



HRI Leadership Academy

An AmericanHort & HRI Initiative



Leading On All Levels



A Business & Leadership Development Program

The **HRI Leadership Academy** guides participants through a concentrated curriculum designed to develop the skills the green industry needs to perform better, grow faster, and prepare for the future.





AmericanHort and the Horticultural Research Institute (HRI) are committed to helping green industry businesses perform better, grow faster, and prepare for the future. A healthy and robust industry is one with connected leaders that have a positive impact on their businesses, their industry, and their communities.

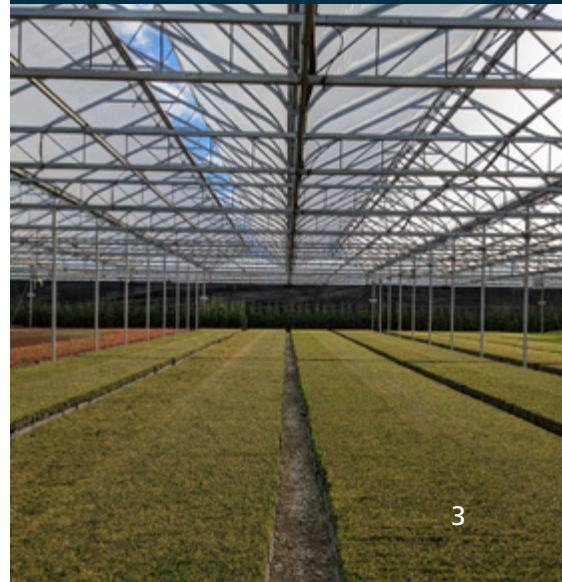
Partnering together, AmericanHort and HRI have created the HRI Leadership Academy, **an advanced program designed for rapid leadership development and real-world results.** Strong leaders and strong ongoing leadership development are mission critical for green industry businesses.

Managed through HRI and generously supported by AmericanHort, the HRI Leadership Academy addresses the industry's need for a leadership development program that serves both current and future leaders through training, coaching, and access to a growing network of industry leaders.



"As the premier green industry association, we are excited to address the need for strong business leaders at all levels of management. The HRI Leadership Academy will help develop the industry's future leaders and hone current leaders. Investing in this program helps ensure the green industry thrives for generations to come."

—Ken Fisher
President & CEO, AmericanHort



Who Should Participate?

Leadership is an action, not a position.

The HRI Leadership Academy is a program that prepares you for leadership challenges ahead, no matter what your role. We develop leaders on all levels, from top-achieving leaders to top-performing talent.

What you will gain from the HRI Leadership Academy:

SENIOR LEADERS:

Enhance leadership skills to prepare for the future growth of your company

Hone strategies to guide your business and influence the industry

Refine your management skills and refresh leadership strategies

Engage with leaders on a national level

EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONALS:

Assess and build upon professional skills to take on increased leadership responsibilities within your company and the industry

Expand your understanding of regional and national industry trends and challenges

Increase your business expertise to include finance, leadership, strategy, communication, and more

Acquire leadership skills to help you drive and manage change in your organization

TOP-PERFORMING TALENT AT ALL LEVELS:

Develop your ability to lead

Increase your understanding of foundational business principles

Develop your ability to collaborate and lead cross-functional teams

Accelerate your path to a leadership role in your business, the industry, and your community





Leadership On All Levels

Leaders exist in all segments of the green industry, in all positions within a company, and all have unique strengths.

If you are part of the green industry supply chain, you qualify.

BUSINESS SEGMENTS:

Arborists • Allied Suppliers • Garden Retailers • Greenhouse Operations • Landscape Design/Build and Maintenance Companies • Nursery Operations

Developing leaders throughout an organization embodies best practices and strengthens a company's capacity for growth and change. The HRI Leadership Academy welcomes all roles.

PROFESSIONAL ROLES:

Accountants • Consultants • Designers • General Managers • Head Growers • Human Resources Officers • Logistics • Marketing and Communications • Merchandisers • Operations • Owners • Presidents • Production Experts • Purchasing • R&D • Sales • Section Growers

Good leaders leverage their strengths, whichever categories they may encompass. The HRI Leadership Academy is designed to build upon the varying strengths of participants.

PERSONAL STRENGTHS:

Creative • Tactical • Advocacy-minded • Visionary • Strategic Thinker • Encouraging • Communicator • Research and Data-oriented

Program Benefits

Professionals consistently rate personal growth and accomplishment as top motivators.

The HRI Leadership Academy provides participants the opportunity to grow personally and professionally, through leadership and business skills training, engagement with a green industry network, and completion of a real-world culminating project.

Participants will:

DEVELOP

essential tools to enhance business management, leadership skills, and strengths

ACQUIRE

strong communication skills, critical thinking skills, and people management skills

DEMONSTRATE

ability to deal effectively, competently, and confidently with complicated issues and challenges that effect the business and the industry

RESPOND

more proactively to challenges that effect your business and the industry

LEARN

to convert a vision into action through effective and appropriate planning, communication and motivation

STRENGTHEN

effectiveness in organizing and utilizing teams

UNDERSTAND,

articulate, and confront different perspectives on issues or challenges

BUILD

and participate in a broad industry leadership network

Green industry businesses understand that effective leadership development requires a sustained commitment to leadership training to keep top leaders performing at high levels and to encourage new leaders to grow their skills.

The HRI Leadership Academy provides businesses opportunity to:

RETAIN top talent

RECOGNIZE and build leaders for the business and the overall industry

DEVELOP talent to keep companies on the cutting edge of change and growth

IDENTIFY and train potential successors

ARM talent with tools to become better leaders, coaches, and decision makers

DELIVER a hands-on learning environment where leaders explore real challenges for green industry businesses



"I am a firm believer in the importance of developing leaders in our industry. This academy is an exceptional opportunity for leaders on all levels who are committed to their business and our industry. Graduates will learn best business practices that can help them be more successful in their own company, as well as be contributors to their community, which in turn helps the entire industry."

—Jon Reelhorn
Belmont Nursery, CA





"The HRI Leadership Academy improved my leadership ability, industry knowledge, business acumen, and industry relationships. The relationships created during the class by common goals and shared experiences allow for a better understanding of the education material and beyond. The education was excellent, the homework was thoughtful, and the speakers' mastery of the subjects was unmistakable."

—**Eric McKie**
Green Oak, MS



"The HRI Leadership Academy was a game changer for me from the very start. The homework assignments for the first session were perfectly aligned with our class on business structure. It was a wakeup call to me that there is still an opportunity for our business to focus on guiding principles, mission, vision, and values despite operating an established 85-year-old nursery."

—**Christine Fortman**
Berridge Nurseries, AZ

Program Outline

The HRI Leadership Academy is a **one-year program** consisting of in-person training sessions, virtual online classes and meetings, and a **LEAD Project** and presentation.

The four in-person training sessions are focused on hands-on learning and are professionally taught by leading business and leadership coaches and green industry subject matter experts. Classroom training provides a structured learning environment where participants will learn new concepts and skills supported with reinforcement tactics, such as group discussions and individual/group exercises, throughout the session. Participants will leave each session with an assignment to apply what they've learned in class to their day-to-day work environment.

Between in-person sessions, participants will continue individual and small group work and attend one virtual classroom session. Virtual classroom sessions follow this real-world application to provide participants the opportunity to share what they've learned with one another, discuss their successes and challenges, and garner strategies for going forward. The experience culminates with small group projects focusing on a real-world green industry business challenge. Groups will present their project at the final in-person session at Cultivate.

The program follows a **LEARN > REINFORCE > APPLY** curriculum.

Participants will **LEARN** new skills in class, **REINFORCE** their learnings in between sessions, and **APPLY** the concepts in a culminating LEAD Project.

The HRI Leadership Academy offers training in the following fundamental business management and leadership concepts:



Assessing Business Strategy



Leadership & People Management



**Numbers & Advocacy—
Driving Success**



**Managing the
Value Chain**

Class of 2027 Schedule

Application Timeline

November 14, 2025

Phase One Application Opens

Consists of Resume, Statement of Interest, Application

February 6, 2026

Phase One Application Deadline

March 2, 2026

Phase Two Application Opens

Consists of Written Essay, Statement of Commitment, Two Professional Recommendation Letters

March 15, 2026

Phase Two Application Closes

April 20–30, 2026

Finalist Interviews

Consists of One-Hour Candidate Interview with Review Panel via Zoom

May 11, 2026

Participant Notification

Class of 2027 Program Timeline

August 2026

Pre-Coursework Begins

September 15–16, 2026

Session 1: Kickoff & Strategy

Philadelphia, PA

October 2026

Session 1: Reinforcement Webinar (Date TBD)

Individual and Group Work

November 10–11, 2026

Session 2: Leadership & People Management

Dallas, TX

December 2026

Session 2 Reinforcement Webinar (Date TBD)

Individual and Group Work

January 26–27, 2027

Session 3: Numbers & Advocacy

Washington, DC

February 2027

Session 3: Reinforcement Webinar (Date TBD)

Individual and Group Work

March–May 2027

Individual and Group Work

June 1–2, 2027

Session 4: Value Chain & Negotiation

Location TBD (Potential Locations: Raleigh, Nashville, Charlotte, Atlanta)

July 10–11, 2027

LEAD Project Presentations and Class Graduation

Columbus, OH, in conjunction with Cultivate'27

***Dates and Locations Subject to Change**

Time Commitment & Advisors

Participants spend an average of:

- **10 hours per month** on class preparation
- **2** classroom training days, plus travel time, for **4** in-person sessions
- **40–45 hours** total time for culminating LEAD Project
- Attendance at Cultivate with commitments for class, presentations, and celebration

Participants receive:

- An average of **2–4 hours per month** per group of advisory services from course facilitators
- Individual access to course facilitators for help with course topics, homework, skills improvement, and suggestions for further development



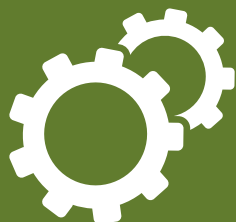
Session Details

SESSION 1

Assessing Business Strategy

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Competitive Positioning: Explore key business principles necessary to effectively grow your business and remain competitive in today's environment.



KEY CONCEPTS

- Introduction to leadership
- Understanding company strategy, mission, vision, values, and culture
- Value proposition
- Competitive positioning
- Market forces
- Industry trends
- Research trends

SESSION 2

Leadership & People Management

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Influence: Improve your leadership and people management maturity with a focus on small to medium business environments and leading teams typical to those environments.



KEY CONCEPTS

- Fundamentals of business leadership vs. people management
- Making the transition from “doer” to “leader”
- Finding and retaining talent
- Identifying strengths to help employees become more successful
- Communicating effectively, including conflict resolution
- Setting a good management cadence
- Creating an effective leadership style
- Civic leadership

SESSION 3

Numbers & Advocacy— Driving Success

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Financial Acumen & Advocacy Acuity:

Understand business operations, including KPIs, cash flow, growth initiative prioritization, and the overall ability to judge business success. Understand our political system and learn ways leaders can enhance their influence and effectiveness.



KEY CONCEPTS

- Reading an income statement and understanding cash flow
- Understanding inventory velocity and return on assets
- Determining and prioritizing growth initiatives
- Judging business success: financial and non-financial KPIs
- Understanding the political system and how government decisions impact business environments
- Advocacy tips and tools for positively influencing policy and politics to enhance business success

SESSION 4

Managing the Value Chain

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Effectiveness & Efficiency: Learn effective techniques for marketing, sales, and operations, including successfully managing supplier and customer relationships and negotiating to win.



KEY CONCEPTS

- Managing vendors and suppliers
- Understanding buyer dynamics
- Driving sales
- Building and leveraging brands/marketing
- Negotiating



LEAD Project Details

The **LEAD Project** is the culmination of the HRI Leadership Academy. We know that participants become better leaders when they learn from current, real-world opportunities and challenges versus applying concepts to a theoretical case study. Developed over the course of the program, the **LEAD Project** provides participants (typically in groups of three to four) with a safe environment to explore ideas to better their businesses and the industry.

Teams examine a real-world issue or opportunity facing businesses or the industry and recommend a business or industry improvement, investment, or solution. In the end, participants will leave with hands-on, relevant experience with innovative and realistic ideas for business and industry consideration.

LEAD Project

Learn and research an issue

Engage with team and others

Adopt a position and solution

Deliver final plan and recommendations



The LEAD Project development process consists of:

- Research the situation: data-driven where possible, interviews with experts encouraged
- Pose a hypothesis
- Assess the business or industry impact of possible solutions
- Make the case for change
- Recommend a solution and course of action
- Receive program and industry coaching throughout
- Presentations given at Cultivate'27



Program Application & Acceptance

Application Process

PHASE ONE:

Candidates complete a brief written application online, including background information, and a resume.

**Deadline to apply:
February 6.**

Start your application at
HRILeadershipAcademy.org

PHASE TWO:

Following committee review, selected candidates will advance to the second phase of the application process. This includes a more detailed written application, two letters of recommendation, and additional consent forms. Candidates will be asked to confirm that they have a documented personal and employer commitment or plan for the time required both professionally and personally to participate in the HRI Leadership Academy.

**Deadline to complete:
March 15.**

PHASE THREE:

Following a committee review, finalists will be invited to participate in the final phase—a video interview with the HRI Leadership Academy review panel. Interviews will be held in April. The results of the interviews are used to select a class. In addition to information gained from the application, essay, and interviews, consideration is given to industry segment, maturity, commitment to personal development, geographic location, and other factors in selecting the members of the class.

Applicants are notified of the selection outcome by **May** and will be required to provide written acceptance in **June**. The class will be formally announced at Cultivate'26. Class members are encouraged to be present during the announcement, but it not a requirement. Travel to the Cultivate announcement is at the class member's expense.

Program Requirements

Candidates must:

- Demonstrate strong leadership ability or potential
- Demonstrate active participation in the green industry
- Be an AmericanHort member or employed by an AmericanHort member company
- Demonstrate commitment to the time required to participate in all HRI Leadership Academy activities
- Demonstrate a commitment to remain in the green industry during the 12-month program and beyond
- Preference is given to candidates with at least five years leadership experience and seven years relevant industry work experience

Candidates are evaluated on:

- Evidence of **demonstrated leadership qualities** plus potential qualities as illustrated by industry and community involvement, or other activities as shown on the application
- Evidence on the nature of the applicant's probable **contribution to the green industry** and/or related areas through growth experiences gained from the program
- Evidence of ability to **consider the broad interest** of the greater community
- The **likelihood to grow** as an individual because of this experience
- The applicant's **character, reputation, and personal life**, as evidenced by references and/or by inquiry in the industry; must be of high quality and reflect potential leadership capability
- The applicant's **personal and employer commitment and plan to participate** in all the classes and activities
- The applicant's **demonstrated leadership experience and relevant industry work experience** as shown on the application



Tuition & Fees

There are no application fees and tuition is covered by AmericanHort.

The Horticultural Research Institute values talent and seeks to select the best candidates irrespective of their ability to pay. AmericanHort has made a generous financial commitment to make this possible by covering application fees, tuition, and housing and meal costs during in-person sessions for all students.

Once accepted to the program, students will be required to provide a \$500 deposit, which is refundable upon successful completion of the program. The deposit is our effort to ensure your commitment to completing the program. Please contact us if you will need travel fund assistance, as stipends may be awarded based on a demonstrated need.

Program Commitment & Fees

Participant Commitment

Participants must commit to:

- Approximately **12–15 class days** over a 12-month period
- Attendance at **all four in-person classes** and **all online webinars** is mandatory
- **In-person group presentation** at Cultivate'25
- Participants will have **additional travel time** to and from each class location, which may amount to several extra days depending on where a participant lives
- Class members are asked to cover the travel cost to get to and from the in-person class locations. Once on-site, all meals and accommodations will be covered by AmericanHort. If assistance is needed with travel costs, please indicate this on the application form. Stipends may be available upon demonstrated need.
- Participants are expected to devote extra time to the individualized coaching process and to group and individual projects outside of the classes. Each class will also have pre-reading assignments and activities. We estimate **10 hours per month** for class preparation and advisory services from course facilitators and **40–45 hours** total time for the culminating LEAD Project.
- Participants are **encouraged to seek leadership opportunities**, participate in post-graduate green industry leadership activities and support the growth of the HRI Leadership Academy, not limited to recruiting participants and fundraising for program scholarships



Rapid Leadership Development with Real-world Results





HRI Leadership Academy

An AmericanHort & HRI Initiative

AmericanHort | HRI

2130 Stella Court
Columbus, OH 43215 USA
(614) 487-1117

HRILeadershipAcademy.org

Industry businesses and individuals who would like to support the HRI Leadership Academy have the opportunity to make a donation in order to help us grow our ability to offer access to this program in the future.

For more information contact Jennifer Gray at JenniferG@AmericanHort.org.

Donations to support this program and HRI do not impact candidate selection.

The HRI Leadership Academy does not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status, in any of its activities or operations.