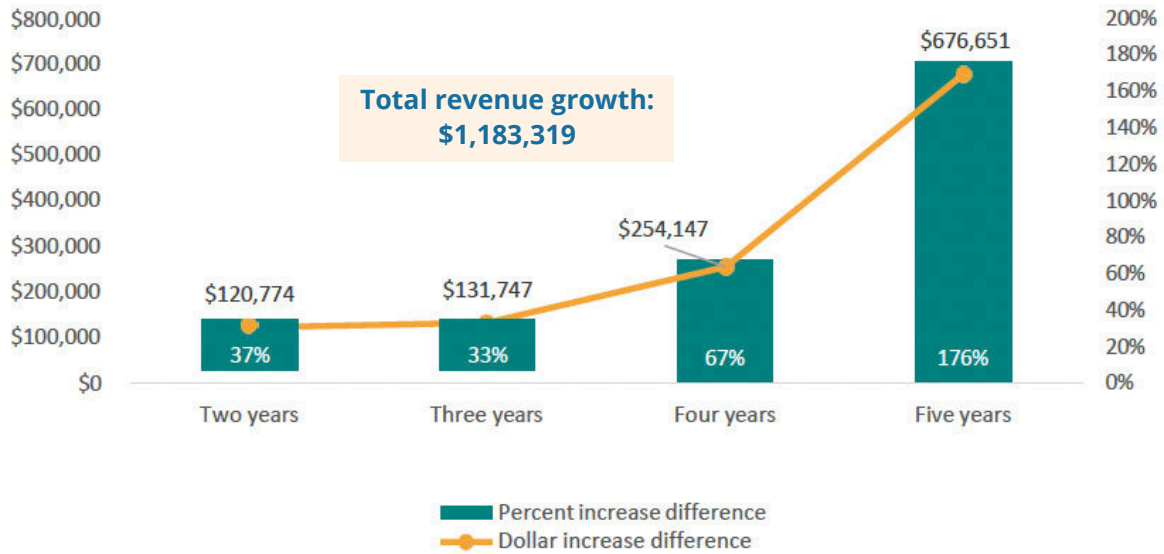
**Praxis participants improved their organizations' capacity in key areas aligned with their needs, with nearly all Praxis participants showing measurable capacity growth by the end of their Praxis experience.** Findings showed that by the end of the Praxis Partnership Program, 90% of Praxis participants grew their capacity in at least four of the eight capacity areas (as measured through the self-report pre/post capacity assessment). These four capacity areas align with the areas identified in participants' work plans as most in need of development, highlighting that Praxis participation results in capacity growth targeted to the unique needs of each organization.

**Praxis participation fosters increased confidence for EDs, resulting in strengthened leadership that catalyzes organizational growth.** Many participants described how their participation in the program increased their confidence as an organizational leader. Additionally, findings revealed that female-identifying EDs most often used words like "confidence" and "empowered" to describe what they personally gained from their program experience. This increased confidence enabled participants to take risks, move forward with decisions, and play a leadership role in their field and/or in the nonprofit sector. Moreover, one participant noted that it legitimized their organization, making them feel that they belonged in the nonprofit space in DC.

**As a result of participating in the Praxis Partnership, participants' organizational revenue growth was significantly higher over time, with participants' revenue being on average 176% higher than the comparison group at five years post-participation.** Exhibit III shows the average difference in organizational revenue between Praxis participants and a control group sample of similar organizations in Washington, DC. As shown, the difference grows over time which illustrates that: a) Praxis participants consistently have higher revenue growth as compared to similar organizations; and b) this

gap widens in subsequent years to show that Praxis participation supports sustained organizational improvements across time. Five years post-partnership, on average, Praxis participants' revenue grew by one million dollars.

**Exhibit III. Revenue Growth of Praxis Participants Compared to Similar Organizations Over Time**



*\*These values depict the differences in revenue growth of Praxis participants over time when compared to similar organizations that did not participate in the Praxis capacity building program*

Another outcome studied was the impact of the Praxis partnership on nonprofit capacity to scale the numbers of children, youth, and families served. While the numbers served analysis was not statistically significant, the majority of participants increased their numbers by an average 106% and all findings showed positive associations between Praxis participation and increased numbers served.

# Program Features Key to Praxis Participant Success

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Evaluation findings surfaced the following key Praxis Partnership Program features that were particularly supportive for advancing participants toward the aforementioned impacts.

**The pre/post capacity assessment supports participant growth and tracks progress.**

The evaluation found the Praxis capacity assessment to have statistical reliability and validity to address its dual purpose of: (1) supporting CBSs and participating EDs with developing a work plan; and (2) assessing change in ED capacity from pre to post. The assessment's ability to produce specific, measurable outcomes for its nonprofit partners supports participants with identifying where capacity building coaching can make the biggest impact, as well as allow Fair Chance to continue to hone and improve its Praxis model.

**CBS's expertise and trust-building approach are key for participant growth.** Praxis participants underscored the importance of the CBS relationship, sharing that an assigned CBS who brought nuanced familiarity with their unique context was foundational for fostering a powerful sense of trust and engagement. Participants communicated a sense that CBSs were true partners in the work, willing to roll up their sleeves and offer practical and emotional support to them, as well as being deeply invested in their individual and organizational success.

**Engagement events and resources for alumni are helpful and supportive.** The alumni listserv and Learning Community workshops were lifted up by Praxis participants as allowing them to both learn from other EDs and mitigate the isolation often inherent in an ED's role. Connections with other participants have allowed alumni to feel as if they have a community and network to help them elevate their organizations.

**Organizational tools and processes gained through the Praxis Partnership continue to be maintained and leveraged to support organizational growth.** Many Praxis participants discussed tools and resources that they developed while in the Praxis Partnership Program, including: report templates, sabbatical/succession plans, evaluation tools, and Board of Directors materials. Participants shared that that they still use or have used these resources as a springboard to advance their organization.

# Considerations for Future Growth

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Evaluation findings pointed to several considerations as Fair Chance continues improving upon and potentially scaling and replicating the Praxis model. These also underscore lessons learned for the capacity building sector as the field continues to evolve and improve approaches to support community-based organizations, particularly those led by people of color.

**Strengthened Key Capacity Areas:** Praxis participants shared that the eight capacity areas largely resonated with them as a guiding framework and appreciated how the framework was used to provide initial guidance that could be flexibly tailored to their needs. However, findings highlighted particular capacity areas that could be strengthened to better support participants' growth. Namely Fair Chance may consider including additional resources for delivering comprehensive strategic planning and outreach and communications supports.

Additionally, Fair Chance can create additional measures for the Board Development capacity area. This may include potential co-creation of measures with participants tailored to their individual organizational needs given the nuanced complexity of the Board Development capacity area.

**Deepening Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) within the Praxis Capacity Building Model:** Outcome findings showed that White EDs are more likely to have higher growth in revenue post-Praxis participation, as compared with EDs of color. In interviews, EDs of color named that fundraising can be particularly challenging given the systemic barriers and challenges they face. Moreover, DEI is an area that Praxis participants are directly calling out as an urgent need that is directly aligned with Fair Chance's Racial Equity Framework, thus presenting an opportunity for the Praxis Partnership Program to strengthen its DEI components.

**Bolstering Praxis Program Operations and Supports:** The nonprofit sector continues to evolve and introduce new challenges for community-based organizations. There is an opportunity for Fair Chance to augment and grow the supports provided to Praxis participants, including creating connections among complementary organizations in the DC nonprofit sector to explore potential partnerships that strengthen the nonprofit network.





Fair Chance can also consider increasing the focus on community and self-care, including a focus on mental health and wellness for both EDs and staff.

This evaluation reflecting Fair Chance's first external evaluation of its flagship Praxis Partnership Program surfaced significant and impressive findings related to the program's impact, but also demonstrated Fair Chance's enduring commitment to its nonprofit partners and the greater DC area. The full report includes further information about the methodology and research questions, a longer discussion of findings, and additional key learnings woven throughout the full report. While equity-focused themes are also woven throughout, the full report adds a section dedicated to exploring Fair Chance's contributions to a more equitable Washington, DC.

Given the strength and thoughtfulness of the Praxis model, Fair Chance is well positioned to utilize the findings and considerations shared in this evaluation to continue advancing toward its ultimate goal of more children, youth, and families achieving life-changing outcomes predictive of future stability and success.

**To access the full report, contact Sallie Lampron, Data and Evaluation Manager, at [evaluation@fairchance.org](mailto:evaluation@fairchance.org)**