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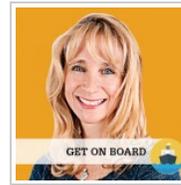
Fundraising and networking: A peek into a nonprofit advisory board



Brandon Miller

By Marissa Levin

Brandon Miller is the director of Year Up, a national organization that provides educational opportunities to high-potential, at-risk young adults. Here, Miller shares insights into how a nonprofit advisory board works. If you are considering board service, it is important to understand the operating differences and expectations of a corporate board versus a nonprofit board. *(Disclosure: I am involved as a speaker and mentor with the local chapter of Year Up.)*



What is Year Up's history and mission?

Year Up was founded by Gerald Chertavian in Boston in 2000 to address the lack of opportunities facing urban youth aged 18 to 24. Chertavian [called this] the Opportunity Divide, where intelligent, hardworking young adults lacked the social and technical skills to escape a lifetime of minimum wage jobs for true careers. Through an 11-month process of classroom [learning] and internships, the students are given the necessary hard and soft skills in an environment of high expectations and high support. Eighty-five percent of the students graduate, earning 18 hours of college credits, and earn a wage in excess of \$30,000 per year in the fields of IT or financial services back-office processing.

How long has a Year Up advisory board been in existence?

There are 12 sites around the country and each site has an advisory board from the time the site opens. In the case of the National Capital Region, the site opened in 2006, with a board formed at that time.

What are the main objectives of the advisory board?

The board provides mentoring to staff, students and alumni; operational review of the program; fundraising; and development of internship partners.

How has the advisory board been instrumental in helping Year Up achieve its mission?

Each student requires approximately \$3,000 of donated funds for a balanced budget, and the board is instrumental to closing this gap. Additionally, the board cultivates internship partners, without whom the program cannot exist. Each board member is charged with a "give-or-get" challenge consisting of cash, internship seats or new donors.

Who serves on the advisory board?

The board is comprised of business leaders in a variety of industries who have a deep belief in giving back to their communities and sharing their personal time, treasure and wisdom. Most have been actively engaged in career development and mentoring within their business life and are actively seeking opportunities to leverage their skills for the good of their communities.

How is the overall advisory board held accountable? How are individual advisors held accountable?

The board members are each given financial targets for giving, developing business partners, and generating future donors and sponsors.

What are Year Up's goals for the next 12 months, 24 months and 36 months, and how will the advisory board help Year Up achieve the goals?

Year Up is going through a growth phase in order to scale and serve more young adults. After 15 years, we have served 10,000 students, but there are millions more to be served. One way to accelerate growth is the development of a hybrid model called the Professional Training Corps (PTC), where we partner with community colleges for the educational aspects, and use a smaller and more cost-effective Year Up staff to reinforce the soft skills. We feel this model will reduce or eliminate the need for donor dollars to subsidize the educational phase. While this model is alluring, preserving the cultural fiber of the program in this model presents a challenge to the organization. In areas such as the National Capital Region, where we may have the traditional and PTC model operating in close proximity, we must strive to eliminate confusion

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of our brand among our partners while providing the necessary stewardship to the new PTC program. This is our challenge for the next 36 months.

How does Year Up select its advisory board members?

Our executive directors are usually in the lead on identification of potential board members. Leads come to them in a variety of ways, and then the board chair and other board members become involved through social settings to meet and evaluate the potential board members. As our boards tend to be small (8-10), we forgo traditional committees, such as nominations.

Does Year Up have a board of directors? If so, how do the two boards integrate?

The fiduciary 501(c)(3) is located in Boston and referred to as the National Board in Year Up. Early on in the geographical expansion of the organization, very little scheduled interaction occurred between the boards. After the third or fourth site, it was very clear that a more robust protocol needed to be established. An annual summit for all the sites' board members has been established, along with quarterly conference calls with the advisory board chairs and the national leadership.

What advice do you have for nonprofits looking to establish an advisory board, or trying to better leverage their existing advisory board?

The establishment of a clear set of expectations and requirements should be accomplished. Without a delineation of responsibilities, the role of the advisory board can be relegated to that of "cheerleader" rather than an implied, if not actual, fiduciary. Communication from the fiduciary board on a regularly scheduled basis, along with frequent site visits from the fiduciary board members and the headquarters staff is imperative. Joint development of goals, both for the overall site and for the local site staff, encourages the cooperative spirit needed for a successful mission.

Interested in learning more about Year Up? For more information, please visit www.yearup.org.

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