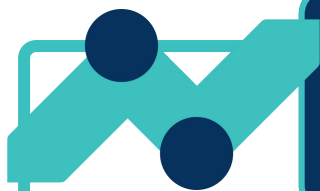


Room to Lead: Continued Support and Opportunity Matter

October 2026 Research Brief



For the Data Nerds

Methodology Summary

This study draws on the **Leadership Institute's longitudinal annual survey** data collected from 2023 through 2026. The dataset includes 448 graduates and 668 possible participant-year records; 639 records from 430 graduates contained at least one annual survey response. Because some graduates completed the survey in more than one year, we averaged their available annual responses to create one participant-level score for each measure. This ensured that a graduate who responded in several years did not receive more weight than someone who responded once. The number of graduates included varied by analysis: **291 graduates had sufficient data for the employer-investment analysis, and 278 had sufficient data for the opportunities-to-lead analysis.**

We measured **continued employer investment** using 14 professional-development and disability-field activities, including conference participation, leadership training, certifications, professional memberships, presentations, publications or applied research, and service on disability-related boards or committees. We counted an activity as supported when the graduate reported that their organization provided funding, work time, or another form of sponsorship. Graduates were classified as receiving greater employer support when they averaged four or more supported activities across their available survey years.

We measured **opportunities to lead** using ten questions about graduates' roles, influence, contributions, creativity, decision-making, and professional growth. We rated each question on a three-point scale, and defined strong opportunities as an average score of at least 2.8, meaning nearly all responses were at the highest level. We defined **high organizational impact** as an average rating of 8 or higher on a 10-point scale for the significance of the organizational change graduates reported influencing.

The analysis compared the percentage of graduates reporting high organizational impact across the employer-support and leadership-opportunity groups. It also examined relationships among continuous scores for employer support, opportunities to lead, and organizational impact.

Although the study uses longitudinal data collected across four years, this specific analysis summarizes each graduate's available responses and examines participant-level associations; it does not measure within-person change or establish that employer support or leadership opportunities caused greater impact. ***The findings should therefore be interpreted as evidence of meaningful relationships among continued investment, opportunities to lead, and reported organizational impact.***

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