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This Compass points Philly-area nonprofits and business pros toward one another

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Alcohol, hors d'oeuvres, soft lighting, men and women moving from table to table and getting to know one another — all the markings of a speed-dating event. Indeed, the gathering was a matchmaking exercise. Yet the goal of this particular event held Sept. 28 at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts wasn't a love connection, but a way to bring together nonprofits in need of free strategic help with business professionals willing to provide it.

Compass Philadelphia is a unique volunteer program that debuted here five years ago in what was the first expansion of a program founded in Washington 15 years ago. Despite its time demands and highly selective screening process — just because you're interested in volunteering doesn't mean you'll be selected (just like dating!) — Compass Philadelphia has been so impressive that it gave organization leaders in D.C. the confidence to start a program in Chicago last January and to begin a search for other suitable cities.

"Philly proved to us that probably every major city has needy nonprofits and business people willing to help. They just need to find each other," said Suzanne Laporte, president of Compass, who came up from Washington for last week's meet-and-greet.

Later this month, businessfolk who mingled over wine and mini-quiches on the second floor of PAFA during



JESSICA GRIFFIN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Beth Dahle, executive director of Compass Philadelphia, during client orientation for her organization, which matches business school graduates and other professionals with nonprofits for pro bono consulting work.

the project launch event will find out whether they were selected to help one of the 16 nonprofits chosen for Compass Philadelphia's 2017-18 program year. The application deadline for volunteers was Oct. 5.

Among those hoping to be picked is Tyler Torres, 26, who even dressed to impress in a dark suit, silk polka-dot pocket square, and Italian leather Magnanni shoes. He's a senior analyst for Mercer LLC, a global health and benefits consulting company.

"I've always been of the state of mind that giving back is better than receiving," Torres said, holding a plate of shrimp and strawberries and a list of the nonprofits whose information tables were set up in a nearby gallery.

Until now, his volunteer activ-

ity has included cancer walks and building houses — worthy causes, but nothing to which he could apply his professional skills and also get something in return.

"I thought this would be a good opportunity for me to develop my consulting skills," Torres said, before heading off in hope of finding a match.

A couple dozen leaders from the nonprofits in the current Compass project cycle gathered earlier last month at law firm Morgan Lewis, an in-kind supporter, for an orientation.

"I have been in a lot of your shoes," Beth Dahle, Compass Philadelphia's executive director, told them. In 2008, she cofounded Impact 100, an organization of philanthropic women that has issued more than \$2 million in grants to local



RAYMOND W HOLMAN JR

Tyler Torres (left), who attended Compass' Project Launch at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts on Sept. 28 hoping to be selected as a volunteer for the 2017-18 project cycle, speaks with fellow attendee Conrod Kelly at the meet-and-greet.

nonprofits. That followed a career in employee-benefits consulting.

Dahle's nonprofit experience made her "perfect" for the job as Compass Philadelphia's first and only executive director, said Sharon Gallagher, cofounder of Sage Communications, which helps nonprofits and foundations with their messaging. After meeting Laporte through a friend, Gallagher agreed to help her bring Compass to Philadelphia and, until recently, to serve on its board.

"For years, professionals told me they wanted to volunteer for nonprofits but didn't really know how. Not everyone has the time, interest or skills to be on a nonprofit board, but they have valuable talent to offer," Gallagher said. "Compass gives them that opportunity."

Since Compass started serving Washington-area nonprofits in 2001 with 35 Harvard MBA alumni, it has enlisted more than 2,300 business professionals (an MBA is not required) to work on 500 projects for 365 clients, providing more than \$54 million in pro bono consulting.

When the current program year is completed in May, Compass Philadelphia will have deployed more than 430 volunteers on 50 projects, delivering more than \$8 million in free consulting services, Dahle said. Commitment averages one to five hours a week for eight to nine months, with each of

the teams of eight or nine volunteers presenting their recommendations to their nonprofit "clients" in May.

Compass offers four types of aid: strategic alignment, board development, funding strategies, and strategic partnerships.

"We're not looking to rescue an organization," Dahle said in an interview. "We want to partner with an organization from a position of strength."

For instance, Compass will not write white papers or launch fundraising campaigns. It will prod nonprofits to craft a strategy for reaching goals or to challenge them to evaluate if they are, indeed, delivering a service that is needed.

When Dahle is out recruiting for volunteers, she highlights the opportunity to be involved in projects at a level their day jobs might not afford them, as well as the networking exposure. Evidently, her sales pitch is proving too enticing: Compass Philadelphia turns down about 40 percent of volunteer applicants. (More on the qualifications Compass seeks can be found at <http://compassprobono.org/about/frequently-asked-questions/>)

Already making the cut, as a project leader, is Pam Dixon, marketing director for small-business credit cards at JPMorgan Chase in Wilmington and a Compass volunteer for the second time in three years. She again will help the Center for Advocacy for the Rights and Interests of the Elderly, this time to assist with developing a funding strategy. Last time, Dixon helped CARIE with board development.

"It's the impact that we make," she said of her Compass work's appeal. "With most organizations, when you volunteer, it feels very temporal. ... This is much more lasting."

For the nonprofits being helped, the appeal is the free professional services many would not be able to afford.

"You'll be very happy with the out-

come, and you may wind up with some awesome board members," Michael Westover, president and CEO of the Center for Literacy Inc. in Philadelphia, a 2016-17 Compass client, told the incoming class of nonprofits at the orientation last month.

He urged them "to be very honest" with the Compass volunteers they get matched with. "The first meeting is almost like a therapy session."

Looking forward to strategic-alignment advice is Family Service Association of Bucks County, an agency with 150 employees and a budget of \$8.8 million that wants to double spending in the next eight to 10 years.



KAIT MOORE / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Center for Literacy student John Johnson (left) works on reading skills with center volunteer Mark Swirsky at an afternoon session Sept. 25. The center has availed itself of the services of Compass Philadelphia volunteers and has been pleased, CEO Michael Westover says.

"We feel we wouldn't be able to do this without the skill sets that Compass is putting in front of us," CEO Audrey Tucker said at the PAFA mixer, where she and board president Joseph Bondi were on the hunt for volunteers they hoped might even stay involved after their Compass obligation.

"The cost to go out and bring in Accenture, Pricewaterhouse or McKinsey, it's hundreds of thousands of dollars," Bondi said. "The value of Compass services is amazing."

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