



Don't Need a Consultant? *5 good reasons you might be wrong*

Foundation and nonprofit staff are spread thin enough. There is a lot to do with a limited number of people and a limited number of hours in the day. And there are times when expecting hardworking staff to strategize and carry through an entirely new project, on top of handling their ongoing responsibilities, is asking too much.

Consultants can take some of the burden off of staff while providing a new perspective and expertise. They may also increase your organization's credibility. Here are the five main reasons most foundations and nonprofits enlist the help of outside consultants.

1. Time

Whether staff is temporarily short on time or you simply lack sufficient staff capacity, consultants can be a great help. A consultant can fill in for a staff member who is on leave or serve as a "staff extender" to add focus to an existing team. Here's a recent example: One of Putnam's family foundation clients was growing quickly. The CEO planned to hire more program officers in the future, but she wanted to wait until she developed new grantmaking programs. In the meantime, she retained Putnam to serve as a "consulting program officer" to review proposals, conduct site visits, and research new grantmaking strategies. The CEO succeeded in adding staff capacity without making any long-term commitments.

2. Expertise

Even with the most meticulous hiring, it's rare to have all the skills you need on staff at any given time. Consultants can fill in those gaps with specialized skills in areas such as quantitative research, evaluation, facilitation, strategic planning, marketing, and more. Many consultants also offer expertise in specific fields of knowledge, such as workforce development, health care financing, or substance abuse prevention. You can decide whether you prefer to hire a consultant with preexisting knowledge or one without content expertise who can bring a fresh perspective to the issues.

3 Objectivity

The best solution is not always the most obvious one. For example, when you want to get at the underlying reasons teens don't succeed in school, increase the effectiveness of a health care outreach program, or communicate the benefits of a new service to a target audience, an outside consultant can provide much-needed objectivity. Consultants often function as a "neutral voice" by conducting objective research, assessing opportunities, and developing new solutions.

4. Openness

Nonprofits often feel they can't fully disclose what's going wrong and what their real challenges are. They're worried that they might lose your funding or fail to receive the additional funding they need. An outside consultant, however, can inspire a sense of confidentiality. They can bring back to you, the funder, the issues and concerns that were raised without sharing specifically who raised them. That allows nonprofits, grantees, and stakeholders to feel more comfortable and confident about sharing what's really happening and what's really needed.



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5. Credibility

Often, organizations hire consultants to increase their project's credibility in the eyes of a target audience. For example, an organization seeking to replicate a program across multiple states might hire a nationally known evaluation firm to inspire greater confidence from national funders. Conversely, if you are undertaking a grassroots effort, you may be better off hiring a community-based consulting firm with experience in your target region.

No matter what your goal, hiring a consultant may be the right next step to help your organization see a project through to its next level and remain poised for continued success.

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