

Board Fellowship Program

2023 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 800 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, 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
- Board mentor who will directly engage with the Fellow at least once per month, in addition to communicating asynchronously on a weekly basis
- 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

- Spring - Application opens, accepted on a rolling basis
- Information Sessions
 - May 2 - Ann Arbor
 - May 3 - Virtual via Zoom
 - May 4 - Detroit
- July 14 - 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

How Nonprofit Boards Can Apply

Business+Impact invites nonprofits serving Southeast Michigan to attend an information session in Ann Arbor on May 2nd at 12pm noon, online on May 3rd at 12pm noon, or in Detroit on May 4th at 12pm noon. [Please register for an information session here](#) and submit an application before July 14, 2023. If you are interested in being contacted for the 2023-24 academic year, please email boardfellows@umich.edu.

Frequently Asked Questions

How many Board Fellows should my organization host?

Nonprofit organizations have the option to host one or two students. Our staff highly encourages two Fellows, as students working in pairs tend to have a more impactful outcome and experience on the board. If hosting two Fellows, each student can have their own project and mentor, or they can work on the same project and share a mentor. Business+Impact staff will work with you to determine the right fit for your organization.

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 the 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 an 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 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(s) to set a regular meeting and communication schedule 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 is done through a series of workshops and networking opportunities from October – March. These trainings 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, office hours, 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
- Assign an executive staff member as a primary point of contact with the organization
- Provide a formal introduction to the organization and the expectations of board members
- Enable the Board Fellow(s) to complete one or two meaningful, mutually beneficial projects
- 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 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 online at <https://businessimpact.umich.edu/collaborations/community/nonprofit-board-fellows/>

