



## What Consultants Should Consider When Working with Nonprofit Leaders<sup>1</sup>

Nonprofit leadership generally lacks experience in working with consultants. Because of this, the nonprofit leaders typically:

- Don't understand why different proposals from different consultants for the same project may vary widely in price.
- Won't necessarily think to call you to get clarification about your proposal.
- Even if the funding comes from a foundation, the cost of the engagement may have a negative psychological impact on staff due to comparisons of consultant prices and staff salaries --- especially if in the long term the work function will be brought in-house.
- Expect that you, as the consultant, will make no assumptions about what the nonprofit leaders know about the topic/the engagement until you're able to have a conversation around the topic.
- Appreciate your help to develop buy-in with their stakeholders.
- Place high value on your experience and knowledge in the field in which the nonprofit operates.
- Expect you to learn about the organization, especially its unique conventions.
- Experience turnover in staff and board members if the engagement is somewhat long term. Help them share the project with new stakeholders through an information session that covers the need being addressed, work done so far, work to go, funding source, etc.
- Don't know what to expect, especially what typically might go wrong during the project. They expect you to share that with them up front.

**What consultants should consider to improve working relationships with nonprofits:**

- Is there board buy-in?
- Is there staff buy-in?
- Is there clarity around who is the client – the Executive Director, the board, the board president?
- Have a follow-up plan that is clearly stated in the proposal.
- Concrete deliverables such as skill development, fundraising/development are viewed by nonprofit leaders as the most successful types of engagements.
- Perceived or real – nonprofits lack the financial resources to work with consultants, so part of your role is likely to include helping to secure the funds to pay for your services.

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<sup>1</sup> This information was compiled from focus groups The Forbes Funds conducted in 2009 with consultants and nonprofit leaders who have received Management Assistance Grants from The Forbes Funds.