Webinar: Planning for ECBO Sustainability: Organizational Life Cycles and Strategies for Sustainability

June 18, 2024, 1:00 – 2:00 PM ET

Transcript

Introduction

Today's Speakers

Nao Kabashima: Good morning and good afternoon, everyone. We are so happy to have you on today's webinar on organizational lifecycle and ECBO sustainability, and I'm really excited for today's special speakers.

NK: First of all, we have Haji Adan. Haji is the executive director at Refugee and Immigrant Self-Empowerment Inc., RISE a prominent ECBO established in 2004 to provide comprehensive support for refugees and immigrants, with a focus on employment, education, social support, and economic independence. Haji's strategic direction and leadership has propelled RISE from a modest budget to an annual allocations of about $5 million organizations, primarily through securing grants to fund essential programs. And RISE serves nearly 800 families originating from over 35 countries. Thank you so much, Haji, for being here.

NK: And next we have Yahya Haqiqi. Yahya is president and CEO of the Afghan Support Network, ASN, a grassroots community-based organization dedicated to helping Afghans be settled and thrive in their new homes in Oregon, under... Sorry. As a co-founder of ASN, Yahya has been instrumental in the organization's growth since its inception in September 2021. Under his leadership, ASN has evolved from a small nonprofit with a volunteer board to a mid-size entity, employing 13 staff members and operating a community center, forming a crucial pillar of support for the Afghan community in Oregon. Thank you so much, Yahya, for being here today.

NK: And last, it's me. My name is Nao Kabashima. I am co-founder and executive director of the Karen Organization of San Diego, serving refugees from Burma here in San Diego, California. This, we started in 2009 by Karen leaders of the community, and this is our 15 year anniversary, so we are so happy to be here today.

Learning Objectives

NK: And let's go to the next slide, today's learning objectives. So by the end of the session, you'll be able to describe the five stage of the development lifecycle of an ethnic community-based organization, identify strategies for sustainable growth at each stage of ECBO development, and then apply new tools and resources for sustainable growth at each stage of ECBO development.

NK: So before going to the presentations and welcoming speakers, we wanted to do this quick Slido activity so that we know who we have today on this webinar. If you've never done this before, please try to take a picture of this QR code and then go to your Slido. And then please answer this multiple-[choice] question.

Which best describes your organization or yourself?

NK: Are you from a resettlement agency, ethnic community based-organization, or state refugee office or replacement designee, and community members or other service providers. If you cannot use this QR code, you can also use slido.com and then enter this number: 6931073. Thank you so much, everyone. It seems like at about half, 40, more than 40% people from ECBOs. We also have about 30% from other service providers. We have somebody from resettlement agencies, state refugee office. We're really happy to have you here. Yes, I can see about 50% of today's webinar participants are from ECBOs, so thank you for being here, everyone.

1. The Five Stages of the Development Lifecycle of ECBOs

Nonprofit Development: Five-Stage Model

NK: I'm going to start right away. I know that everybody wanted to welcome our speakers right away, but I wanted to go over the five stages of the development lifecycle with ECBOs before welcoming our ECBO leaders today. Next slide shows the model that we try to use, and nonprofit organizations, including ECBOs, typically follow a predictable lifecycle. And I know that there are a lot of different models that talk about the lifecycle of nonprofit organizations. But we chose this model created by Judith Sharken Simon. Why we chose this… because we believe this image of a butterfly-shaped kite and building the kite from scratch and then trying to fly the kite, it's going to give us better understanding of this model, especially for ECBO leaders and newcomer community members.

NK: And then we thought this model is easier for you to reflect on your own organizations and then try to see where you are, where your organization is in this life stage and life cycle of the organizations. And we believe that it's very important for ECBO leaders to know where you are in this lifecycle, because each space has different types of unique challenges and then also appropriate strategy to overcome those challenges. So let's go to the next slide.

Applying the Five-Stage Model

NK: Before sharing the different stages of our lifecycle, we wanted to share the seven key arenas of ECBO development. And these are characterizing where you are in the life cycle. So let's go. The first one is governance, and staff leadership, and we have finance, and administrative systems, and we have staffing, products and services, and marketing.

NK: So whenever you think about where you are as organizations in this life stage, you have to think about these different key arenas of ECBO development. Where am I, where my organization is about governance-wise, staff, leadership wise, financially or administrative system or marketing. And so we wanted share this first before going to the stages. Let's go to the next slide, the first stage.

Stage 1: Imagine and Inspire

NK: Stage one is imagine and inspire stage. You can see this picture of the kite, that you are trying to create the kite from scratch. And in this stage, the leaders usually come together, and many ECBOs start with visionary leaders and then the community members who try to do something to meet the needs of the community who are new to this country.

NK: And so those leaders [are] going to identifying unmet need in the community and envisioning goals, and taking actions as an informal group. At this stage, the organization is not formalized yet, so it is not a formal nonprofit organization yet. But the primary question here is, can this dream be realized? As you can see in this drawing, the leaders get together, and then when you join? Maybe you do community meeting, community kind of discussion sessions. And the leader is going to be thinking about what kind of kite looks good for this community? Like what kind of butterfly, what kind of color or the butterfly size? Is it big or small? And so this is stage one, that imagine and inspire stage.

Stage 2: Found and Frame

NK: So let's go to the next one. Stage two. This is a found and frame stage. At this stage, the organization is actually receiving organizational status, meaning, maybe you are in, registering your organization with your state. It doesn't matter. Maybe some organization decides to go with a 501(c)(3) right away, or maybe you are going to start working with fiscal agency at the beginning, but at least you are a formal, official nonprofit organization.

NK: And to found and then frame [the] organization... These [are] going to be the creating, completing task. So administrations or logistic infrastructures, that leader is going to think about what kind of funding is available.

NK: And then the primary questions, how are we going to put this up? So we have a good vision and a good idea of starting an organization and then we register. But how are we going to fly this kite? We need money, we need a structure. Maybe we need a partner, we need supporters. So in this stage, we are going to found and then frame the organization.

Stage 3: Ground and Grow

NK: Let's go to the next stage. It's ground and growth stage. The organization is growing and is expanding by establishing the organization's foundation. So it's going to be a more strong and stable foundation compared [to] stage two, building mechanisms for accountability and shared viability, growing and taking care of business. And the primary question here [is], how can we build this to be viable? So you can see now the kite is starting to fly. I don't know how high it is, but at least started to fly.

NK: And so it's an exciting time. You are dreaming a lot and then imagining, visioning, and now it's actually flying. So, exciting time, but this stage requires the most growth in many organizational arenas. The arenas that we talked a little earlier about that governance or staffing administration system or products or marketing. And this stage, you need stronger governance and diversified funding, and then also study to need to work with many different partners.

Stage 4: Produce and Sustain

NK: So let's go to the next stage. After stage three, the kite is going to go even farther, going higher up, and then it's going to be [the] produce and sustain stage, and stabilizing organizations even while risking some staleness and pushing peak productivity and focusing on sustainability. And the primary question here is, how can we maintain the momentum? So maybe at this stage, your organization is very stable, can be very productive, may be well established and well known.

NK: Maybe a lot of organizations in your community or people in your community know about your organization. And maybe at this stage, some organizations started to kind of coach or support the smaller organizations or smaller organization leaders. You definitely need to... have a more diversified funding. And then also more complicated, the system, the organizations. So that was a stage four.

Stage 5: Review and Renew

NK: And then we go to stage five. This is a review and renew stage. At this stage, reinventing some way, shape, or form of this kite. So you start from the vision and then you have great leaders, and now you have great system, a lot of organization, staff members, maybe office, and then great products, programs, and services for your community members.

NK: But this is the time to revisit and renew aspects of the organization. And, for example, maybe your organization's mission might change. Maybe you started to, maybe at the beginning you are focusing on a very specific community, maybe from a specific ethnicity of the community. But because you're growing and you started to serve more... like a bigger, larger community, so the target population might change. And although the missions is still the same, but it doesn't really truly reflect who you are, or vision might need to shift or products getting bigger.

NK: And then also the organization name that you named at the beginning of the organization, at stage one or stage two, might not truly reflect who you are as an organization. So this is the review and renew stage. At this stage, the primary question is, what do we need to redesign? Let's go to the next one.

Decline and Dissolution

NK: We also have a decline and dissolution stage. It's not a stage, but this can happen at any stage, maybe stage one, two, three, four, five, and not always negative. And that sounds of the decline or dissolution doesn't look negative, but maybe 100% of your organization needs are met because of your hard work of many years. So you have to close the organization. So maybe you started to work with other organizations and emerged with organizations alignment, your value. And crisis in a majority of the seven key arenas may indicate organizational decline.

Indicators of Decline and Dissolution

NK: So on the next slide, we're going to talk about what [are] the indicators? And then what we believe, it's very important to talk about, speakers, this kind of indicator might happen any time at stage one, two, three, four, five. And as long as you know the indicators and then you start to see some indicators of decline that you can bring that up to the board, maybe you can discuss with your community, with your staff. That's the reason why we are sharing these indicators. First one is lack of board governance, lack of ED, leadership, and passion,

high staff turnover, lack of community support, no program evaluation and needs assessment, and then financial crisis. So these can be indicators, and this is really good to have a conversation if you started to see some of these indicators.

Eight Assumptions About the Development Stages and Cycle

NK: Let's go to the next one. Eight assumptions. Although we share those stages and then the nonprofit organization and the ECBO typically go with this cycle, but organization, we have eight assumptions that this model is using.

NK: And organizations are forward moving, and various dimensions interact to create a pattern unique to a particular life stage. Five factors influence this: age and size of the organizations, growth rate of field, social environment, and primary leaders' characteristics. Significant events occur at each stage. And next one is, we have four more. There is no predictable endpoint in organizational development. And the stages of an organization's life are distinct, but the boundaries between the stages are not always obvious. Each stage can be defined by dominant characteristics, and each stage is uniquely valuable to the organization's positive development.

NK: So all of these stage, one, two, three, four, five and then even the stage of dissolution is very important for that positive development of the organization.

Poll Question

NK: So before welcoming our speakers, I want to do one more Slido. And I know that this might be a new model for you, but I thought it's very good if we can do this together:

Which stage is your organization at in the organizational life cycle?

NK: And there's no right or wrong answer, but I think it's good that we can think together.

NK: These are multiple [choice] questions. Stage one, imagine and inspire stage. Maybe some of you are very new and are thinking about starting an organization. Then stage one, we have stage two, found and frame. Stage three, ground and grow. Stage four, produce and sustain. We have review and renew. We have, oh, it seems like about 50% of people are from organizations at stage four. So maybe your organizations might be very strong right now and then you are keeping the momentum and then keep moving. But we also have community members who are from organizations in stage five, stage three, and stage one. It's very exciting. Thank you so much, everyone, for doing this together.

2. ECBO Strategies for Sustainability Over the Course of the ECBO Organizational Life Cycle

NK: Hey, so this is exciting part. I'm welcoming our speakers today from three ECBO leaders, and each ECBO are doing amazing work and at the different stages of this life cycle, the organizations. And first of all, I would like to welcome Yahya... Yahya from the Afghan Support Network. Let's go to the next slide. Thank you so much. I'm going to pass to Yahya. Thank you, Yahya, for being here.

Afghan Support Network (ASN)

Yahya Haqiqi: Thank you. Yes. Thank you so much. And thank you for the amazing introduction earlier. My name is Yahya Haqiqi. I'm the President and CEO of the Afghan Support Network. The Afghan Support Network is based out in Portland, Oregon. We started about in 2021. Our vision really is we're focused on the Afghan community specifically. And as we talked about some of the stages, we came out of a need that we saw. And our vision is to create a future in which all Afghans prosper and contribute back to their communities. We want to change the image that people see of Afghans of one of immigrants and refugees to one of leaders [and] entrepreneurs in the future. And we do that through our mission, which is to empower Afghans through advocacy services and resources.

Timeline of Organization History and Growth: ASN

YH: So a little about how we came to be. Like I said, we started in September of 2021 when a couple of us community members really came together and said, what is our responsibility? As we saw this large influx of Afghan refugees coming to the United States. And one of the first things that we did when starting the organization is we started with a strategic plan. We wanted to make sure that whatever work we do, we had a plan in place. And we're following our plan as we move forward.

YH: And with that we actually, because there was such a need and we organized quickly, we grew really quickly as well. So September of 2021 is when we registered with the state. By December of 2021, we had our 501(c)(3) status. By January 2022, we had our first full-time staff member. By the end of that year, we had our brand, and now we are a team of 13 people starting to work on our second strategic plan. Our first strategic plan was two years old. And really thinking about what the future holds, so we went through those first couple of stages really quickly and feel a bit between that stage three and four right now, between still growing but also trying to find out, build our foundation and find sustainability.
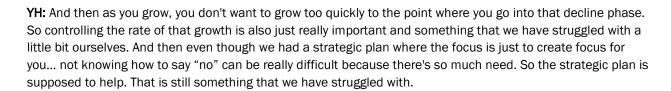
Programming and Structure: ASN

YH: Like I said, we have 13 current staff members. We've grown really quickly. We have six board members. And we are still focused on those primary focus areas that we started off with. But as we do our strategic plans, some of these are going to change because some of the stuff we already did and passed. In the beginning, we didn't have our own services to offer, so we were focused on connecting people to services. Now we have a bunch of English classes and permit classes, rent assistance. We have all of these things that we offer ourselves. So that's where we are switching gears a little bit as we rethink about, what is it that we want to do moving forward?

YH: So as we were going through these stages, sometimes it feels like we've already moved to stage five and are rethinking how we're doing things, and then coming back to stage three and going four, five and doing it over and over again.

Strategies for Overcoming Challenges in Stages 1–3

YH: So some of the challenges that we had to overcome as we were going from stage one to three is we grew, like I said, we grew really, really quickly. And growth is great, but it can be, especially in the nonprofit world, which requires so much reporting and so much accountability, it can be really difficult without the proper infrastructure.

YH: And then as you grow, you don't want to grow too quickly to the point where you go into that decline phase. So controlling the rate of that growth is also just really important and something that we have struggled with a little bit ourselves. And then even though we had a strategic plan where the focus is just to create focus for you... not knowing how to say "no" can be really difficult because there's so much need. So the strategic plan is supposed to help. That is still something that we have struggled with.

Discussion Question

YH: So thinking about some of these challenges, I would love to hear from you all:

What are some strategies that you think might have helped ASN overcome these challenges?

YH: So please just use Slido to answer this question. I would love to hear from you all around. What is something that you might have done in this case?

YH: Pro bono legal support. We did get pro bono legal support and, honestly, we could not have gotten our 501(c)(3) without it. So that is 100% correct. I see there are other people writing as well right now. Community need assessment, get more housing support, assessing highest needs. These are great thoughts. We did some sort of a community needs assessment in the beginning. We could have definitely done more. Working with other CBOs is great. Like I said, our beginning focus area was around service connection, so a lot of it was really focused on how do we connect people to other services. That means creating a lot of partnerships. Transportation, something we still struggle with, ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Yeah, building capacity.

YH: These are some great ideas. I can tell there are folks that have already dealt with the same challenges that we have dealt with. Guidance from other CBOs. Language justice. Yes. Access to language is a huge issue for a lot of folks. From my personal experience, that was one of the things that I had to deal with as a child was having to interpret for my parents all the time. So that was one of the reasons that I wanted to find this, I wanted to make sure kids have their childhood and not have to go and be interpreters all the time. So, completely agree with language justice. These are some amazing ideas. Thank you, everyone, for participating.

ASN's Strategies for Sustainability: Stages 1–3

YH: So some of the stuff that we focused on, like I said, was controlling growth by knowing what to focus on and when to say "no." It's a really hard thing. But that strategic plan that you do in the beginning and then redoing your strategic plan becomes a huge part of knowing what to focus on and what to say "no" to. It is always going to be a struggle, but having something in writing makes it easier.

YH: The other part of it is focusing on the organization as much as the client. Yet a lot of the time, organizations, when they start, they're really just focused on, "We have to help people. We have to help people." But if you don't also try to grow the organization and build up a structure, whether it is HR or accounting, as you grow, it is going to become much harder later on.

YH: And then having a strong, clear mission and vision early on... without those, you don't really know what you're trying to do. What is the goal you're trying to achieve and how are you doing it is incredibly important to any sort of growth. And also considering what the future may look like. That was something that we were really focused on. What is the future for the... as an ECBO focused on specifically the Afghan community, we are a

very niche, we are serving a very niche community. And so you have to always think about, well, what does sustainability look like in the future? What do funding streams look like when a lot of these funding streams dry up? And you have to be thinking ahead, one step ahead all the time in order to make sure that you can continue to support your community and not just all of a sudden have to decline dramatically because funding has dried up.

YH: So these are some of the stuff that has helped us so far. I wanted to share with you, there were some amazing ideas that we had tried already and hadn't tried. So thank you for participating. I think I'm going to give it back to Nao.

Karen Organization of San Diego (KOSD)

NK: Thank you. Thank you so much, Yahya. And now I'm going to talk about my organization, Karen Organization of San Diego. We advance educational, civic, and economic opportunity for ethnic groups from Burma, also known as Myanmar, by honoring cultural heritage. Let's go to the next slide.

Timeline of Organization History and Growth: KOSD

NK: Quickly I want to go over our timeline of organizational growth. We started in 2009, community organizing efforts, that time was stage one, we are just dreaming and then also thinking what could be done, what can be the solutions to the struggle of our community members who are very new to this community. And then we see a huge gap between what the San Diego community were able to offer and then the needs of the community. And so in 2009, we started to organize the community. And right away in 2009, we registered in California as an organization, nonprofit organization.

NK: In 2010, we got the 501(c)(3). Although these first two years I was, we were applying for many different funding, there was no funding... able to come to us. But in 2011, we were very, very fortunate that we were able to get this ORR Ethnic Community Self-Help grant we got awarded, and this was our first-ever grant that we ever got. And because of this funding, we were able to get a community office. We were able to hire staff, but later in 2017, we lost the award funding. We got that funding again in 2020. But when we lost the funding, we struggled. We needed to create a new relationship. And then with the local government foundation, because we are not duly prepared, we are very rely on that or our funding. And then, but we are able to create the new relationship.

NK: And then we, again, started to fly as a kite. And then 2020 with the San Diego Refugee Community Coalition got formed. And then we are a member and because of this coalition work that we are able to study to get that different type of funding from bigger funders like a county or large funding that we can kind of share the funding together and then do the work together as a community here in San Diego.

Programming and Structure: KOSD

NK: So that next slide, very quickly, we have 16 members. We have 12 board members, and more than 70% of them are refugees themselves. So we consider us as a community-led board. And we have four overarching programs including community program, family engagement, civic engagement, and economic development. And let's go to the next slide.

Strategies for Overcoming Challenges in Stage 4

NK: We also had different types of challenges. As Yahya shared, we had similar challenges too, but we also had the culture… like maintaining cultural relevance. Even if we say "refugees from Burma," the community is just so diverse. We have many different ethnicities, religions, languages, and the background of our community members are very diverse. So how can we maintain relevance? And then also making sure that everybody from different ethnicities, different religions, different languages, they feel comfortable and then can trust us as their own community organizations.

NK: And finding sustainable funding support was also a challenge I shared earlier, but when we lost the ORR funding, we were not prepared.

NK: And navigating emerging community needs and improving the organization's structure to meet new operational challenges. For example, our budget last five years got double, but because we quickly grow. So we didn't really have the operational structures, not enough operation staff. And then, so now we are in the process of kind of reviewing and then assessing what kind of structure is good for us.

Discussion Question

NK: So let's go to the Slido quickly. I believe that some of the answers might be similar to somebody who shared with Yahya's questions, but again, we want to go the same question with this Slido:

What strategies might help overcome these challenges?

NK: What I shared was about cultural relevance and diversifying funding, and then also the organizational structure that doesn't really match with how the organization is running actually. And yeah, so, oh, this number, yeah, you can also [go to] Slido.com and then you can put this number and then you can also put the answer there.

NK: Developing policy. Ooh, I like that. I cannot read everything, but policy and maybe protocol or something like that. But yeah, that's something that we needed to think about. And then at the beginning, stage one and two, even three, we didn't really think through well about what policies we needed, especially when we are growing, planning for funding loss.

NK: Yeah. Exactly. We were not prepared at the beginning, but because of the experience that we now know what needs to be done to prepare. And then always thinking about different types of scenarios and then diversifying funding so that we don't need to rely on only one type of sourcing. Yeah. A lot of answers. Thank you. Institutional building, development database, management training, sharing other communities. Yeah. Thank you so much, everybody, for doing this. Let's go to the next one. This is my last slide and I'm going to pass to Haji.

KOSD's Strategies for Sustainability: Stage 4

NK: Our strategy is something that you share already too, but also we created a community-led board. We had a community-led board, but we didn't have a majority at some of time of our organizations because we thought we needed to have legal perspective or some specific nonprofit organizational management skill. And we thought it's important to bring non-community members to the board. And then, which is true, but at the same

time, we needed to trust more on our community. It's their wisdom and then they know... our community leaders know how to unite the community, how to run the organization with us and then build trust and support through transparency with the community.

NK: For example, when we are trying, about to lose the funding, we let people know and then involved them to think about our strategy planning for a fundraiser. And then our community members were proud of our fundraising effort those days or involving community members and their story in fundraising and then working with other ECBOs to apply together. That way we can grow. And then also we can support the smaller organizations and then we grow together. Okay. So I'm going to pass to Haji, Haji from RISE. Thank you, Haji, for being here.

Refugee & Immigrant Self-Empowerment Inc. (RISE)

Haji Adan: All right. Thank you so much, Nao and Yahya, for that incredible presentation. Thank you all for joining us today. So RISE, Refugee and Immigrant Self-Empowerment, formerly known as the Somali Bantu Community Association. Our mission today is to advocate for and facilitate economic independence and community inclusion for refugees and immigrants through education, employment, social support, and service and education.

Timeline of Organization History and Growth: RISE

HA: So I want to get into our timeline of organization. And what you are going to see is the different ways people actually journey, different journeys of organization get into sustainability or where they are. You heard about Yahya's organization's journey and also Nao's, the Karen Organization.

HA: And when you look at RISE, it's completely maybe similar, but also a longer journey than what I call them. So for us, the Somali Bantu Community Association, this was founded in 2004 by a group of Somali Bantus who settled in Syracuse, New York, early 2004 and also into 2005 with the whole purpose of them coming together was just to support each other. And for when a family member is not able to pay their rent, they were able to collect money and depend, because that's the culture of Somali Bantu, depend on each other. And that was the whole purpose. And then as we continued to stay, we realized that the parents and the people, the Somali Bantu parents, the majority of them have never seen the four corners of a classroom, and adjusting to American life was so difficult and hard for them. So we realized that from 2004 and then 2007, it was based on community support and all of that.

HA: And then we started with education since 99% of the Somali Bantu community parents who came there were also illiterate and then even in their own language. So we focused on the education piece because the hopes and dreams of the parents were the children. And then 2008, 2009, through connections of the community members, we realized that we were told you can incorporate this and you can get funding for it and all of that, and then all of a sudden we get connected to Syracuse University Law School who helped us put together our 501(c)(3) application. So the process took about a whole year and a half. And then 2009 we became incorporated as an organization, but it still continued to provide education services for our youth. And then from 2009 to 2013, we were still doing education programming, mainly after school program. And then we slowly added programs for adults and citizenship programming, case management services, and then employment services limited only just to the Somali Bantu community.

HA: And then 2011 and '12, a new wave of refugees started coming to Syracuse. And then we extended our hands to them, the Nepal, the Congolese, and we started providing services for them, even if our organization name was Somali Bantu Community Association. Then 2013, we had a leadership change and all of this work was done on a voluntary basis. The Somali Bantu parents themselves were paying everything from their pocket, whether it means to actually buy food for the children or pens or pencils for the children or whatever, providing transportation there, all of that we were doing on a voluntary basis.

HA: In 2013, that's when I came in as volunteer executive director. And then at that time, we still had the Somali Bantu Community board members. I told them, "Give me six months, and then I'll figure it out and where we want to head." And all of a sudden, and thank God, 2014, we also received the ORR Ethnic Community Self-Help grant, which was a blessing for us because we... Some people call it seed money, but for us it was a blessing, right? So because that, it gave us, we use that as an opportunity to market our organization. We've run with it in media, radio shows, and all of that. We were given money. So the local foundations can actually also start trusting us and to give us money and all of that. So 2014, we actually increased our employment services, case management services, and all of that.

HA: But we also had some challenges. When refugees come, other refugees like Nepali, Congo, Liberians, or other people, then they will say, "I'm not Somali Bantu. Can we actually receive services?" And then we also apply for local foundation funding. When we say our mission statement at that time was to support the Somali Bantu community through employment, education service, but while also maintaining their cultural identity. So the funders would also ask question, "Okay, you're telling me your mission statement is this, but you're helping these people. Can you actually explain to us?" And then because back on that, and then we realized that we had to make a strategic planning change as to whether we want to change the organization name or to something else. So again, we connected to Syracuse University Maxwell School [of Citizenship and Public Affairs], who helped us put together a five-year strategic plan. The whole goal was to either change the organization name to make sure that we are aligning with the services that we're providing, or otherwise we keep the name, but also have umbrellas for other organizations. But eventually they give us a five-year strategic plan, which Refugee and Immigrant Self-Empowerment, the name was born in 2016.

Programming and Structure: RISE

HA: So right now today, in terms of programming, from 2016 until now, we have been actually changing programs and adding a program one, every other year, we were adding one or two other programs. Today we are about 55 staff members, more than 35 different languages are spoken, and nine board members. And right now we are providing six main programs. Right now we also became a refugee resettlement and affiliate organization for the Ethnic and Ethiopian Community Development Council. We provide an agriculture program, case management and employment services, education initiatives, care management services, and individual development account.

HA: So in every program, there's a lot of other programs, like for example, in education, we have the after school program, the child care program, we also have adult student programs. So in terms of employment and case management, we have a whole list of other programs and services that we provide.

Strategies for Overcoming Challenges in Stages 4 and 5

HA: So in terms of strategies for overcoming challenges as an organization, our organization transitioning from community support organization to staff, all of us for 10 years, for us, 2004 all the way to 2014, we're already

all of us doing every work on a voluntary basis. And now to transition from that to a paid staff, that was actually a very difficult transition for us, transition leadership also coming in from volunteer-based leadership and now getting paid and then making sure that you come with a whole different system. And also identifying alignments between the organization's name and purpose, because the clients were asking questions, and then funders were asking a different question. And also, the founders, the framers of the organization had a vision, which is to support our fellow refugees.

HA: Because even if we don't speak the same language, we actually had faced similar situation in our home country or in refugee country. So how can we align all of these things to make sure that we actually do what we're supposed to do when we are doing mission, when we are avoiding mission creep. Also, the resistance of community ownership, like it used to be called Somali Bantu Community Association. Now you want to change it to Refugee and Immigrant Self-Empowerment. So the Somali Bantu Community members were like, "Oh, okay, you're selling us, Haji. You actually changed our name, because now how are we going to feel ownership of this organization to make them understand, telling them, 'Hey, what is your purpose? What's your goal?'" I explained to asking them their goal and making sure that you translate their goal into more impact. And then that was also a big challenge that has taken a lot of time.

RISE's Strategies for Sustainability: Stages 4 and 5

HA: So I know that we have already talked about some of the challenges that you guys face. So some of you guys talked about prolonged legal support, community leaders assessment, assessing high needs, working with other ECBOs, building capacity.

HA: Some of the things that you already said is the same thing that we actually faced similar ourselves as an organization. So what I'm trying to do is I'm not going to ask you the questions again to the Slido, but what I'm trying to do is I'm trying to talk to you about our way of sustaining... our strategies for sustaining the organization and overcoming some of the challenges that you guys mentioned.

HA: So RISE, what we did is, despite of all those challenges, we partnered with a local university for legal support in organization growth. And so we were trying to skip this Slido because I think some of the things that was said, it's kind of the same, it's kind of the same thing. So I want to get into our... The way we overcome those challenges. So you guys live in cities and states that have universities and colleges. Please make sure we were able to connect to that and use them as a resource, whether it means providing guidance, whether it means volunteering for the organization, whether it means internship opportunity and all of that.

HA: So some of the things that we also did was that we did not actually introduce new programs. The programs were one program at a time. Like, every year we were introducing one or two programs, and then the following year we were doing that. For example, in 2014, we were only providing employment and case management services, education services. In 2016, we introduced the agriculture program in an individual development account. And then in 2017, '18, we introduced the health care management services. And then in 2021, we introduced research and development programs. So, we knew ahead of time, we wanted to make sure that we are actually doing all of this ahead of time.

HA: And then closely mentioning, making sure that our community assessment, that for us, we were using our own clients to actually, we use them as assessing the community need. Every time a client comes to us, we would ask them, "What are some of the things that you wish this agency provided? What are some of the things that we are providing that we are not actually providing in the way that you wish to be served?" But for

me, as a former refugee myself, Haji Adan, I know some of the challenges that our refugees that are coming to our doors are consistently facing in the neighborhood, because I was once a refugee myself, my father was a refugee, my cousins, and everyone else.

HA: So, for me, using my own experiences as well as the experiences of the newly arrived refugees, that's what we were using to assess our community needs assessment, to make sure that we tailor the programs the way we want. And also one of the things that we did is like the trend is over, like sometimes the interest of the community changes. Sometimes they're focused on adult literacy. We're actually positioning the agency to make sure that we're providing a culturally appropriate adult literacy program to make sure that we have... make sure that the funders are fine and happy with us, but at the same time, we are having more impact with our clients.

HA: So those are some of the things that actually we were able to overcome some of the challenges. So we've used the university, we've used volunteers, we've used our own staff members, but most importantly, we hired our own refugees, former refugees and immigrants who speak more, their languages, because our goal was to make sure when the clients come to our office, they're being greeted or otherwise served in a language they understand. So those are some of the questions. And now that I'm willing, I'm ready to turn it over to Nao.

Panel Discussion Questions

NK: Thank you so much, Haji, for sharing. Now we want to go to a very quick panel discussion. I know we don't have enough time, but we have three questions. And I know the first question, second question are really good ones, but since we already shared a lot, I remember that we touched upon some of the [answers to questions] one and two... So maybe we just start with the third question. The third question is,

What advice would you give to new and evolving ECBO leaders who are in stages one and two?

NK: We only have five or six minutes left for this part. So I'm really sorry that I have to skip some questions. But if you have any questions, everyone, please put [them] into the Q&A. We wanted to start with the... question, what kind of advice would you give to the leaders, evolving ECBO leaders? You want to go first, Haji?

HA: Yeah. I think one of the advice that I would give when you are in stage one is making sure that you clarify your mission and vision statement and you clearly state what you're trying to achieve. And then making sure that you're building your legal organization documents and all those structure, and start small and think big. When you're passionate about something, you really want to do everything because you want to do that. But again, at the same time, the general advice is making sure that you can effectively communicate your mission and vision statement. You yourself [are] a story. As a former refugee yourself, you yourself [are] a story. Make sure that you're communicating that to your partners and all of that.

HA: Another thing that I would say, make sure that you partner and collaborate with other ECBOs. They're out there. Some of them, sometimes they don't want to collaborate and join you in your own vision and how you're trying to do something, but give them time and don't give up and make sure that you're persistent unless you know that you're going to achieve something. But most importantly, I call nonprofit organization a labor of love. Like self-care. Take care of yourself. I know there's a lot of need in our community and we want to achieve something, but make sure that you're actually doing self-care and team care. Making sure that you take care of your own staff members as well.

NK: Thank you. Can I go, Yahya?

YH: Yeah. Haji hit all the points I wanted to hit on. Those are really... Having a really strong vision and mission is absolutely key. You need to be able to sell something and that's what the vision is. What is it that you're trying to sell? You [cater] to your community, to the people that are coming here, the clients you're supporting. And like I said, create a strategic plan early and that will... Things will shift, things will change, and you might not be able to follow it exactly, but at least it gives you guidance. At least it gives you some sort of a roadmap to follow. And then, like Haji said, partnership, partnership, partnerships, there's going to be a lot of trust building in the beginning that you'll have to do. And the more partnerships you have, the more people will trust you.

YH: And then one of the things we really struggled with, and Haji was really pointing out, is marketing. You really... this is something we struggle with because as a Muslim, this is kind of like a charity work in some ways and our religion says, if you give with your right hand, your left hand shouldn't know about it. It means don't brag about charity that you do. So that was one of the struggles that we [had], but in the nonprofit world, you have to market. You have to tell people about the work that you're doing. You can't just be like, "Oh, we're helping people. No one needs to know about it." You can't grow that way. So, marketing is absolutely key. Just like any, this is a business at the end of the day, and you got to treat it like a business, even though the business is helping people.
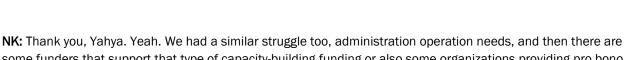
NK: Thank you. I know I wanted to answer, but yeah, you did amazing. Haji and Yahya. That's something that I definitely add. And then Haji mentioned, but definitely learn from other ECBOs' leaders. And then please contact us too. I'm really happy that we can connect with any ECBO leaders, and we put our email address in the chat. We are happy to receive any email. If you have any question, please connect with us. We learn a lot from other ECBO leaders and we continue learning. And then also Switchboard has amazing resources. So if you can go to the Switchboard website, you will be able to see a lot of different resources. There's some good questions in the chat. Maybe one minute. One question to Yahya. Sorry.

In what way did you prioritize an organizational house while also focusing on clients?

NK: Do you want to answer this question, Yahya? I thought it's a great question.

YH: Yeah. One of the things I was thinking about, one of the earlier question was like what was the turning point in our development, right? And I think one of the things is a lot of the time, especially when you are coming out, when the organization is built out of a crisis like ours was, the funding that's really available out there in the community is for service work, like front-end support. And I think the way to prioritize is to go and go after funding to make sure you have administrative support. If you don't have somebody focusing on the organization itself, you are not going to be able to do the service end of it for long. And one of the turning points in our organization was when I came on full-time as president and CEO of the organization.

YH: If I had continued to do my other job full-time and then did this on side, we would not have grown at all. It would've been a one-man team that was just really doing everything they can. So you, like that piece is absolutely essential to have somebody whose job is, and not one person, by the way, like at this point I am struggling so much because I'm the only one. I just hired an administrative assistant that's amazing. But you have to have folks focused on the administrative end. If you don't, you will struggle.

NK: Thank you, Yahya. Yeah. We had a similar struggle too, administration operation needs, and then there are some funders that support that type of capacity-building funding or also some organizations providing pro bono consultation to ECBOs to grow in that area. So that might be a good resource too.

3. Resources and Tools for Sustainable Growth at Each Stage of ECBO Development

Switchboard Resources

NK: Okay. Let's go to the closing of this webinar. I know we didn't have enough time, but thank you so much, Yahya and Haji, for amazing presentation and then sharing your stories. We learned a lot. Before closing, we wanted to share some resources on the Switchboard webinar, I mean website, sorry. The links to those resources are going to be in the chat soon, but it's about developing your board to advance your organization's mission. I see somebody definitely asked this question in the chat. So this is definitely a good resource.

NK: There are a couple of eLearning courses. It might be good for the inspirational forming and growth stage of your organizations. Next page is, also there are toolkits around fundraising. We talked a couple of times about diversifying funding, and so this might be a good tool. We also have another evaluation eLearning course. There's a lot of other resources on the Switchboard website. So we definitely recommend and then learn from the other organizations. Okay. Let's go to the next.

Conclusion

Reviewing Learning Objectives

NK: Now I believe that you are able to describe the five stages of the development cycle of ECBO and an identified strategy for sustainable growth at each stage of ECBO development. Thank you so much, Yahya and Haji, for sharing your organization's strategy, and then apply new tools. This model is a tool that you can assess your organization where you are. And then also the resources on Switchboard for sustainable growth of your organization's development.

Feedback Survey

NK: One more minute, sorry. We have one quick survey. I hope that you can give us one minute more to help us, let me see, help us to help you. Yeah. The quick question, just five questions, and then if you can go to the link in the chat or you can use this QR code you can just answer the quick questions and then that really helps us to improve... and then we can continue providing great webinars or resources on the Switchboard website.

Stay Connected

NK: Again, thank you so much, everybody, for being here. Please stay connected with us. This is our website information, social media. There's amazing tools and resources available for ECBOs and anybody working in this field. So please continue to stay connected with us. And then please email us me, Yahya, Haji. We are very happy to get any email and then connect with you. Thank you so much, everyone. And thank you, Yahya and Haji, for being here. You are amazing.

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YH: Thank you. Thank you.

NK: Thank you. Thank you so much.