



## HBS COMMUNITY PARTNERS CASE STUDY

Interview conducted with **Kathy Salmanowitz,**  
Program Director

**Community Partners** provides Harvard Business School alumni the opportunity to apply their business and management skills as volunteer consultants working on challenging and worthwhile projects in the non-profit sector. The projects involve key business issues such as strategic planning, organizational development, marketing plans and board governance. They work with a diverse group of Bay Area non-profits including museums, performing arts, social service and community development agencies.

### Project Examples

#### **Goodwill Industries of San Francisco**

The Community Partners team was asked to evaluate new business opportunities for Goodwill Industries that would generate increased revenue as well as generate new jobs for Goodwill clients. The team identified and generated a list of potential new business ventures, developed criteria to evaluate the various options such as fit with mission, barriers to entry, ability to execute etc., selected the most promising option and then presented a business plan with supporting financial model for the new venture.

*“Goodwill Industries of San Francisco, San Mateo and Marin Counties, wants to express tremendous thanks to HBS Community Partners. Not only did we get an incredible business plan and financial model to use as a basis to pilot a new line of business, but also the professionalism, insights and helpfulness of each team member made it a wonderful experience. We are confident that the HBS Community Partners project will translate into increased revenues to further our mission in the future.”*—Cedric Yap, COO, Goodwill Industries of San Francisco, San Mateo and Marin

#### **Oakland Museum**

For 10 weeks, an HBS Community Partners team worked with the Oakland Museum to increase their earned revenue approach. By assessing the property rent value, the museum store, and conservation facilities, the team developed a financial plan to better leverage their resources. The museum responded so receptively that some of the team members continued to help the museum in constructing a branding strategy which renamed the institution as the Museum of California.

*“The Community Partners team provided that all important outsiders’ assessment of our museum’s revenue centers and gave us excellent insights that we will certainly implement.”* — Dennis Power, Executive Director, Oakland Museum

## **Richmond Police Actives League**

Richmond Police Activities League provided HBS Community Partner volunteer consultants the opportunity to work with a poorly paid staff in a struggling organization. With few resources available, the team suggested high impact but achievable improvements to the organization's business strategy and a governance structure that would increase effectiveness. "Our Board was totally impressed with the work the CP team did and the presentation" Corporal Larry Lewis, Executive Director, Richmond Police Activities League.

## **Good Business?**

### **Networking**

One of the most consistently compelling reasons HBS alumni compete for work on Community Partners projects is because of the networking opportunity. Alumni are peer driven to perform their best because of top-level teammate business leaders in work with highly-reputed non-profit organizations. Working pro bono through Community Partners promotes many self-interest benefits because of the value in these personal connections.

### **Career Development**

Community Partners offers HBS alumni a way to apply their management and business skills to address non-profit capacity challenges in the Bay Area. Through participation, alumni develop their professional abilities to strategize for a variety of business models.

Some alumni use their pro bono work with Community Partners like an internship to get to know an organization; establish connections with CEOs, board members, and senior staff; and gain experience with the non-profit management structure for future work in the non-profit or social enterprise sectors. Many Community Partners participants have become CEOs, COOs, and CFOs of non-profits and foundations and others have started for-profit business with social impact driven missions.

"Mission, passion, and social change are all reasons why to do something that doesn't relate to money."

## **Evolution of Community Partners' Pro Bono Work**

In October of 1986, a proposal was made to the Board of the HBS alumni club in San Francisco for a new initiative named Community Partners to be undertaken in which alumni volunteers would be recruited to contribute their expertise as pro bono consultants to selected nonprofit organizations in Northern California. The initiative was approved and the Community Partners program has continued in the San Francisco Bay Area, and later a similar model was adopted by Stanford and other alumni networks, recognizing the need for business skills (strategic planning, business consulting, financial guidance, etc.) to leverage needs in the non-profit community.

The mission of Community Partners is:

- To serve the community by providing free business consulting to non-profit organizations.
- To serve HBS alumni in by providing opportunities for them to channel their interests into community service.

Since 1986, over 600 alumni in Northern California, working in teams of 2-4 volunteer consultants, have provided pro bono assistance to over 300 non-profit organizations throughout the Bay Area including museums, environmental, social service and community development agencies.

Community Partners is one of largest non-profit resource providers in the Bay Area donating an estimated value of over \$1.5 million in consulting services each year. Community Partners has also served as a model for similar HBS alumni programs across the country including Boston, New York, Washington DC, Minneapolis, Miami and Los Angeles.

When Community Partners began, the business school was a less prominent advocator and the program gained recognition independently through its mission of service. Over the past twenty years, HBS has become very supportive, and in 1993 with the forming of the Social Enterprise Initiative, HBS aims to inspire, educate, and support current and emerging leaders in all sectors to apply management skills to create social value. Further, with the 100th Anniversary of the MBA program, HBS is marketing global outreach to encourage every alumni club around world to work in the community. Over 90 percent of HBS alumni serve on a non-profit board at some point during their career.

### **Pro Bono Management**

Community Partner projects differ in time commitments and durations depending on the scope, organization, time of year, and phase. Typically, each lasts 3-4 months and averages 10-15 hours per month. Some employers will sponsor an employee's time while others will not. Community Partners assigns teams of 3-4 people, with some as small as 2 and others as big as 8, according to the project requirements. 90 percent of projects are successfully implemented.

### **Project Acquisition**

Community Partners is organized and managed like a consulting firm. Generally, non-profits apply to the program for business consulting; occasionally, Community Partners will actively seek clients in favorable fields to diversify their project portfolio and make the project topics more appealing to alumni. Name recognition of HBS has been a unique selling point for Community Partners to non-profit organizations because of the school's reputation to produce top talent with innovative ideas. In addition, Community Partners has established credibility in the non-profit sector through its 20 year history.

Prospective clients complete a detailed project application that is reviewed by the Community Partners Steering Committee. Projects must be business-related with scopes requiring expertise in strategic planning, organizational and board development, finance, or marketing. Since Community Partners only accepts 15-20 projects each year, they try to vary their portfolio in business topics, non-profit causes, and geography.

Projects undergo a through vetting process for acceptance. By asking specific questions to tighten the project scope, Community Partners can be selective about their non-profit projects to maintain their strong reputation of high level work.

### **Know Your Participants When Choosing Projects**

"Make it work for the volunteers!"

By knowing the audience, projects are screened to be attractive and target HBS alumni. Popular projects are those with reputable and recognizable non-profits; personal association with these organizations drives competition among alumni applicants and generally produces a blue chip teams. **Easiest bets** for voluntary involvement are high-visibility projects in the arts, environment, and social services. The weakest projects are marketing based, despite the high need by non-profits, because they do not best match the business consulting skill set of HBS alumni in the Bay Area.

The scope of project also drives recruitment. Currently, alumni are looking for projects developing business plans for earned revenue; the market is entrepreneurial.

### **Recruitment and Participant Selection**

Initially, Community Partners gave alumni four projects options. "Alumni are motivated by the networking opportunities with other HBS alumni and by the opportunity to use their skills in a more meaningful way than writing a check." People participated for their resumes and contacts which was fine because Community Partners was concerned about measuring the number of projects and quality of projects being done, not the reason for doing them. People have become more socially conscious about their civic responsibility to volunteer their time and abilities which has made recruitment easier.

Alumni range from 1950s graduates to recent grads; the majority of participants graduated from HBS during the 1980s and 1990s and are now stable in their careers. Alumni apply to work, pro bono, with Community Partners and go through a thorough screening process to verify their time availability and relevant experience to ensure projects are completed efficiently and hassle-free.

Projects are posted on Community Partners' website and advertised through mass emails to the alumni network. Five times the number of alumni who join a Community Partners project have read about the program which leads to many client referrals.

Community Partners does accept non-HBS volunteers on a project-by-project basis without active recruitment.

### **Sustained Involvement**

At Community Partners, involvement, high performance results, and efficient project completion are largely peer driven by nature of its participants working in the business world. Additionally, the interpersonal connections made within a team and with a non-profit continue to drive retention.

### **Guidance through a Steering Committee**

A Steering Committee of ten members provides direction to the types of Community Partner projects and oversees participants throughout each project. To ensure consistent quality work, each member supervises up to two projects, approves the team's work plan, and attends the final presentation of the results to non-profit's executives.

### **Participant and Project Evaluation**

Every project has a final presentation to the non-profit's board and to the Steering Committee in forms ranging from PowerPoint presentations, to formal business plans and documents. Projects conclude with a survey, rating the team's and non-profits' experiences. Through these surveys, HBS Community Partners is also able to document the percentage of recommendations carried to completion.

### **Impact Measurement System**

Project completion surveys determine the impact on an organization and the satisfaction of participants. Both the volunteer consultants and the project clients answer these survey questions which focus on strengthening the management and structure of the program. Consulting can produce innovative recommendations, but successful projects are implemented; 90 percent of Community Partners projects are put into practice. Community impact is measured at respective non-profits.

This program also values a volunteer consultant's hourly contribution at \$75/hr which totals over \$1 million annually.

### **Recognition for Pro Bono Work**

At the completion of a project, participants are sent a letter and pen to thank them and recognize their involvement. Volunteer consultants drive the program which makes recognition an important step in Community Partners' sustainability. In addition, Community Partners hosts annual dinners for participants to provide an opportunity for networking, reunion, and celebration.

Proceeds from two major HBS Alumni Club dinner events recognizing local business leaders constitute the funding of Community Partners operations. Although Community Partners is a highly-regarded alumni program, they do not receive any funding from HBS.

## **Lessons Learned**

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### **Biggest Challenge**

Recruiting sufficient numbers of alumni willing work on projects is a continual challenge. The challenge is addressed through working to find interesting, challenging and worthwhile projects. In times of economic downturns or unemployment, Community Partners finds many HBS alumni interested in projects, but in upturns it can be difficult to convince people they do have 10-15 hours a month to volunteer. In addition, Community Partners continues to revise their vetting strategy to ensure participant commitment, high-quality work and projects, and strong partnerships with non-profit organizations in need of business consulting.

Community Partners has found it more difficult to make high-impact changes in under-resourced organizations; however, sometimes these organizations are in most need of assistance.

### **Biggest Success**

Community Partners has noted a number of successes. Over 600 alumni have done pro bono projects for 300 non-profits throughout the Bay area. They have developed a reputation as a highly-regarded pro bono provider which is "nice to hear from clients that we provide high quality consulting for no charge." Alumni find networking and career development opportunities and take advantage of their specialized business abilities to expand the capacities of the non-profit community. Community Partners was the first program of its kind and has led the way for intermediary pro bono organizations nationwide.

### **Valuable Advice**

Make it work for the volunteer. Let participants choose the projects they want to work on because they will do a better job if they care. Use projects to recruit volunteers. Do pro bono work that aligns with what people want for personal development or in particularly desired cause

or non-profit; this will achieve positive promotion throughout the company internally and through active involvement in the community externally. Lastly, an employee's performance review and supervisor should not exclusively drive involvement in pro bono; the drive should initially come from within.

As your company engages in pro bono, consider how pairing senior staff with newer employees may strengthen internal networks and create professional development opportunities. In addition, using intermediary organizations such as Community Partners can facilitate and sustain pro bono work within your company without considerable internal management.

**Contact Kathy Salmanowitz for more information about their program.**

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