

Guidelines for Graduate Professional Education in Nonprofit Organizations, Management and Leadership

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Background and Purposes

The Guidelines for Graduate Professional Education in Nonprofit Organizations, Management, and Leadership respect the educational challenges presented by the breadth and diversity of the nonprofit sector. A wide array of skills, knowledge, competencies and attitudes is essential for the success of nonprofit leaders and managers. These guidelines are intended to stimulate exploration and innovation in curriculum design and content and are based on the view that there are core essential elements that characterize nonprofit organizations and their managers and differentiate them from public and for-profit organizations. While most graduate-level nonprofit management education occurs in conjunction with MPA/MPP degrees, there are programs in a variety of other academic settings. Regardless of the setting, graduate professional education programs in nonprofit organizations, management, and leadership should reflect the fundamental body of knowledge defined by these guidelines.

Section 1: Program Integrity

As evidenced in "Section 3: Program Elements," nonprofit management encompasses a significant range of subject matter. Therefore, a minimum level of educational offerings dedicated specifically to the nonprofit sector is critical for a program to advertise truthfully that it is providing graduate professional education in nonprofit organizations, management, or leadership. Elective courses should be used to enable students to move beyond generic nonprofit course work and to specialize in substantive knowledge areas.

1. A Masters degree in public affairs, policy or administration should include a minimum of 36 semester hours or equivalent credit hours with a minimum of 12 semester hours within a nonprofit concentration (4 courses or equivalent focusing primarily on the distinctive essential elements of the nonprofit sector listed in Section 3-D below).
2. A Graduate Certificate in nonprofit organizations, management, and leadership should have a minimum of 12 semester hours or equivalent credit hours.

Section 2: Mission, Program Objectives, and Structure

Graduate professional education programs in nonprofit organizations, management, and leadership, serve different audiences and seek different ends. Thus, a program should have a clear written statement of its educational philosophy, mission, objectives and strategies to guide decisions about curriculum, faculty, degree requirements, and instruction. The statement should be included in program literature and referenced in advertisements.

The statement of mission, objectives, and strategy should identify the general types of positions for which the program attempts to prepare its graduates (for example, mid-level managers in larger nonprofit organizations; board/community leaders; in arts, human services, community development nonprofits; in government or for-profit positions that require extensive interface with nonprofit organizations; in international or multilateral NGOs); the population from which students are drawn (for example, pre-service, in-service, local, national, international); and relative educational emphasis (for example, theory, practice, leadership, public policy, organizational management, quantitative analytical/policy skills).

The faculty and administration should have a clear understanding of the program's compatibility with the mission of the host department or school and the program's relationships with other graduate professional education programs in the host department or school (if any). The structure of nonprofit management programs can take a variety of forms. A careful assessment of resource stability, ability to draw on interdisciplinary resources, and intellectual compatibility with a host department are factors to consider in determining the placement of a nonprofit management program within a university structure.

Section 3: Program Elements

A. Format

Separate courses do not need to be established for each element of these guidelines. The elements may be addressed through any format appropriate to match the needs and resources of the offering institution so as to allow flexibility and encourage creative delivery of relevant subject matter.

It is acceptable to assemble a nonprofit management curriculum by drawing upon a limited number of appropriate courses originating in different disciplines (for example, anthropology, communications, health sciences, management, marketing, psychology, economics, social work, and sociology.) However, the curriculum must include explicit efforts to integrate such disparate components.

B. Content

The core masters courses should include subject matter related to the nonprofit sector and the blurring of the boundaries among the three primary social sectors. The changing relationship between the sectors should be included in lecture materials, case exercises, assigned readings, and research topics throughout the curriculum.

C. Internship

If the masters program requires an internship, students who choose the nonprofit concentration/certificate generally should be placed in a nonprofit organization for that experience. Exceptions may be appropriate if internship tasks are highly relevant to nonprofit practice, policy, or regulation.

D. Essential Elements

The guidelines now turn to curriculum topics or elements. This subsection covers elements distinctive to nonprofit organizations. These elements should be addressed in the curricula of all programs that claim to provide graduate professional education in nonprofit organization, management, and leadership. Specific prescriptive approaches and requirements within these essential elements are purposely avoided in order to foster innovation in the field and to preserve flexibility to pursue different educational program missions.

1. History, Values, Ethics and Philosophies: Nonprofit management programs should place nonprofit organizations in their relevant societal context. Coverage of the history, values, ethics, and philosophies of nonprofit organizations is necessary for understanding the role of nonprofit organizations in civil society and democratic processes. The curriculum should address the moral and ethical issues and dilemmas faced by nonprofit organization board members and staff, and it should develop critical thinking skills in participating students. Students should understand nonprofit reliance on the public trust and the need to set and maintain elevated standards of duty to mission, care for the public's best interests in the execution of that mission, and expectations to work collaboratively to promote the public interest. This material should address more than purely legal issues.

2. Legal Structure: Programs should include curriculum content that addresses the legal context within which nonprofit organizations operate including the dynamic regulatory environment. Law that governs incorporation and tax-exempt status (at the federal and state levels) implies specific impacts on organizations. An understanding of the responsibilities imposed by statute and the rationale for society's willingness to privilege nonprofit organizations should be included in an academic program's basic curriculum. Students should be exposed to the legal environment for advocacy by nonprofits.

3. Revenue: Nonprofit organizations raise funds through a variety of means including: solicitation of donated revenues, such as charitable gifts, planned giving programs, and capital campaigns; memberships; earned income, including fee-for-services and sales of products; private and government grants; investments; special events; and contracts with businesses and government agencies. This element should include, for example, the history, theory, ethics, standards, and practice of fundraising and philanthropy; Unrelated Business Income; charitable trusts; and related tax and other laws regulating fundraising.

4. Governance: Programs should address the volunteer boards of trustees (or directors) legally charged with fiduciary responsibility to act in the public interest. The non-distribution constraint is a key concept to be included in any discussion of governance concerns. Board responsibility, structure, and relations with the CEO and staff, and the board's responsibility for the organization's mission are key factors in this element, and should be included along with theories of governance, leadership, and conflict negotiation and management.

5. Human Resources and Volunteer Management: If human resource management for nonprofit governing bodies is not covered elsewhere in the curriculum, it should be included in a specialized human resource management course for nonprofits. The curriculum should cover human resource management for volunteers as well as for paid staff, and address human resource management functions including recruitment, selection, training and development, evaluation, negotiation, job analysis, and reward and recognition. Motivation of board, staff and volunteers should be addressed, as well as management of the relationship between paid staff and volunteers. The curriculum should develop recognition of the challenges of human resource management in the nonprofit context, including executive compensation and cross-sector careers.

6. Theories of the Sector and its Organizations: Theory should be an important and visible part of any nonprofit management program. Particularly important for nonprofit organizations are theories of the sector's existence, role and functions as well as theories of philanthropy, voluntarism, and civic engagement. Theories of organization that distinguish organizations by sector are particularly important, as are organizational and systems theories that explain nonprofit behavior (e.g., life cycle theories).

E. Overarching Elements

This section includes elements that are not specific to the nonprofit sector but are still important for effective management and leadership of nonprofit organizations. These elements should be included in courses in nonprofit management concentration/certificate programs, and integrated into mainstream courses in graduate degree programs. These elements are "component topics," not necessarily courses.

1. Accountability, Performance Measures and Program Evaluation: Like all organizations, nonprofit entities must develop mechanisms and processes to secure fiduciary and programmatic accountability to their various stakeholders. Curricula should address this imperative by providing opportunities for students to consider the manifold forms of accountability claims of the multiple stakeholders in a typical nonprofit organization's operating environment including its clients, governing board, primary community supporters or sponsors (including contractors where pertinent) and employees. Curricula should highlight both the ethical demands these relationships involve as well as the programmatic requirements that each entails. Students should explore the organizational processes and methodologies necessary to ensure that such imperatives are effectively addressed, including alternate strategies of program assessment and evaluation. Whether process, output or outcome focused, these should be presented as an integral part of ensuring stakeholder accountability and therefore important to effective organizational governance.

2. Budgeting and Resource Management: Attention should be given to nonprofit organizations' management of resources, including integration of management systems. Curricula should address general accounting practices and budget management, risk management, fund accounting, government tax reporting requirements, program budgeting, monitoring of contracts, supervision of grant projects, and

reporting to government agencies, philanthropic foundations, and other sources of program or organizational support. Attention should also be paid to management of endowments and risk management of capital resources.

3. External Relations: The relationship between the organization and its constituents, how that is managed, and various interpretations of accountability should be included in the program. Within this context are principles of communication, public relations, general and social marketing, managing constituent groups, negotiation and conflict management, and strategic planning. This element also encompasses the role of mobilization of human resources and media relations for the purpose of public relations and advocacy and the principles and techniques of crisis management.

4. Inter-organizational and Inter-sectoral Relations: Nonprofit organization operations often require spanning of sector boundaries and development and management of partnerships and innovative inter-organizational relationships. Therefore, resource dependency, institutional theory, population ecology, network theory, boundary-spanning activities, and alternative organizational, partnership and network structures are topics for students of nonprofit organizations, management and leadership.

5. Alignment with the Environment: Organizations must be able to align or position themselves with their environment, the demand or need for their services or activities, and the availability of resources. Students should be aware of the advantages and limitations of strategic planning and management and understand the appropriate use of these tools for directing organizational change.

6. Applications of Quantitative Analysis and Information Technology to Nonprofit Management and Policy: Students should be able to apply current tools and techniques of quantitative analysis to the processes of planning, policy analysis, management, and evaluation of nonprofit organizations and their programs. Examples of applications include analysis of financial statements, program planning, and needs, market, and outcome assessments. Students should understand the limitations of quantitative analysis for these types of functions. In addition, nonprofit managers and leaders should be able to integrate current information technology into the processes of planning, policy analysis, management and evaluation of nonprofit organizations. Decisions about which information technology applications should be used, and strategies for keeping pace with technological change, are examples of appropriate elements in a nonprofit curriculum.

7. Policy Making Processes: This element is important for organizations because of its impacts on internal organizational processes and external operating environments. Students need to understand how public policy is created at the federal, state and local levels, how these can affect non-profit organization mission and programs, and roles in advocacy. In addition, the role of organization governing boards in setting and evaluating internal policy is an important process for students to understand.

8. Economics and Market Issues: Nonprofit organizations in the United States operate in a market economy and therefore are subject to market forces. Students should understand the macro and micro economic principles that can assist them in understanding those forces and their implications for organizational effectiveness. Curricula should address self-generated revenue and the decisions faced by nonprofits in determining such things as product and service mix, pricing, market opportunities, and competition with for-profit firms.

9. International Organizations: Nonprofit education should include study of the international nonprofit community both as a comparative exercise but also to gain an understanding of international organizations, global social issues, international regimes and institutions, and INGOs and NGOs in development and democratization processes. Students should have an understanding of issues for nonprofit organizations spanning national boundaries as well as those for indigenous, community-based organizations outside the United States.