



Leadership Fairfax Announces CEO Search

Long-time executive Karen Cleveland is passing the torch after positioning LFI for sustainability and next chapter of community engagement

March 7, 2023

The Leadership Fairfax Board of Directors today announced it will begin a search for the next CEO of Northern Virginia's premier leadership development organization. Current Chief Executive, Karen Cleveland, recently informed the Board that she intends to transition to a new chapter after an incredibly successful eight-year tenure at Leadership Fairfax.

"Under Karen's leadership, LFI has been integral to developing the County's next generation of leaders, leaving an imprint on our community that will be felt for years to come," said Cynthia Bailey (LFI Class of 2018), Chair of the Leadership Fairfax board. "Leadership Fairfax flourished and is in a stronger position thanks to Karen's passion for community engagement. Through this transition LFI will continue to serve as a guiding light for building and sustaining an inclusive, equitable, and connected community in which everyone can thrive."

Cleveland was serving on the Leadership Fairfax Board in 2015 when she stepped down to accept the role as CEO of the nonprofit organization. At the time, she said her intent was to guide LFI for a couple of years as it sought to implement a new strategic plan.

Cleveland (LFI Class of 2005) was head of Cleveland Coaching Group, her own leadership and consulting practice, prior to taking the helm at Leadership Fairfax. Before that, she was CEO of Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia and formerly was the first CEO of the Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce.

"This is an incredibly difficult decision as I remain so committed to our programs, our alumni, our faculty, and our many partners," Cleveland said. "Much like the timing when I took over, I see this as an inflection point for Leadership Fairfax after working with our Board last year to adopt a new, bold strategic plan, creating Leadership Fairfax 2.0 if you will, that will put us in an even stronger position to impact the opportunities and challenges affecting Fairfax County and the region."

During her tenure, Cleveland not only expanded the reach and sustainability of Leadership Fairfax, but she also shepherded its experiential curriculum-based programs through a global

pandemic that strained everyone's ability and commitment to remaining connected and engaged in community-wide priorities, the very pillars of Leadership Fairfax's mission.

"What we experienced during and after the pandemic truly underscores the vital importance of identifying and engaging our next generation of community leaders," Cleveland said.

"Leadership Fairfax 2.0 is not a departure from our 35-year mission but rather an enhancement reflecting the changing landscape of Fairfax County and the needs in our community."

As part of its new strategic plan, Leadership Fairfax intends to broaden the organization's reach. It recently launched a Youth Leadership Network in collaboration with Fairfax County to support local youth and young adults as they explore volunteer, community, and business opportunities. In addition, Leadership Fairfax will pursue opportunities to turn its unique curriculum outward by partnering to foster community-based conversations about the vital role inclusion, respect, and equity have played, and must continue to play, in shaping communities where all can thrive.

Leadership Fairfax boasts more than 2,200 alums across its three signature programs: Leadership Fairfax Institute, Emerging Leaders Institute, and Lifetime Leaders Program. Graduates from Leadership Fairfax programs become part of, and stay connected to, a rapidly growing number of servant leaders making a difference in the Fairfax community every day.

"Our alums are the stewards of our community, leaders within their own organizations, and thought leaders with our nonprofit partners who are the backbone of our community," Cleveland added.

The Leadership Fairfax CEO Search Committee is being chaired by Dominic Bonaiuto (LFI Class of 2019), Vice Chair of the Leadership Fairfax Board. More information can be found at <https://leadershipfairfax.org/Job-Openings>.

Exemplifying its motto of Lead, Unite, Thrive, Leadership Fairfax develops, connects, and inspires leaders of diverse backgrounds and experiences to engage in building a better community. Leadership Fairfax is currently accepting applications for all of its leadership development programs. Leadership Fairfax employment opportunities and programs are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, or any other basis protected by law. To learn more, visit leadershipfairfax.org.

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