**Project#3: MENTOR New York Young Professional Advisory Board Civic Leadership Program**

**Project Abstract**

**Project Goal**

In May 2022, MENTOR New York launched the Young Professional Advisory Board Civic Leadership Program. The program helps young professionals 24-35 years old develop the civic and philanthropic skills necessary to be effective board members and civic leaders in the community.

**DEL Outcomes**

2 and 4

**Competency Areas of Focus**

Leadership Development

Ethics: Values and Decision Making

Organizational Dynamics

Executive Decision Making

**Project Overview**

A 2013 Georgetown University Center of Education and the Workforce Study found that the rate of educated, skilled workers available to replace the Baby Boomers was not large enough to keep pace with the job vacancies and job creation anticipated in 2020 (Hirsch, 2017). While Georgetown University scholars conducted this study, this scholar-leader is confident they could not have predicted that a global pandemic would cause a paused economy and further erode the anticipated workforce gap. This reality has created greater urgency for organizations to examine their current workforce and evaluate the leader and leadership gaps they anticipate experiencing over the next five years. This has created a void for the nonprofit sector at the workforce level and the Board of Directors level.

As a business-to-business nonprofit model, our focus at MENTOR New York is to anticipate the future of the mentoring marketplace to support mentoring programs in sustaining their operations and implementing best practices with proven impact on young people's lives. Looking at the current realities in shifting talent pools and challenges in recruiting new board members, MENTOR New York understood we would need to invest more intentionally in developing the future leaders available for board leadership. Our goal is to mitigate the significant talent loss and expert gaps they will undoubtedly experience in a marketplace with a limited pool of eligible candidates. To that end, we assessed our role in this space and recombined our current resources and a specific program to address this need over time. I decided to design and implement a MENTOR New York Civic Leaders Program for Young Professionals. This project focuses on DEL program outcomes #2 and #4 with the areas of focus on accelerated leadership development, organizational dynamics, and ethical and executive decision-making.

**Project In Action**

For the past 15 years, MENTOR New York has had a Young Professionals Advisory Board comprised of young professionals who volunteer to help the organization host its annual fundraising event, the MENTOR of the Year Awards. In this role, young professionals help the organization by selling tickets, securing corporate sponsors, securing donated goods for the silent auction, and attending the event. Due to the global pandemic in 2020 and 2021, our event was held virtually, limiting their roles in planning and engagement. In 2022, we had to revamp the program for our annual event as many members had aged out, moved out of state, or lost their employment. This challenge became an opportunity to address the challenge of the board member talent gap while recombining our resources to revamp our Young Professional Advisory Board engagement.

The MENTOR, New York Civic Leadership Program, would focus on recruiting young professionals ages 21-35 interested in our mission, making a difference, and learning how to be an effective civic and philanthropic leader. The program is designed to build a peer learning opportunity and help gain experience as a civic leader. We created a business casual professional development program that allows young professionals to develop their social capital and network with like-minded peers. These have three components. The first was to teach young professionals the fundamental concepts of nonprofit management through three cohorts learning "Sip and Learn" sessions. The second was to provide a MENTOR New York Board member to become a philanthropic mentor to share their experiences and answer the questions, and finally to use the learned skills of advocating for a mission, storytelling, and raising money taught during the "Sip and Learn" sessions. This experience will add the mental models and framing necessary to develop expertise in these areas.

**Sip and Learn Sessions**

Nelson (2015) suggests these fast-moving changes require a shift to three-level organizations leveraging Board engagement in strategic foresight. "Three-level leaders and governors understand that to be effective and efficient while losing relevance is to fail" (Nelson, 2015, p. 4). The role of understanding changing context and providing a narrative that defines where the organization will find itself in the future currently lives with external consultants or the CEO. Nelson (2015) proposes that Boards should own the role of "undertaking strategic foresight at a high professional level"; while articulating and owning the future vision, which the organization is committed to serving throughout its life (Nelson, 2015, p. 4). During our "Sip and Learn" sessions, our eight members experienced three sessions that helped them understand and develop the skills necessary to become a board member successfully. The first session focuses on nonprofit management and the board member's role. By demystifying the operations of a nonprofit business and board member responsibilities, we created a safe place for members to ask about their concerns, articulate fears, and ask tactical questions about the role. The second session focused on storytelling and the value of connecting to their passions through a mission-focused organization. Since mentoring was an area of passion they had identified by engaging in the program, we helped them understand the value of advocacy in mentoring, sharing their mentoring story and discussing mentoring from an informed advocate. The third session focused on developing their fundraising skills and understanding their fiduciary responsibility as a board members.

**Philanthropic Mentor**

As a mentoring organization, we know that mentoring should occur at all levels of the leadership development process. Having mentors and senior colleagues have mentoring mindsets helps create a learning culture that encourages curiosity, inquiry, and the desire to strive for excellence. "Mentoring and coaching are two of the most effective ways for Boomers to transfer their knowledge and expertise to younger, less experienced employees" ( Hirsh, 2017). We added a mentoring component to the program to transfer knowledge and support the "Sip and Learn" experience.

This program component allowed MENTOR New York board members to engage as mentors, strengthening their connection and affinity to the organization's mission while developing future board members for the mentoring movement. Each Civic Leader matched with a MENTOR New York board member was required to meet once a month via zoom to discuss their learning in the sip-and-learn sessions, expand their professional network by meeting a seasoned executive, and learn more about the role of a board member.

**Experiential Learning**

When an emerging leader puts what was learned into action, learning from your peers and receiving feedback are powerful tools for developing competencies and skills faster. Each "Sip and Learn" session ended with an assignment that needed to be completed prior to the next "Sip and Learn" session. These assignments allowed the civic leader to practice the suggested skill and receive feedback from cohort peers and MENTOR New York Staff, This type of post-learning experience is beneficial in capturing the growth and leadership development that has occurred and reinforcing performance measures that can be rewarded accordingly (Maheshwari& Yadav, 2018).

MENTOR New York provided tools like Memory Fox so each mentor could record a video of their mentoring story and articulate their passion for mentoring. We also provided causevox, an online peer-to-peer fundraising platform, to help them solicit their friends, family, and colleagues for the cause. This platform also allowed them to write solicitation emails and create social media posts to support the event and their passion for mentoring.

**Conclusion**

**Preliminary Outcomes**

The Young Professional Advisory Board Civic Leaders Program met the desired outcomes and was very successful. Civic Leaders learned skills, raised over $25,000, benefited from gaining a senior executive as a mentor, and expanded their social capital. The Civic Leaders provided positive feedback about the program, and some cited expanding their social capital as one of its main benefits.

Social capital is the cooperative behaviors within and between firms. (Olcott & Oliver, 2014). To further define social capital, we must distinguish the types of social capital individuals in a team. "External social capital is those relationships employees have with others while internal social capital is the relationships among employees in a network, while neutral social capital integrates them both" (Edmondson & Lie, 2014). Studies have found that external and internal social capital is positively associated with psychological safety and creates an environment that supports failure-based learning (Edmondson & Lie, 2014). As a result, building social capital through this program created a safe environment to engage in board responsibility without fear of failure while having a network of professionals for their professional development.

References:

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