

BUSINESS+IMPACT

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Board Fellowship Program

Information for Nonprofit Organizations

The Board Fellowship Program prepares University of Michigan graduate students for responsible community involvement and practical leadership experience. For an academic year, students are placed on nonprofit governing boards in Southeast Michigan as non-voting members.

Since 1999, over 700 Board Fellows have been placed with over 300 nonprofit organizations. These students have assisted in various board initiatives, including supporting strategic planning development to further programs and enterprises. Nonprofit organizations gain access to future community leaders with fresh perspectives and talents, the time and expertise of outstanding graduate students, and a connection with the University of Michigan. Meanwhile, students gain practical board experience, skills, and networks to further their community engagement.

Program Overview

Business+Impact recruits graduate students from the Ross School of Business, Ford School of Public Policy, and other graduate schools each fall term through a competitive process. Selected students must have:

- A record of academic and professional excellence
- Knowledge and skills relevant to particular nonprofits and their boards
- Sensitivity and commitment to issues of community needs, financial concerns, and confidentiality
- A clear commitment to the nonprofit sector and passion for their selected mission

Business+Impact then matches top students with each qualified nonprofit board, pending their approval. Qualified nonprofit boards must provide the following:

- High performing nonprofit board that meets regularly in the Southeast Michigan area
- Board mentor who will directly engage with the Fellow on a monthly basis beyond meetings
- A board-level project/initiative for the Fellow, generally focused on Governance, Assessment, or Strategy
- Executive staff member who serves as a point of contact for the Fellow

Board Fellows serve as *non-voting* board members for an academic cycle (from October through April), and complete a board-level project over the course of their placement. Students work closely with the board and executive director of their assigned organization, attend board meetings, serve on committees, and engage with the issues facing the organization. In other words, *they serve in the same capacity as any other board member.*

The purpose of the board project is to utilize the student's skills and interests, while providing a vehicle for communication and exploration of the management role of a board member. The board project is not an exercise that should be done in isolation or solely with staff; the objective is to engage directly with board members.

Nonprofit Partner Timeline

- **July 15** – Nonprofit applications are due. Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis and individual calls are scheduled within two weeks of submission to discuss application and proposed project.
- **July** – Participating nonprofits confirmed
- **Mid-September** – Student Applications due
- **Late September** – Nonprofit organizations connect with recommended student(s), and confirm placement
- **Early October** – Mandatory orientation for Board Fellows and nonprofit partners
- **October to Late April** – Students serve as Board Fellows

How Nonprofit Boards Can Apply

Business+Impact invites nonprofits in Southeast Michigan to attend an information session in Detroit on May 17th at 12pm noon, or Ann Arbor on May 19th at 12pm noon. [Please register for an information session here](#) or [view a recording of the information session here](#) and submit an application before July 15. If you are interested in being contacted for the 2022-23 academic year, please email businessimpact@umich.edu.

Frequently Asked Questions

What types of projects do Board Fellows undertake?

Board Fellow engagements should be board-level projects – not staff-level work – and must be manageable in light of the student’s other academic demands and the board mentor’s availability. Generally speaking, Board Fellow projects fall under categories of Governance, Assessment, or Strategy.

Examples of specific Board Fellow projects include:

- [Governance] Bylaws - *revise and construct up-to-date operating bylaws or meeting regulations*
- [Governance] Assessment – *review of past board assessments or development of new process*
- [Assessment] Performance measurement - *develop a balanced scorecard or create an evaluation system*
- [Strategy] Strategic plans - *formulate a strategic plan for growth, fund advancement, or web development*
- [Strategy] Marketing plans - *develop awareness of the organization, new memberships, or sponsorships*

How much time will a Board Fellow commit to my organization?

Board Fellows voluntarily commit a similar amount of time per month as a full board member; they attend board meetings, committee meetings, and complete their projects. Please note that due to academic demands, some students may not be available during certain times of the year. We strongly encourage the Board Fellow and organization leadership to set expectations at the beginning of their engagement.

What type of training and support is provided to the Board Fellows and organizations? At the beginning of the fellowship, both students and nonprofits are provided an orientation of the Board Fellowship Program. The majority of content and training for students is done through a series of workshops from October – March. These trainings provide avenues for students to compare learnings, issues, and experiences. In addition, nonprofits and students receive ongoing support from Business+Impact such as additional project resources or communication channels to establish clear expectations.

What is expected from the nonprofit organizations?

To ensure an effective and mutually beneficial working relationship, the organization must:

- Assign a board member to serve as the Board Fellow’s primary mentor
- Assign an executive staff member as a primary point of contact with the organization
- Both the mentor and staff lead should maintain regular communication with the Board Fellow
- Provide a formal introduction to the organization and the expectations of board members
- Enable the Board Fellow to complete one or two meaningful, mutually beneficial projects
- Keep the Board Fellow informed about organizational developments
- Complete a mid-year and final evaluation of the Board Fellow’s progress
- Conduct a final wrap-up meeting with the Board Fellow

What are the benefits of hosting a Board Fellow?

There are several benefits of hosting a Board Fellow, including:

- New perspectives and input in board discussions
- Graduate student knowledge and skills used to complete a board project
- Relationships with potential candidates for future board, volunteer, and staff positions
- Connections to faculty, students, and knowledge resources of the University of Michigan

Who should I contact with questions or concerns?

Please contact the Business + Impact staff at businessimpact@umich.edu. More details, including current partners and student profiles, are located online at

<https://businessimpact.umich.edu/collaborations/community/nonprofit-board-fellows/>