



case study



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Campus

Maytree's DiverseCity onBoard program and CharityVillage Campus

Maytree wanted to find the most convenient, cost-effective and valuable training for candidates of their DiverseCity onBoard program. The course needed to clearly and effectively explain the role, obligations and expectations of nonprofit board members to ensure Maytree candidates could perform their new roles successfully.

The context

When John Griffin decided he wanted to give back to the Scarborough community of Malvern where he grew up, he wasn't sure how. With his free time limited to a few hours a month, he wanted to ensure his volunteer experience was impactful and effective. So he turned to Maytree's DiverseCity onBoard program. Part of a larger DiverseCity project offered by Maytree and the Toronto City Summit Alliance, DiverseCity onBoard was established to counter the lack of governance diversity in the GTA. The program connects qualified candidates from Aboriginal, visible minority and under-represented immigrant communities and places them in organizations that need them.

With a roster today of 1,200+ candidates looking for placements, DiverseCity onBoard has facilitated more than 330 appointments on boards across the city, including the Ontario Science Centre, Women's College Hospital, United Way of York Region and the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

Griffin, a group benefits consultant, was matched through the program with Second Base Youth Shelter. Second Base helps homeless youth with food, clothing, shelter and opportunities for self-reliance. The pairing was a good fit. "I'm very interested in poverty issues, particularly with youth because I feel you can have great impact without a lot of community dollars to get people off the street and back on their own two feet," he explains.

The only problem was that Griffin knew little about the workings of a board and the responsibilities and obligations the role entails. Lucky for Griffin and others in the same predicament, Maytree and CharityVillage.com would prove helpful.

Aside from matching board candidates with the right organization, DiverseCity onBoard leaders realized that they also needed to help prepare prospective board members by giving them tools to succeed. “We came to realize that some individuals who applied to the roster don’t have a clear understanding of what the role of the board is and the relationship with the executive director,” explains manager, Catherine Winter. “They needed some guidance as a first step in preparing them for their governance journey.” The question was where Maytree would find the tools to help prepare their applicants.

The search

Maytree conducted a mini environmental scan of the available training in the GTA that met their requirements. It needed to be convenient, budget-conscious and chock-full of helpful information. In their search, they came upon CharityVillage.com’s Campus offerings and found exactly what they needed. Titled “Boards that Work,” the online course, approximately two hours in length, offers the following takeaways:

- Explains how a board acts as a whole unit
- Lists the eight key board responsibilities
- Clarifies the unique relationship between the board and the executive director
- Highlights six issues requiring special board attention
- Describes what it takes to be an effective board member
- Describes when to create a committee and when to use a task force
- Shows how to improve the routine functioning of a board.

Maytree appreciated the program’s cost-effectiveness and, as an online course, it was convenient both for the organization and their candidates. The course content met their needs too. “The idea was to provide some basic training for individuals; they can then take further in-depth training in areas like financial statements, fundraising and other key areas that are important for board members on a nonprofit board,” says Winter.



The results

The working relationship with Charity Village – now going on two years – has proven successful. “The program is useful, practical and easy to take,” Winter says, explaining how Maytree representatives tried it themselves before offering it to DiverseCity onBoard candidates. As for the process itself, it was simple and straightforward, adds Winter. Whenever they have had questions or concerns, Charity Village representatives have been quick to respond.

What’s more, the course enhances DiverseCity onBoard’s marketability. “We can say with confidence that our roster members are knowledgeable in the area of governance in general,” Winter explains. After all, without this basic board knowledge, Maytree doesn’t even allow prospects to appear live on their roster. “So [the course] is a prerequisite for individuals with no board experience or training.”

Organizations seem equally satisfied – on a number of levels. “We wish we had more diversity on our board,” says Virginia Gibberd, Second Base board chair. “And DiverseCity onBoard has been a good way of getting board members,” she affirms, adding how publicizing their needs with DiverseCity onBoard helped them build a full roster for the first time. Though she wasn’t even aware that Griffin had taken the course, she has definitely noticed the immense value he adds to the board. “He’s been a really good member of our group; we’re very pleased.”

The students are pleased too. For one thing, as an online course, Griffin appreciated the ability to study on his own time. Sometimes that meant he’d work at night, other times during lunch breaks at work. The flexibility was a huge boon for Griffin and his tight schedule. For another, Boards that Work was a fantastic primer for his new role, says Griffin. At age 28, he’s the youngest board member at Second Base by 15 or 20 years. “It [the course] essentially let me know exactly what I was getting into.”

He was able to understand, for instance, the oft-times subtle difference between a board’s role and the job of managing the organization. “It taught me very clearly that our role is to set policies and ensure policies are being followed by management but we don’t enforce policies and we don’t get directly involved in the day-to-day management of the organization.”





Without the course, his usefulness would have been compromised, Griffin adds. “The program allowed me to hit the ground running; I wouldn’t have been able to walk in the door and make an impact,” he explains, adding that without the training it would have taken him three or four months to learn about the functioning of the board. Such preparedness can prove invaluable. Board members have a responsibility to be prepared for these meetings, he says. “It’s important to understand your role; I wouldn’t recommend anyone joining a board without going through a similar program.”

“It’s working really well for us in terms of providing basic training for our candidates. And the comments we’ve had from the nonprofit sector – they’ve said it’s been beneficial.”

-Catherine Winters, Manager, DiverseCity OnBoard

CharityVillage Campus is a series of self-paced, web-based e-training courses. Developed by senior nonprofit practitioners, the courses help build essential skills and knowledge that learners can start using immediately. All courses are backed by a 100% satisfaction guarantee.

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