

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

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# What is Board Fellows?

McCombs Board Fellows was launched in 2010 as an initiative of University of Texas at Austin McCombs School of Business Net Impact chapter, a national organization for socially-minded business people. This program places MBA students on the boards of directors of local partner nonprofit organizations as non-voting board members for one year. The purpose of the program is to give talented business students the opportunity to work with - and learn from – experienced business leaders while contributing their time and skills to benefit the local community.

# How does the Board Fellow differ from an intern or volunteer?

The Board Fellows program is designed to develop the student’s board governance experience and prepare the student for future service on nonprofit and for-profit boards of directors. This is in contrast to an intern or volunteer’s responsibilities that typically represent the day-to-day responsibilities of the host organization. Board Fellows are interested in exercising important management skills in finance, strategy, accounting, marketing etc. during their coursework and extra-curricular activities at McCombs. The Board Fellow can be a valuable member of the governance team, bringing expertise and skills to the organization.

# What are the requirements of partner organizations?

The national Net Impact organization recommends the following guidelines for a Board Fellows partner organization, and we are obligated to share this information with you. At McCombs, we want to focus more on the student/organization match than on strict guidelines, so we plan to be flexible in our selection and matching process and encourage ALL organizations to apply. Nonprofits come in all shapes and sizes, and we think this program should reflect that. Be assured that a good match between student interests/skillsets and partner needs, enthusiasm, a well-functioning board of directors, and commitment to the program will outweigh these criteria:

* Nonprofit 501(c)(3) status (REQUIRED)
* An operating history of at least one year
* An annual budget of at least $350,000
* A minimum of 3 full-time staff members
* Have a board member willing to serve as a mentor (REQUIRED)

# How are Board Fellows and partner organizations matched?

Board Fellows are selected through a rigorous application process. Incoming McCombs MBA students apply to Board Fellows in the fall. After applications have been reviewed and potential candidates interviewed by the Board Fellows Leadership Team, selected students are matched with a partner nonprofit whose needs and mission align with the Board Fellows’ skills and interests. Board Fellows serve the nonprofit for the duration of one calendar year from January – December.

The nonprofit then assigns the Board Fellow to a mentor and board committee, if possible. Board Fellows are expected to participate in all board meetings and either complete a project specific to the needs or challenges facing their partner organization or assist with work on one of the Board’s committees.

# What factors affect the Board Fellows match process?

Many factors affect the Board Fellows match process: Board Fellow and nonprofit partner interest, the project proposed by nonprofit applicants, and the needs, skillsets, and interests of the students and nonprofit partners. The Board Fellows Leadership Team is committed to ensuring that the needs of the organizations match the student’s skills and interests. If we are unable to match you, please realize that we are trying to achieve the best possible experience for students *and* our nonprofit community, and a suitable match was simply not available. We have shared best practices with other Board Fellows programs around the country and want to ensure the partnership is mutually beneficial. Therefore, we are unable to guarantee that an organization will be matched with a Board Fellow.

# What are the responsibilities of Board Fellows?

* Attend all board meetings and relevant committee meetings for the partner organization, unless class schedule or board meeting time/location changes otherwise require alternative arrangements
* Help with and attend special events, similar to other board members of the host organizations
* Attend regular seminars at McCombs to learn more about the nonprofit sector and board governance
* Commit approximately 10 hours of work per month to assist with either board committee work or through pursuit of a [strategic project](#_What_are_suitable) in conjunction with the organization’s board
* Communicate with the organization about summer internship plans that may require relocation and remote engagement
* Contribute in a leadership capacity to the McCombs Board Fellows student organization

# What are the responsibilities of Board Fellows partner organizations?

* Help the Board Fellows understand the organization’s goals and challenges to improve the Board Fellows knowledge about board governance
* Secure board and organizational support for hosting Board Fellows and clearly communicate to staff the role of the Board Fellow
* Identify a well-suited Board Fellows mentor (a member of the board who will serve as the Board Fellow’s primary contact and guide)
* Invite Board Fellows to meetings and introduce them to board members
* Establish outcomes that can be completed within the allotted time, while respecting the students’ academic commitments
* Ensure the Board Fellow feels like a board member, not an intern
* Conduct a final meeting with the Board Fellow
* Estimated time required may be 1-2 hours per month

# What are the qualifications and responsibilities of a Board Fellow mentor?

Each Board Fellow is assigned a mentor from the organization’s board of directors. The mentor works with the Board Fellow, providing guidance and insight into the workings of the board.

Responsibilities

* Help orient the Board Fellow to the workings of the board
* Ensure that the Board Fellow is included on all communications to the board
* Educate the Board Fellow about board governance and assist with their development as a current and future board member
* Discuss the norms for participation at board meetings with the Board Fellow, and encourage the Board Fellows' board participation
* Help the Board Fellow identify a project (or projects) that advance the work of the board
* Act as a resource for questions and insight about the organization, industry, function, and board governance
* Provide the Board Fellow and the Board Fellows Program with ongoing and end-of-year feedback

Key characteristics

* Established and experienced board member and familiar with the organization
* Familiarity with MBA skillsets to better utilize and develop a Board Fellow
* Significant managerial and communication experience
* Interested in mentoring and working with a Board Fellow
* Able to commit the necessary time to mentorship
* Regular attendee at board meetings
* Preferred but NOT mandatory
	+ MBA graduate (understands program demands and Board Fellow skill set)

# What are suitable projects for Board Fellows?

The primary goal of the McCombs Board Fellows program is to gain insight into board governance and strategic planning to prepare them for future leadership. The board project should not be done in isolation or solely with staff – as the objective of the program is to engage directly with board members.

The project component of Board Fellows entails coordinating with a board (committee) or working on a discrete piece of work specially assigned by the board (committee). The work should be important (preferably strategic) to the board of directors, relevant to a critical issue faced by the organization, and should leverage the Board Fellow’s skills and expertise.

The following are real examples of contributions made by previous Board Fellows. Please do not feel limited by these ideas – propose whatever type of project would be most beneficial to the organization.

Accounting and Finance:

* Build a financial model to improve planning and tracking costs
* Evaluate funding opportunities and revenue sources
* Develop a model for earned revenue generation

Board Development:

* Design a dashboard to be used as a board and/or organizational evaluation tool
* Evaluate board recruitment and training
* Improve board processes and capacity
* Create a board manual
* Perform a board effectiveness audit

Marketing:

* Assess community perspectives of organization
* Design a process to assess customer satisfaction and needs
* Perform a social-impact assessment
* Align communication strategy with mission
* Perform a needs assessment to improve marketing efforts
* Develop/enhance internal communication program
* Analyze current fundraising efforts to increase donations
* Benchmark best practices of similar nonprofits

Operations:

* Analyze costs and benefits of critical processes
* Identify potential organization efficiencies
* Develop a capacity-building plan
* Create volunteer management training for new programs

Organizational Strategy:

* Develop a business plan for expanding into new regions/services
* Evaluate the activities critical to your mission
* Create a five-year strategic plan

Examples of project activities and deliverables:

PROJECT 1 - Membership organization benchmarking

* Conducted research on similar organizations in the space
* Determined best practices in the field
* Recommended changes in program design to increase chances of success
* Shared benchmarking study with all the organizations in the field

PROJECT 2 - Development of a young symphony goers’ group

* Conducted research on activities of target demographic, including time spent/month, fees/charges to participate, social/educational/active/outdoorsy
* Worked with marketing committee on board to develop marketing materials for this audience
* Provided analysis of attendance, feedback and recommendations for future programs

Examples of projects NOT appropriate for Board Fellows:

* Running the organization's annual fundraiser
* Actively managing the organization's online social media campaigns
* General staff or volunteer management, or administrative or volunteer tasks
* Leading a search for a new executive director
* Identifying/leading a project to merge with another nonprofit

# What is the Board Fellows program timeline?

* May - August: Online applications accepted (application deadline: August 31, 2015)
* September: Partners selected by Board Fellows Leadership Team
* October: Board Fellows matched to partner organizations
* November - January: Board Fellows introduced and integrated into partner organization
	+ Provide a Board Mentor
	+ Provide a formal introduction to the organization's work and expectations for board members
	+ Complete a Memorandum of Understanding with your Board Fellow(s) to ensure a common understanding of the project scope and timeline
	+ Introduce the Board Fellow(s) at the first board meeting they attend. Allow them to explain the Board Fellows program and their project.
	+ Include Board Fellow(s) in all board meetings. (Board Fellows will act as non-voting members.)
	+ Include Board Fellow(s) in the committee meetings that their project is assigned to
	+ Keep the Board Fellow(s) informed about organizational developments
* January - December: Support the Board Fellows project
	+ Provide feedback about the progress of the project
	+ Provide opportunity for the Board Fellows to present findings to the board
	+ Conduct a final wrap up meeting with the Board Fellows
* Ongoing:
	+ Communicate with the Board Fellows Leadership Team to provide feedback about the program and suggestions for improvement

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# What is required in the application?

The application takes approximately 30 minutes to complete and requests details about:

* Key contact information
* The organization (purpose, history, annual budget, and critical issues facing the organization)
* The organization’s interest in Board Fellows (expectations, history working with Board Fellows (if any), and affirmation of support for the program from the Board and CEO)
* Board of Directors (number of members, committee structure, board meeting times and location, and skillsets desired of a Board Fellow)
* Project information (project description, desired outcome and deliverables, skills required)

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# How can my organization apply?

* Discuss the Board Fellows program with your Board of Directors (and CEO or Executive Director, if possible) to obtain their support
* Identify a mentor
* Identify a project or board committee that the Board Fellow will help with
* **Complete our** [**online application**](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/133WxUIu5iJRGC0Ab7b1i4XsYkNZPFyZJoa9xf4HAp7g/viewform) **by August 31, 2015**
* Students and partner organizations will be matched in September, and Fellows will begin their year of service in January 2016