

## Section 3: Courageous Conversations

### Pick a scenario:

- OPTION ONE: SUCCESSION PLANNING.** Your organization's beloved and dedicated E.D. has been leading the organization for 23 years. There is no succession plan in place. In the 2-3 times in recent years that someone has brought up the topic of 'What will happen when the E.D. leaves?', the E.D. has gotten defensive or changed the subject. During a recent illness, the E.D. took an eight-week medical leave. During that time, it was very apparent to the board and staff how heavily the organization relies on the E.D. It was difficult to fill the E.D.'s shoes during this absence because appropriate systems don't appear to be in place.
- OPTION TWO: FUNDING CUTS.** Your organization has an operating budget of \$500,000. It just lost \$100,000 in funding for the coming year because a major funder changed its funding criteria. The E.D. has revised the budget to make up for this loss by expanding earned revenue by \$60K and individual giving by \$40K. The E.D. appears stressed and burned out, and the last board meeting was very tense. Afterward, several board members had a long conversation in the parking lot. They voiced concerns that the new revenue goals are unrealistic, and that spending cuts may be necessary (which, of course, involve cuts to staff and programs.)

### There are three roles for each scenario:

- A board member (decide if it's the board chair or another board member)
- Executive Director
- Observer (or two observers, if you're in a group of 4)

**Set the stage:** Establish a shared purpose. For example, "I have some ideas about \_\_\_\_\_. This may be a sensitive conversation, but I know we both are really committed to \_\_\_\_\_, and I think it will help a lot if we can talk about it."

### Practice:

S.T.A.T.E. <sup>1</sup>	Examples	Practice: phrases for your scenario	Observer notes
Share your facts	I've noticed that...		
Tell your story	When that happens, I start to think...		
Ask for other's paths	I'm wondering how you see this...		
Talk tentatively	Is it possible...		
Encourage testing	What am I missing here...		

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Crucial Conversations Skills*, by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan and Switzler. (2011)