

Board Fellowship Program

2024 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. Nonprofit organizations are able to connect with future community leaders with fresh perspectives and diverse academic and professional backgrounds. Meanwhile, students gain practical board experience and impactful leadership skills.

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, skills, and interests relevant to particular nonprofits and their boards
- Sensitivity and commitment to issues of community needs, financial concerns, and confidentiality

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 (minimum number of 2 board meetings per program cycle, Oct. – April)
- Board mentor who will directly engage with the Fellow at least once per month, in addition to communicating asynchronously on a weekly basis
- An operating history of at least 2 years and a minimum of 5 board members
- A board-level project/initiative for the Fellow, generally focused on Governance, Assessment, or Strategy

Board Fellows complete a board-level project (see FAQs below) over the course of their placement, from October through April. Students serve in the same capacity as any other board member: attending board meetings, serving on committees, and engaging with the issues facing the organization.

How Nonprofit Boards Can Apply

Business+Impact invites nonprofits serving Southeast Michigan to attend an information session in Spring 2024. If you are interested in being contacted for the 2024–25 academic year, please email boardfellows@umich.edu.

Nonprofit Partner Timeline

- Spring – Information Sessions
- Early Summer – Application opens, accepted on a rolling basis
- Mid Summer – Nonprofit applications are due. Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis and individual calls are scheduled within two weeks of submission to discuss the 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

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Frequently Asked Questions

How many Board Fellows should my organization host?

Boards may host one or two students. Our staff encourages two Fellows, as students working in pairs tend to have a more impactful outcome and experience on the board. If hosting two Fellows, both students will work on the same project and share a mentor. We will work with you to determine the right fit for your organization.

What types of projects do Board Fellows undertake?

Generally speaking, Board Fellow projects fall under the categories of Governance, Assessment, or Strategy. Projects must be scoped appropriately and manageable in light of the student's other academic demands and the board mentor's availability. Students are expected to spend about 5 hours a month on their project. Examples of specific Board Fellow projects include:

- [Governance] Bylaws - revise and construct operating bylaws or meeting regulations
- [Assessment] Performance measurement - develop a scorecard or evaluation system
- [Strategy] Strategic framework/research - formulate a strategy for growth, fund advancement, or web development

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

Board Fellows voluntarily commit a similar amount of time per month as full board members (no more than 10 hours/month); they attend board meetings, committee meetings, and complete their projects. We strongly encourage the Board Fellow(s) and their mentor to set a regular communication cadence 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. The majority of content and training is done through a series of workshops and networking opportunities. These workshops provide avenues for mentors and students to compare learnings, challenges, and experiences. In addition, nonprofits and students receive ongoing support from Business+Impact such as one-on-one coaching and third-party nonprofit consulting services.

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
- Provide a formal introduction to the organization and the expectations of board members
- Complete a mid-year and final evaluation of the Board Fellow's progress

What are the benefits of hosting Board Fellows?

There are several benefits of hosting Board Fellows, including:

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

Who should I contact with questions or concerns?

Please contact the Business+Impact staff at boardfellows@umich.edu. More details, including current partners and student profiles, are located on [our website](#).