

Teaching Nonprofits to Think Like a Business

With her blend of compassion and corporate expertise, Alison Glastein Gray helps nonprofit companies adopt a for-profit mindset.

When we think of nonprofit organizations, some of us default to a few enduring misconceptions:

- Nonprofits aren't allowed to make a profit. (They are.)
- Nonprofits employ a volunteer workforce. (They attract qualified talent and pay competitive salaries.)
- Nonprofits are built on passion rather than business acumen.

This third point isn't always off base, says Alison Glastein Gray, president of Pear Associates.

"Many nonprofits could benefit from business development strategies to help them explore growth opportunities in an increasingly competitive sector," she says. "They can provide a valuable public service and still have an excellent ROI. They just need to think like a business."

That's Gray's specialty: teaching nonprofits to think strategically, work methodically, and create healthy bottom lines.

Getting Into Details

Gray's role with each client depends on their situation. Her areas of expertise include business development, strategic planning, and grant writing. The extent of her involvement varies as well, with contracts ranging from a single project to longer-term consulting engagements. No matter the task or duration, Gray can tackle it, working



"I've learned the importance of listening to clients up front, understanding their needs, and building a customized engagement accordingly."

—ALISON GLASTEIN GRAY
PRESIDENT, PEAR ASSOCIATES

hands-on to help each client analyze and execute their goals.

It makes sense that Gray is successful in this unique niche—it combines her primary natural talents: public service and business insight. "My mother was a social worker—always focused on giving back," she says. "Since childhood, I've had those values. But I'm also extremely results-oriented. So I wanted to merge the two."

To that end, Gray formed Pear Associates in 1999. The company flourished until 2008, around which time she accepted an offer to transfer her skill sets to a for-profit health care consulting firm. She grew that firm from start-up to a profitable national practice. But her success only reinforced her desire to help others. "My achievement was tangible, but I wanted to be in a more mission-driven environment," she says.

Gray returned to the nonprofit sector for several years, heading up the business development team at a statewide health organization, and in 2018, Gray relaunched Pear Associates. She knows it was the right move. "I'm where I belong," she says. "I've come full circle."



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Pear Associates Services

With each service, Pear Associates not only assists the client but also teaches them to adopt strategic methods so they can thrive on their own.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Ongoing changes require nonprofits to periodically revisit their mission and programs. Pear Associates guides clients through this process by helping them balance their objectives and strategies.

MARKETING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Nonprofits need to keep donors and community partners engaged in their mission and inform them of successes, activities, and needs. Pear Associates works with clients to develop strategic marketing plans that include community outreach, thought leadership, and communication strategies. Pear Associates also helps nonprofits explore opportunities for growth through competitive analyses and expansion plans.

GRANT WRITING

Pear Associates assists clients through every stage of the grant writing process: identifying potential institutional and government funders, convening stakeholders to explore fundable programs and services, and writing proposals that are comprehensive, compelling, and competitive.