Our Mission

CenterLink strengthens, supports, and connects LGBTQ community centers.

Our Vision

CenterLink envisions flourishing LGBTQ centers that nurture thriving, healthy, safe communities.

Our Strategic Goals for FY 2020-2022

- Achieve greater diversity, equity, and inclusion within CenterLink’s operations, governance, and programs.
- Expand leadership development opportunities for chief executives, board members, and fundraising staff.
- Launch at least two new funding pass-through initiatives that build member centers’ capacities.
- Improve communication with and messaging to centers.

Our Priority Issues

Our priority issues include:
- Strengthen Boot Camp
- Expand coaching
- Enhance the Leadership Summit
- Increase diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts
- Identify new pass-through funding opportunities that build the capacity of centers
- Refine membership communication strategy
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Planning Process Description

In 2019, CenterLink completed the final year of its most recent strategic plan after accomplishing many of the plan’s goals. The prior plan guided the organization through significant changes in the past three years, including:

- Transition of a long-term chief executive, followed by a new chief executive with a relatively shorter tenure;
- Completion of a Federal grant that once represented CenterLink’s largest single funding source;
- Growth in membership;
- Expansion of existing leadership development programs; and
- Creation of new programs.

CenterLink launched a strategic planning process with the intention of achieving alignment on two main issues:

- Organization and program level priorities
- Process to determine if a new program opportunity should be pursued

CenterLink engaged Successful Nonprofits’ principal Dolph Ward Goldenburg to facilitate the strategic planning using a participatory planning process. This process relies on a committee to participate in the environmental scan, data analysis, recommendations to the full board, and final plan drafts. The strategic planning committee included:

- Sarah Anderson, board member
- Cece Cox, board member
- Lorri L. Jean, board member & co-founder
- Michelle Kristel, board member
- Paul Moore, board co-chair
- Denise Spivak, interim CEO
- Modesto Tico Valle, board member
- Stacie Walls, board co-chair
- Lora Tucker, CEO (until September)

The committee began the environmental scan in April 2019. This process included interviewing key stakeholders, as well as conducting a multi-year analysis of financials, programs, and fundraising trends.

The committee identified and invited 92 key stakeholders to participate in individual interviews. These interviews were designed to elicit candid feedback on CenterLink’s strengths, challenges, opportunities, and future risks. Those identified stakeholders represented a broad group of constituents: LGBTQ center chief executives, funders, national partners, and community
leaders. The chart below describes the constituencies represented among the 56 people who agreed to be interviewed:

The percentages above total more than 100% because each center chief executive is counted at least twice. Additionally, many people interviewed represent multiple constituencies. For example, someone might represent a funder and serve on the board, or an interviewee might be affiliated with a national partner and serve as the chief executive of a medium size community center.

While conducting these interviews, the committee also carefully reviewed financial trends, program outputs, and program outcomes. The financial analysis identified trends by reviewing income sources and expenses for a seven-year period, and the program review quantified service outputs and outcomes among all years for which data was available, typically since the program was created.

The consultant surveyed CenterLink board members regarding the expectations of board service, recruitment, orientation, and succession planning. He also analyzed board attendance and board member achievement of service expectations, such as meeting attendance and fundraising.
After conducting this comprehensive environmental scan, the committee reviewed the board retreat slide deck and made recommendations to the board for further consideration in the following areas:

- Mission, vision, and core values
- Prospective program evaluation via the drafting of a strategy screen
- Strategic questions requiring board clarification and alignment
- Decision-making regarding continuation or modification of current programs

Following the two-day board retreat, the committee finalized its work on the strategy screen, priority issues, and goals to guide the organization. Using the board feedback, as well as the data and information already assembled, the committee finalized the strategic plan draft. This draft was sent to the board for deliberation and was approved on January 15, 2020.

Environmental Scan Results

Stakeholder Interviews

Every stakeholder offers a unique perspective, and themes emerged when analyzing the results of all stakeholder interviews. The consensus among stakeholders included focusing on the following areas over the next several years:

- Diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Expanding efforts for regional and subject matter gatherings
- Fundraising and financial sustainability of centers
- Marketing and messaging to centers

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI): A wide variety of stakeholders expressed that CenterLink has an opportunity to engage in internal DEI work. Nearly everyone who expressed DEI as an area for future focus felt that cultural competency work with the board and staff, as well as ensuring that all programs and services were inclusive of the diversity found in LGBTQ communities, was essential.

Expanding efforts for regional and subject matter gatherings: Center chief executives who participated in the Leadership Summit or Boot Camp articulated the value they received from the national gatherings. This value included not just the content but also development of a support network of other chief executives. Many wanted additional opportunities for this support for themselves or their leadership staff. The type of regional gathering chief executives requested was varied. Some wanted a gathering of senior leadership among regional centers; others wanted state-wide gatherings for collaboration to advocate on legislative opportunities
and grant funding within their states; and some expressed a need for regional gatherings for their lead program or fundraising staff members.

**Fundraising and financial sustainability:** When the interviewer asked for the single greatest issue that CenterLink could assist with, nearly every center-based stakeholder said “money.” They emphasized the importance of CenterLink building relationships between national funding sources and local centers. They also underscored the need for local centers to receive capacity building opportunities for fundraising, grant writing, grant management, and pass-through funding.

**Marketing and messaging:** Stakeholders felt that CenterLink could improve its marketing and messaging to better communicate the programs offered and their value proposition. This sentiment was echoed across center chief executives, funders, and board members.

While the environmental scan does not replace the program evaluation outlined later in this strategic plan, it does provide insight on the programs that center members use and feel are important. When asked about the use of CenterLink programs, interview respondents indicated that the Summit, Center Advocacy Network, Q-Chat Space, consulting, job boards, and My CenterLink were the most commonly accessed programs. Program usage among the relatively small sample of center members interviewed is described on the following page:

![Use of CenterLink Programs by Centers Interviewed](image)

Of those center members interviewed, the interview tool asked respondents which programs they used and which they felt were important. As part of the analysis, we developed a pivot table to determine how these two variables related to each other. Among responding center members, Boot Camp and coaching had a much higher “importance” rate than “usage” rate,
and these programs have a strong public value perception. Both Q-Chat Space and consulting have a significantly higher “usage” rate than “importance” rate, which means that many centers currently using those two programs do not value them as highly as they do Boot Camp and coaching.

![Use A Program; Feel It's Important](chart)

**Program Analysis: Leadership Development**

By every measure, CenterLink has grown tremendously over the past three years. The foundation of this growth is an expanding membership because members are the natural participants for all programs.

The chart below describes membership growth:
While the organization has witnessed a growth in program and international members, US-based centers that are independent nonprofit organizations continue to be the largest portion of all members. Over the past three years, membership among US centers has grown by more than 11%. This is strong growth for a mature national association. Additionally, CenterLink has recruited more members from among all centers nationwide. In fact, 74% of LGBTQ centers were members in 2016, while 88% of centers in 2018 were members.

Leadership Summit

Since its founding in 2007, the Leadership Summit has enjoyed healthy growth and utilization among members. Initially started for center chief executives, the Summit’s growth has been driven by board attendance and value provided to chief executives, many of whom return year after year. The chart below describes Summit attendance.
While not outlined in the chart above, the Summit had another record-breaking year with 200 participants in 2019!

There is also a correlation between Summit attendance and continued operation of a center. The charts on the following page describe the correlation between the number of Summits attended and whether the center continues to operate:

Of course, correlation does not indicate causation and there are many connected and unconnected variables that determine whether a center can continue to operate. Nevertheless, the Summit provides clear value to centers and can help chief executives and board members build on the variables most likely to create sustainable centers.
Boot Camp

The committee also reviewed outcome data on Boot Camp, a training and support program for new center chief executives. This program, which offers full funding for travel expenses, provides a conference-style training on the skills necessary for chief executive success, including board management and board relations, fundraising, operations, programs, finance, and more.

Boot Camp has grown from just seven participants in 2012 to 18 participants in 2019. This growth is largely due to CenterLink intentionally lifting the cap on the number of Boot Camp participants in 2018.

In 2018, 25% of participants were people of color. People of color represented 26% of participants in 2019. Unfortunately, the organization does not have sufficient demographic data to determine representation of people who are transgender or gender nonbinary. Millennials are more likely to participate in Boot Camp than Generation X or Baby Boomers¹.

Since the purpose of Boot Camp is to help new center executive directors succeed in their role, length of tenure is an important outcome measurement. While multiple factors determine the tenure of a new executive director, one measure of this program’s success is the length of tenure. The chart below describes tenure based on Boot Camp “class year”:

¹ To analyze programs, CenterLink staff compiled data on participants, their demographics, and outcomes. In some instances, staff had to use their best judgment in determining the demographics of a program participant.
Another option for viewing this data is approximate length of tenure of Boot Camp alumni who are no longer in their positions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approximate Tenure of Alumni No Longer In Their Positions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6+ Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still in position</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparing tenure of Boot Camp participants with Movement Advance Project’s (MAP) 2018 LGBTQCommunity Center Survey Report, the tenure for those attending Boot Camp is not significantly different than that of non-attendees. It should be noted, however, that Boot Camp participants are typically from smaller centers that experience higher rates of chief executive transition. Additionally, Boot Camp participants interviewed as part of the environmental scan recommended adding stronger DEI and follow-up components. For these reasons, redesigning Boot Camp was elevated to a priority in the plan.

**Coaching and Technical Assistance**

The committee also reviewed data on coaching, in-person consulting, and remote technical assistance. There is strong output data on these programs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
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CenterLink has not tracked demographic information or outcome data on these programs, and this is a possible area of improvement for the organization. Further, identifying some outcome measures for these programs would benefit their ongoing development.

Program Analysis: Recently Developed Programs

In the past three years, CenterLink has developed several new programs under the rubric of HealthLink and YouthLink:
- Q-Chat Space (YouthLink)
- Howie Price Curriculum Initiative (YouthLink)
- HIV Prevention Capacity Building (HealthLink)
- All of Us Research (HealthLink)
- Online Resources (HealthLink and YouthLink)

Each of these programs has brought funding to CenterLink, and four of the programs have enabled CenterLink to provide funding to member centers. The youth programs were largely informed by a recent YouthLink Needs Assessment that also provides data for local center program development, grant writing efforts, and advocacy.

Since each program is in a nascent stage, outcome data was not available, and a brief summary of each is provided here.

**Q-Chat Space** provides an online platform and funding for seven centers to facilitate online groups through an interactive web chat room known as Q-Chat Space. The website and services were designed with feedback and input from partner centers, and the program provides about $210,000 in funding to the participating centers. CenterLink receives almost $40,000 for its efforts in building the online space and coordinating the efforts of partner centers.

**Howie Price Curriculum Initiative** will develop a curriculum and training focused on LGBTQ youth and young adults who have been victims of abuse or violence. The $700,000, two-year
funding will provide financial support for centers creating and implementing the curriculum, CenterLink staff salaries, and 10% for indirect costs.

**HIV Capacity Building** is a subcontract relationship on a CDC grant that will enable CenterLink to connect centers to state and local health departments as part of a broader capacity building initiative. This opportunity will provide CenterLink with the chance to help centers compete for and obtain HIV-prevention funding at state and local levels. The subcontract is for $200,000 annually for five years, with $33,150 for CenterLink’s indirect costs each year.

**All of Us Research Project** is a research study of the social determinants of health. It seeks to survey a broad and diverse sample of one million Americans, including people who are LGBTQ. CenterLink is a subcontractor responsible for disseminating the survey to select LGBTQ communities. The $400,000 of funding includes $265,000 for six LGBTQ centers and $135,000 for indirect costs. The 2020 renewal will generate $150,000, of which $95,000 will support CenterLink and $55,000 will pass through to three centers.

These pass-through funding programs have enabled CenterLink to become a transformation funder for many centers. In fact, three of the four programs provide technical assistance and capacity building as part of the funding opportunity.

While each program does important work, the board wanted to ensure that future program opportunities are carefully considered in relation to the organization’s strategic vision and framework using a consistent process. For this reason, the committee developed a Program Strategy Screen, which is presented in another section.

**Program Analysis: LGBTQ Center Action Network**

Facing the possibility of rollbacks in national LGBTQ protections, CenterLink started the Center Action Network (CAN) in 2017. This program seeks to protect and champion policies, social services, health care, programming, and funding vital to LGBTQ communities. Toward that end, it advises registered centers of threats and changes to policies and programs affecting LGBTQ people by offering simple ways to take action.

CAN started in 2017 with 16 participating centers and grew to 34 centers by the end of 2019. Each of these centers received newsletters and action alerts informing them of proposed policy changes and upcoming legislation. As evidenced by the following examples, CAN has a proven track record of driving public comment on important issues:
- Opposition to DHHS’s Conscience and Religious Freedom Division generated 2,707 comments (1.5% of all comments collected).
- Urging the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide medically necessary health care to transgender veterans generated 2,003 comments (32% of all comments collected).
- Opposition to Administration attempts to undermine the Health Care Rights Law (7,997 comments generated, representing 22% of all letters).

Financial Analysis

Between FY 2013 and FY 2019, the organization’s income has increased in tandem with programming. CenterLink had a surplus each year, with the exception of 2016, and that year’s deficit represented less than 3% of the total budget. While the CenterLink budget has more than tripled over a seven-year period, the net unrestricted assets have only doubled.

A chart of income, expense, and unrestricted net assets is below:

The growth in revenue was also accompanied by a significant shift in the revenue model. Specifically, federal grants as a percentage of the total budget grew for four consecutive years...
(2013 to 2016) and then decreased for four consecutive years (from 2016 to 2019). By 2019, CenterLink was receiving no funding directly from the federal government. Achieving revenue growth despite the loss of federal funding was the result of “other grants” (see the chart below). These grants primarily supported new programs and are from foundations or subcontracts within larger projects.

Revenue sources as a percentage of total budget are described below:

Just as revenue sources shifted, the funded programs also changed during this period. While unrestricted membership revenue remained relatively steady as a percent of budget, most of the grants and contributions were in support of new programming.
Strategic Goals

The planning process led to the development of strategic goals to achieve between 2020 and 2022. These goals are summarized below:

**Strategic Goal: Achieve greater diversity, equity, and inclusion**
- Assess organization’s current DEI efforts
- Provide training for board and staff
- Implement new policies and procedures
- Ensure programs are diverse, equitable, and inclusive

**Strategic Goal: Expand leadership development opportunities**
- Offer an additional institute day at the Leadership Summit
- Develop an additional conference for center staff leadership who are one level below the chief executive
- Redesign Boot Camp to increase group cohesion and provide meaningful post-conference opportunities
- Develop a fee-for-service coaching program

**Strategic Goal: Launch at least two new funding pass-through initiatives**

**Strategic Goal: Improve communication with and messaging to centers**
- Develop and implement a membership communication plan
- Build program awareness among members
- Refresh CenterLink’s brand
Strategic Goals and Annual Objectives
The strategic planning process facilitated the development of the following annual objectives for each area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Goal</th>
<th>FY 2020 Objectives</th>
<th>FY 2021 Objectives</th>
<th>FY 2022 Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achieve greater diversity, equity, and inclusion.</td>
<td>Engage diversity consultant(s) to conduct an organizational assessment and determine opportunities for greater inclusion.</td>
<td>Implement DEI plan.</td>
<td>Continue implementing DEI plan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expand leadership development opportunities.</td>
<td>Expand the Summit with additional day to include half-day programs or institutes.</td>
<td>Test launch one regional Summit.</td>
<td>Expand to an additional regional Summit based on lessons learned in 2021.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Redesign Boot Camp to include size, location, curriculum, and follow-up program.</td>
<td>Identify new Boot Camp funding for 2022.</td>
<td>Launch coaching program as a fee-for-service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Launch at least two new funding pass-through initiatives.</td>
<td>Identify at least three center-based program opportunities that foundations might fund.</td>
<td>Launch at least one new funding pass-through initiative that meets the strategy screen.</td>
<td>Launch at least one new funding pass-through initiative that meets the strategy screen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify centers to collaboratively create the program model.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approach funders.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve communication with and messaging to centers.</td>
<td>Develop a membership communication plan.</td>
<td>Launch plan.</td>
<td>Refresh brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Begin implementing the communication plan.</td>
<td>Refresh brand.</td>
<td>Redesign website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review branding and marketing.</td>
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</table>
Program Strategy Screen

This strategic plan calls for developing at least two new pass-through initiatives. The organization will assess new initiatives using the following strategy screen. The screen is to be used as a guide for deliberation and decision-making, but it is not a measuring stick that independently determines whether a new program can move forward. Board deliberation and approval remain essential components of assessing any prospective program.

1. **Mission Alignment.** This relates to whether an initiative or program furthers CenterLink’s mission.

2. **Priority Issue.** As part of the planning process, CenterLink identified these issues as being the highest priorities for its work with centers.

3. **Priority Population.** The process identified the following priority populations on which to focus its work and ensure the organization does not become a provider of direct services in competition with member centers. The inclusion of people of color, as well as transgender, gender nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people, relates to building a diverse and inclusive CenterLink and community center movement.

4. **Leverage Competitive Advantage.** CenterLink is most competitive when it: convenes member centers to address issues; provides capacity building to member centers; and brokers additional financial resources for member centers.
5. **Financial Impact.** CenterLink believes that some programs will have a positive financial impact, but also understands that other programs may have a negative financial impact yet be incredibly important to provide. While financial impact will not be the same for each program, this strategy screen recognizes that determining the required impact necessary to initiate or end a program is the purview of the board.

6. **Visibility.** The CenterLink board will consider visibility in determining whether to start a program.

7. **Staff Capacity.** Determining if CenterLink has the staff talent and bandwidth to implement a project is an important consideration.

8. **Decision.** The decision to initiate or end a program is entirely the board’s. A staff member, constituent, or board member might make the case that a program meets the seven criteria, but only the board can approve program initiation, expansion, or termination through the allocation of resources.