

The Nonprofit Board Leadership Program

OVERVIEW: The Nonprofit Board Leadership Program provides students with a unique professional opportunity to work with Columbia Business School alumni who are actively serving on nonprofit boards. Operating under a mentorship structure, the program exposes students to the inner dynamics of nonprofit boards and helps prepare them for future board participation. The program runs over the course of a single academic year, serving approximately 35 alumni, students, and nonprofit organizations annually.

STRUCTURE: Following a rigorous selection process, students are matched with an alumnus mentor and gain first-hand exposure to a nonprofit's activities through:

- Attending 1+ Board of Directors meetings as an observer with the alumnus board member
- Completing an independent project in coordination with the alumnus, the executive director and/or key staff members of the nonprofit
- Attending 1+ volunteer functions or other relevant events hosted by the nonprofit to gain a holistic understanding of the nonprofit's operations

In addition, students and mentors are expected to meet, in person, *at least* one time each semester, to ensure that the project is on track.

Mentor Commitment

We recognize that participating alumni are incredibly busy, so the program is designed to require nominal time while creating maximum learning and impact. While each assignment is unique, **we ask that mentors dedicate 2-4 hours a month as a participant.** In addition, **mentors are expected to introduce students to the appropriate staff at the nonprofit organization so that students may complete their project in a timely fashion.**

ABBREVIATED TIMELINE:

September

- Students are matched with alumnus mentors
- Students complete orientation at Columbia Business School
- Students scope projects with alumnus

October – March

- Students attend volunteer event(s) to gain an understanding of the organization
- Students attend board and/or sub-committee meetings with alumnus
- Students work to complete research project in coordination with alumnus and nonprofit

March – April

- Students complete project and present findings to mentor, Executive Director and/or Board as appropriate
- Closing reception

Nonprofit Commitment

It is important that students be assigned a point person on staff at the nonprofit organization. **The nonprofits' understanding of the program and its commitment are crucial to the students' ability to complete the project that they will be undertaking.** We ask that a staff member of the organization be available to help obtain data for the project and provide feedback when necessary.

Finally, the program is **project-based** and is not an internship. Students will work on the project over the course of two semesters, for on average 2-4 hours per week. Therefore, please keep in mind:

- The student will **not** need a physical work space to complete the project.
- The project should be designed so that most of the work can be preformed off-site.

Project Examples

The program was designed to offer autonomy and flexibility with regards to projects. While the program does not require specific types of projects, it emphasizes the need for projects that are important and relevant to the board of directors. Below are a few examples of projects:

Sector: Arts & Culture

Project Summary:

Identified potential candidates to join the Board of Trustees; developed plan for attracting potential members of an International Council focused on supporting annual international festival.

Project Summary:

Analyzed current pricing strategies and developed a plan to optimize profit/revenue

Sector: Community Development

Project Summary:

Developed a detailed business plan to create new revenues for organization - relates to a business involving labor from assisted program participants; used learnings from Launching New Ventures class as a basis for developing the plan.

Sector: Education

Project Summary:

Developed a report about how similar organizations perform budgeting and fundraising. Researched best practices for integrating national and regional fundraising efforts. Delivered recommendations for providing regional staff with critical information, while openly communicating with headquarters.

Sector: Medical/Healthcare

Project Summary:

Completed an ROI analysis of all fundraising activity including gala events, mailings, phone drives, etc. and assessed against comparable organizations.

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