

Introduction to The Bridgespan Group

A vibrant nonprofit sector is a powerful lever for improving our society. Whatever the issue—fighting climate change, 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 and philanthropy enhance their ability to achieve breakthrough results in the vital work they undertake. At the outset, we pursued this mission by providing strategy consulting services. Over time, Bridgespan activities have expanded to include executive search, philanthropy advising, 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.

In the end, the goal is to help nonprofits and philanthropy increase the impact of their activities.

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 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. Nonprofits typically 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 nonprofit 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.

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The strategies, tools, and frameworks used in the for-profit world have the potential to provide a powerful starting point for helping nonprofits overcome these barriers. Bridgespan exists to apply the best of these to the task of achieving greater social impact. We adapt time-proven concepts or, as necessary, re-think them, with respect for a nonprofit's different and distinctive needs.

Knowledge also 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.

Bridgespan services

Incubated 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 strategy consulting engagements in 2000. Since then, we have worked with over 200 nonprofit organizations and foundations on their strategic and organizational issues, and many more on their hiring needs. We have also undertaken several projects designed to promote helpful structural changes in the sector itself. Key among these is Bridgestar, which was launched in December 2003.

Bridgespan's strategy consulting and philanthropy advising services focus on what it takes to achieve results. We pursue opportunities to help nonprofits and philanthropy with big ideas for making the world a better place, who seek roadmaps for enabling and accelerating social change.

Whether they are direct-service organizations, intermediaries playing structural roles within the nonprofit sector, or philanthropies, 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 demonstrated reach and reputation. In others, clients are engaged in innovative efforts that promise significantly improved outcomes, or they are pursuing initiatives that have the potential to transform their fields.

Fact-based, data-driven analysis and interactive, values-driven discussions are at the heart of the work itself. Our strategy 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.

Our work in philanthropy typically addresses four broad sets of strategic challenges: clarifying the objectives of the philanthropic effort; developing strategies to pursue it; aligning financial and organizational resources to implement it; and defining sound performance measures to assess impact. We also partner with some philanthropies to work with their grantees on developing business plans for programs and initiatives in which they invest.

Of course, even the best-conceived strategy is ultimately of little benefit unless there is a strong team in place to lead and implement it. With this in mind, Bridgespan executive search services are designed to help nonprofits navigate the often frustrating and time consuming process of attracting and building strong and cohesive senior leadership teams. Bridgespan's search clients are typically organizations, intermediaries, and foundations seeking to strengthen their capacity in the areas of finance, operations, strategy, evaluation, marketing and communications, and technology. An innovative model of service delivery enables organizations to choose full executive search or, as appropriate, a la carte advisory services in the areas of candidate pool development, resume screening, referencing, and more.

In pursuit of talented individuals with the functional expertise required to strengthen and grow nonprofits, we have developed a deep candidate pool from both within and beyond the sector. Our engagements emphasize capacity-building, in that we both execute on searches and train our clients in hiring best practices, so that they are better enabled to attract excellent candidates for their organizations at all levels.

Bridgestar's (www.bridgestar.org) objective is to foster the creation of highly effective management teams and to support their leaders. This Bridgespan initiative seeks to be a resource for increasing the flow of capable managers and leaders into and within the nonprofit sector. By building and maintaining an online job board, connecting leaders, and producing and distributing recruiting- and career development-related knowledge and tools, Bridgestar hopes to help strengthen 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.

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: our website (www.bridgespan.org), publications, working sessions, speaking engagements, symposia, and collaborations with educational institutions and others. We also look for opportunities to support the dissemination of breakthrough ideas created by others.

Bridgespan's board of trustees 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.