

WORKPLACES AT THEIR BEST

*Creating Strengths-Based Cultures to
Catalyze Engagement, Positive
Relationships, and Expanded Performance*

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

& chief programs and services officer

REALIZING THE BEST IN INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS

What an extraordinary year it has been! Fueled by a shared vision to catalyze human flourishing and building upon a successful long-term collaborative partnership, the VIA Institute on Character and Mayerson Academy (MA) merged into a single organization in 2023. This new entity integrates VIA's global leadership in the science of character strengths with MA's proven expertise in learning and program design, delivering innovative initiatives that translate science into practice for impactful results in workplaces, schools, and communities. With these essential components now unified under the VIA Institute on Character and led by CEO, Jeff Levy, MD, we are well-positioned to fulfill our mission to advance the science and application of character strengths to realize the best in individuals, organizations, and communities.

As VIA extends its reach globally with strengths-based programs and services, we remain passionately committed to our

hometown of Cincinnati. Through our Strong Workplace Solutions (SWS) Initiative, we continue to grow positive, capacity-building impact within Cincinnati's nonprofit community. Supported by our generous funders and partners and in collaboration with nearly 80 organizations across healthcare, community development, arts and culture, higher education, social services, and city government, the SWS initiative has consistently demonstrated significant positive outcomes for Cincinnati's nonprofit sector. By fostering engagement, performance, and positive workplace culture, SWS has encouraged organizational transformation that amplifies the positive impact these organizations can achieve.

Our commitment to continuous improvement has driven innovations in the SWS model since its inception. In this report, I am delighted to share our history and innovations over time, the results from our most recent cohort of eight organizations, and to introduce

“Transforming how we experience work, can begin a positive ripple that has the potential to not only change our workplaces, but our families, our communities, and beyond. Taken together, these seemingly small efforts can be world changing.”

WORKPLACES AT THEIR BEST

This innovative initiative responds to the expressed needs of workplaces, helping them leverage their strengths to achieve outcomes and unlock new possibilities for their organizations. The report concludes with a brief glimpse into the future of VIA's work with organizations, locally and globally.

We are so grateful and honored to have the opportunity to do this work, and we are proud of what we've accomplished in collaboration with so many committed colleagues and partners. We look forward to developing future innovations that support and magnify the good work of our community, elevating our beloved city and the world!



DR. JILLIAN COPPLEY

President & Chief Programs and Services Officer



Our Shared History

- 1992 Mayerson Academy is founded
- 1998 VIA Institute on Character is founded
- 2015 Mayerson Academy launches Thriving Learning Communities (TLC), a strengths-based SEL program in schools
- 2018 Strong Cincinnati is created to build the capacity of Greater Cincinnati nonprofits through the science and application of character strengths
- 2019 Strong Cincinnati becomes Strong Workplace Solutions
- 2020 Hub24 is launched to reach 200+ SWS and TLC organizations with online resources and learning experiences
- 2023 Mayerson Academy merges with VIA Institute on Character
- Eight organizations form the first Workplaces at Their Best Learning Cohort – a customized multi-month program to develop strengths-based organizational cultures. VIA survey takers total more than 30 million people worldwide.
- 2024 The Workplaces at Their Best learning modules, implementation guide, and certification process becomes available to the entire Strong Network and the world



GROWING TOGETHER

TWO ORGANIZATIONS: A HISTORY OF MILESTONES

Since its founding in 1992, Mayerson Academy broke new ground in professional learning. The Academy was launched in collaboration with Cincinnati community and school system leaders to bring world class professional learning to Cincinnati Public Schools.

In 2015, as part of a reinvention of its program and services portfolio, the Academy became a sought-after leader in the application of the science of character strengths to develop social and emotional learning competencies.

Building on MA's success in education and professional learning, Strong Cincinnati was launched in 2018 to build capacity in local nonprofits to create strengths-based cultures characterized by engagement, performance, and well-being. Strong Cincinnati became Strong Workplace Solutions a year later

and has now supported 3000+ nonprofit professionals in nearly 80 organizations as they mobilize what is best in themselves and each other to create optimal impact for those they serve.

VIA Institute on Character (VIA) was founded in 1998 in Cincinnati with the goal of providing people with ready access to resources to build good lives for themselves and others through the application of scientific knowledge about character strengths.

Based on the work of a global team of 50 scientists and led by Dr. Martin Seligman, the VIA survey has been taken by 33 million people in more than 140 countries and the positive impact of the science of Character Strengths has been captured in more than 1000 research studies.

“The more organizations that VIA Institute on Character educates on the importance of strengths, the more naturally positive outcomes can flow into the communities and people that we serve.”

– COO, Cincinnati Nonprofit, Leader

TRANSLATING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

A PROVEN MODEL TO CREATE REAL CHANGE

Leveraging the most advanced research in organizational development and change, our work is founded on the deep understanding that culture forms the center of the flywheel driving every organizational action. From this point, culture can either propel or hinder all organizational efforts including vision, strategy, and operations.

The organizational culture nucleus comprises individuals, relationships, and teams, whose functional capacity directly impacts the results in the outer circle. VIA's organizational model impacts this core by actively engaging participants in understanding, recognizing, and applying character strengths at the individual, relationship, and team levels. This engagement fosters a core flywheel that turns the wheels faster towards success.

"Building a strong culture is what builds a strong organization."

– Simon Sinek



To get to the flywheel at the center, we work at the individual, relationship, team, and organizational level to know, see, and apply character strengths.

Knowing strengths includes building a shared language for personal and collective understanding.

Seeing strengths shifts perspectives from what is wrong to what is strong, expands perspective, and makes way for new possibilities.

Applying strengths activates the best in teams and organizations resulting in increased engagement, performance, and positive relationships.





You at Your Best

WORKPLACES AT THEIR BEST FOR ORGANIZATIONS



CORE LEARNING

In response to recurring requests for digital resources and courses to sustain and support the work of positive culture transformation, VIA has developed its own online learning platform. This platform houses a powerful array of comprehensive, interactive, applied and adaptive courses, tools and resources. With the Workplaces at Their Best Learning Paths, leaders and managers can use the courses as reference for group learning or individuals can engage online independently, building expertise in the following areas.



Work Relationships at Their Best

WORKPLACE AT THEIR BEST FOR ORGANIZATIONS



YOU AT YOUR BEST

Discover the best within yourself, uncover your “why”, and apply your strengths to increase engagement and performance.



Teams at Their Best

WORKPLACES AT THEIR BEST FOR ORGANIZATIONS



WORK RELATIONSHIPS AT THEIR BEST

Build capacity to know and be known authentically, build skill in creating psychological safety and learn to utilize tools to advance even the most challenging conversations.



Leaders at Their Best

WORKPLACES AT THEIR BEST FOR ORGANIZATIONS



TEAMS AT THEIR BEST

Expand awareness of team functioning, team roles, team preferences and team culture to illuminate opportunities and gaps for increased collective engagement, relationships, and performance.

LEADERS AT THEIR BEST

Define your authentic leadership style and build skill in providing strengths-based performance review and talent development.



Change at Its Best

WORKPLACES AT THEIR BEST FOR ORGANIZATIONS



CHANGE AT ITS BEST

Apply a strengths-based approach to the implementation of change, care for the people experiencing change, and adopt self-care and monitoring habits as a leader of change.

INNOVATION THROUGH ITERATION

REALIZING THE BEST IN INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS

With the launch of this work in 2018, our commitment has been to translate the best of global research in learning design, organizational development and the science of character strengths to build the capacity of organizations to thrive. While grounded in research, innovations have arisen from action research with partners in the midst of change as well as program evaluation research. Through focus groups, interviews and feedback surveys designed to understand perceptions of quality of resources and experiences, resulting changes in knowledge, and expectations for action, our model for intervention has been continuously refined and innovated.

Based on this continuous improvement process, the current program model includes four essential components:

Cohort Based Learning

Intentional Learning Community Development

Resources, Tools and Courses on VIA's Online Learning Platform

Customized On-Site Expert Consulting

RIGOROUS STUDY. PROVEN IMPACT. REAL CHANGE.

DOCUMENTING CHANGE

Research evaluation studies of VIA's strengths-based work in the organizations conducted in the last several years have consistently evidenced positive impact. Beginning with Strong Cincinnati and now Workplaces at Their Best, evaluations indicate positive outcomes such as changes in attitudes, knowledge, and actions, but even more importantly, the work shows positive impact.

74%+ of Workplaces at Their Best cohort participants report increased engagement, improved relationships, and better work performance.

The most recent program evaluation was led by a University of Cincinnati team along with additional consultants and involved a statistically powerful sample across eight organizations engaged with VIA over eight months. Both qualitative (focus groups, interviews, observation, artifact review) and quantitative (pre/post impact survey, benchmark assessments) data were collected. Analysis methods involved comparing pre- and post-measures using various parametric and nonparametric tests, including means comparisons (t-tests) analysis of variance (ANOVA) and ordinal regression to determine the effects of participation, strengths use frequency, strengths use impact and other demographic factors on the following outcomes: work relationships, work engagement and work performance. A selection of findings is included on the following page.

The model has been implemented with organizations which are:

Place-based

Hybrid

Virtual

Across a diverse array of sectors:

Community development

Arts and culture

Higher education

Social services

Behavioral health

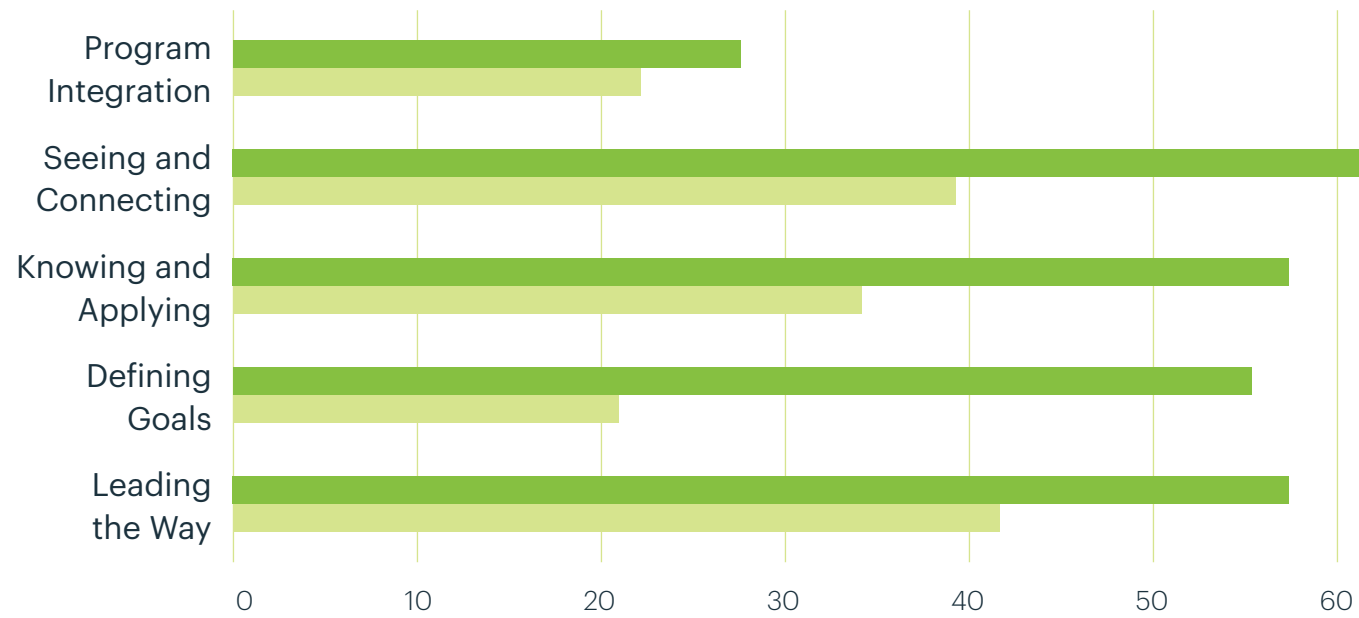
Community services

City government

FINDING #1

pre-assessment post assessment

All organizational made progress on all benchmark categories.



FINDING #2

Strengths use frequency went up in all 7 measured categories.

26%

increase in the number of individuals who achieved the results they wanted using their character strengths

FINDING #3

Strengths use accounted for significant variance in workplace experiences.

27%

of the variance in work relationships

23%

of the variance in work engagement

31%

of the variance in work performance

FINDING #4

Strengths use was significantly and strongly tied to positive outcomes in all areas. With each unit increase in strengths use, participants were:

232%

more likely to show an increase in their work relationship score

257%

more likely to show an increase in their work engagement score

296%

more likely to show an increase in their work performance score

What Our Partners Say About Us

“Understanding and using my character strengths has empowered me to lead more courageously, and to speak honestly and contribute more effectively to my team. I feel better about my place in the organization.”

“It has opened up opportunities for recognizing and celebrating our successes rather than focusing on only the negative things that didn’t go as planned. I feel like we congratulate each other more, which helps overall with office morale and sense of meaning/fulfillment.”

“This has made a huge impact on our organization. We were in a very difficult place with the agency, and this allowed us to start to shift our team by focusing on the positive strengths that we each bring to the agency. This made everyone feel like they were making a difference.”

“One of the best benefits of the program are the resources that they provided. Our team really enjoy utilizing those resources, and it’s helped to create a positive culture within our organization, in team meetings and in our one on one check ins.”

“It’s made a huge difference in our organization. We started from ground zero. We had never even taken the VIA Character Strengths Survey...With our small team, we’ve been able to get to know each other and have strengths based language to then really have the ability to have positive conversations around difficult topics within the organization and in the work that we’re doing.”

“What was most attractive for me was how could this potentially help our staff throughout ... changes. How can it help them as individuals, and how could it help us as teams as well as an organization... We wanted to create a culture, to be intentional about crafting a culture, that would transform the way our staff showed up every day, so that they could show up as their best and give the best service they could to the clients that we serve.”

THE FUTURE FOR CINCINNATI AND BEYOND



GLOBAL FLOURISHING

To live VIA's vision to catalyze global human flourishing, we will bring the tools, resources and learning experiences developed and refined in Cincinnati to the world.

Individuals will be able to access single courses on critical topics such as strengths-based leadership and change, or they can access the entire Workplaces at Their Best for Individuals Learning Path.

Team managers and workplace leaders will be able to access the Workplaces at Their Best for Organizations Path for their organization and utilize a comprehensive implementation guide to plan for change. They might even apply to be acknowledged as a Certified VIA Strengths-Based Workplace.

Organizational development consultants will be able to engage in an intensive learning and certification experience to lead strengths-based transformation for their clients.

FROM RESEARCH BACK TO PRACTICE

Based on the study of this year's work, future Cincinnati-based programs will include the following innovations:

QUARTERLY ONBOARDING

New employee onboarding for all current and former nonprofit VIA partners.

ONGOING COHORT LEARNING AND LEARNING COMMUNITY

Quarterly in-person gatherings for the most recent and future cohorts to address problems of practice and foster continued, cross-organizational learning.

ONGOING AND JUST-IN-TIME CONSULTING

Comprehensive consulting for new cohorts and targeted, as needed, support for the most recent cohort.

IMPLEMENTATION MANUAL

Comprehensive, step-by-step digital guide for workplaces and consultants including planning, communication, learning, and implementation tools.



Whether in Cincinnati or around the world, the success factors surfaced below in our evaluation findings will continue to be designed into the work.

Leadership by Two

Both influence of leadership and leadership in execution and implementation.

Customized Intervention

Adaptable implementation to meet the unique and dynamic needs of individual organizations.

Focus on Doing

Resources that build knowledge efficiently with the focus on application.

Learning Together

The cohort model with intentional effort to build a learning community across organizations.

Well Defined Pathway

Clear strategic priorities, roadmap, and measures.

Deep Consultant Expertise

A combination of deep grounding in character strengths, learning design, change, and organizational development.

Just in Time Support

Utilizing ad hoc expertise after the work has internal sustainability.

**WE ARE SO PROUD
AND SO GRATEFUL
TO WORK WITH
AMAZING LEADERS.
THANK YOU!**

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CURRENT PARTNERS



CURRENT FUNDERS



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Mayerson Family Foundations

Western & Southern Financial Fund

P&G Fund

JOIN US IN CATALYZING GLOBAL HUMAN FLOURISHING

VIA Institute on Character is dedicated to advancing the science and application of character strengths to realize the best in individuals, organizations, and communities.

OUR VISION IS TO CREATE A WORLD WHERE EVERY PERSON CAN THRIVE AND REACH THEIR FULLEST POTENTIAL, BUT WE CANNOT DO THE WORK ALONE.



Your Support Matters

Our Character Strengths Survey is a free resource, so why contribute?

Your contribution will:

- **Impact Lives:**

Your donation directly supports our work on mindfulness, wellbeing, mental health initiatives, and other positive programs and services.

- **Be the Catalyst:**

Join us in creating positive change within workplaces and communities.

- **Invest in Tomorrow:**

Every donation contributes to the betterment, health, and happiness of individuals, workplaces, and communities.

- **Support cutting-edge research:**

VIA continues to delve into the science of character strengths to uncover insights that can transform lives.

- **Develop impactful programs:**

VIA continues to create resources and tools that empower individuals, workplaces and communities to activate their strengths.

Your generous support can help us continue our mission and expand our impact. Together, we can make a significant difference in promoting human flourishing worldwide.

Donate Now

<https://www.viacharacter.org/about/donate>

VIA Institute on Character welcomes opportunities for sponsorship and partnership, visit our website to find out more.

<https://www.viacharacter.org>

Thank you for your interest and commitment. We appreciate you!