



Introduction to The Bridgespan Group

A vibrant nonprofit sector is a powerful lever for improving our society. Whatever the issue—preserving the ocean’s fish stocks, helping ensure that every student graduates from high school prepared to be a productive citizen, or bringing together public and private resources to help fragile families strengthen themselves and their neighborhoods—the challenges nonprofits tackle are enormous. The more effective these organizations become, the better the hope of addressing many of our most pressing social and environmental problems.

The Bridgespan Group was created to help nonprofits enhance their ability to achieve superior results in the vital work they undertake. From the outset, we have pursued this mission by providing consulting services. Over time, Bridgespan has expanded to include a variety of knowledge-sharing activities and Bridgestar, an initiative dedicated to attracting, developing, and connecting leaders for the sector. These endeavors are all shaped by values grounded in our mission: impact, respect, candor, collaboration, and passion.

Bridgespan’s approach

The ingredients for achieving results—a coherent and compelling strategy, capable leadership and staff, and sufficient and appropriately structured capital—are the same across the nonprofit and for-profit sectors. However, the structural barriers to obtaining them are often higher for nonprofit leaders.

For-profit management teams have ready access to external expertise and advice, which can be the catalyst for meaningful performance improvements, while nonprofits have much more limited access to such services. There exists a huge body of resource material that codifies the business world’s best thinking and practice, but most of it sheds little light on the social sector’s distinctive management challenges. A robust executive search industry and sophisticated internal training programs support the development of strong senior management teams in for-profit organizations, while institutional mechanisms that promote the flow of managerial talent to high-performing nonprofits are few and far between. And, ironically, even the most elementary precept of business—that capital will follow success—does not hold in the nonprofit sector, where dollars are at least as likely to flow to what is new, or troubled, as to what is proven.

The strategies, tools, and frameworks used in the for-profit business world have the potential to provide a powerful starting point for helping nonprofits overcome these barriers. Bridgespan exists to apply the best of this thinking to the task of achieving greater social impact. We adapt time-proven concepts or, as necessary, re-think them, with respect for an organization’s different and distinctive needs. In the end, the goal is to help nonprofits increase the impact of their activities.

Founded under the auspices of Bain & Company, Inc., the global consulting firm, and incorporated as an independent nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, Bridgespan began its first client engagements in 2000. Since

then, we have worked with more than 100 nonprofits organizations and foundations on their strategic and organizational issues, and have undertaken several projects designed to promote helpful structural changes in the sector itself. Bridgestar was launched in December 2003.

Bridgespan services

Bridgespan's consulting relationships focus on results. Put simply, we seek opportunities to help high-performing organizations maximize the impact of their work.

Whether they are direct-service organizations, intermediaries playing structural roles within the nonprofit sector, or foundations, all of our clients have in common the potential to achieve greater impact; leadership committed to making the changes necessary to realize that potential; and a strategy-related issue or question that is likely to result in the production of knowledge relevant to other sector leaders. Of these three criteria, the potential for social impact is the single most important. In some cases, the impact is a function of the client's demonstrated reach and reputation. In others, Bridgespan clients are engaged in innovative efforts that promise significantly improved outcomes, or they are pursuing initiatives that have the potential to transform their fields. All of these clients are also our teachers. Our field experience deeply informs Bridgespan's emerging body of knowledge about effective nonprofit and philanthropic performance.

Fact-based, data-driven analysis and interactive, values-driven discussions are at the heart the work itself. Our consulting engagements with nonprofits involve strategic and organizational issues ranging from questions of focus and growth, to effective performance measurement, the challenge of balancing mission and economic sustainability, and the use of technology for social change. Recognizing the value and power of this kind of consulting, funders have begun to provide Bridgespan services for current or prospective grantees.

We also consult directly to foundations on issues such as strategic focus, accountability, due diligence, and effective grant making. Because these foundations are deeply committed to enhancing their grantees' impact as well as their own, they represent not only a powerful force for change in the performance of individual nonprofits, but also a crucial point of leverage for change in the sector overall.

Knowledge figures prominently in Bridgespan's operating model and is a cornerstone of our mission. Bridgespan's knowledge initiatives represent a commitment to learning and sharing what works, to prompting new thinking about strategy and management, and to encouraging leaders, managers, and staff to reach out for new tools and concepts likely to affect performance.

Every Bridgespan employee actively looks for opportunities to develop new knowledge. We are committed to distributing our insights, frameworks, and tools through multiple means and media: publications, working

sessions, speaking engagements, symposia, and collaborations with educational institutions and others. Our clients share and support his commitment: on engaging with Bridgespan, all agree to make relevant and non-proprietary content available for the use of others.

Bridgestar's (www.bridgestar.org) objective is to foster the creation of highly effective management teams and to support their leaders. This newest Bridgespan initiative seeks to be both a source of talent for individual organizations and a resource for increasing the flow of capable executives into and within the nonprofit sector. By building and maintaining a free online job board, offering a variety of talent-matching services, and producing and distributing recruiting- and career development-related knowledge and tools, Bridgestar seeks to influence the development of the sector overall as well as the performance of individual nonprofits.

Help build the bridge

The Bridgespan management team is comprised of sector-experienced professionals and individuals with consulting and business backgrounds. All have deep respect for nonprofits' unique qualities and their mission focus.

Bridgespan's board of directors and advisory board are similarly comprised of highly engaged individuals from both sectors. Several bring unique perspectives distilled from personal experience with "bridging" from the for-profit to the nonprofit sector in their own careers.

Bridgespan's ongoing relationship with Bain & Company provides continued access to some of the world's best thinking and practices related to strategy and organizational effectiveness. Bain consultants offer us fresh perspectives and approaches through six-month rotating externships.

And, finally, Bridgespan's work in partnership with world-leading philanthropies, universities, professional interest groups, research institutes, publishing outlets, and other consulting firms promotes sharing of resources and, hence, greater social impact.

Our vision of success is a world characterized by vibrant nonprofits making significant progress on a variety of important challenges. We invite inquiries, feedback, and comments from all who share our passion for social impact and results-driven action. Visit us on the web at www.bridgespan.org, or reach us at 617-572-2833.

The Bridgespan Group
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