

Civic Leadership Program Session #1: Grant Writing for Architects

July 25, 2018 by Quinn Lammie and Ashly Chirayil

As architects and designers, we are always trying to maximize our positive impact through our work. We are charged with upholding the health, safety, welfare of the public at large. However, it is often the case that the design that benefits the greatest number of people comes second to an intractable budget which is held above all else. Alternately, there are many potential clients, projects, and causes that don't have access to financial capital or fit neatly within traditional employee-employer business models. We may want to create a product for easing refugees' plights, help move health initiatives forward, or increase the depth and subject matter of our education systems. For these scenarios, it is important for an architect to have a solid understanding of funding. Although there are many avenues to receive funding, including through the government, crowdsourcing, and venture capital, the first development session of the 2018 Civic Leadership Program delved into grant procurement as a means for architects to serve a greater number of communities and expand the boundaries of our practice.



2018 CLP team with Manhattan Deputy Borough President Aldrin Bonilla. Courtesy of Center of Architecture.



Courtesy of Center of Architecture.

The day began with the 2018 CLP cohort meeting at the Manhattan Borough President's Office to meet with Deputy Borough President Aldrin Bonilla. Bonilla described the hierarchy of local government, the role of the borough presidents within New York City, and how architects can plug in to this system to bring their expertise to existing communities. The group also discussed the importance of diversity within community boards and the need to push for participation from varied generations, backgrounds, ages, and professions.

The second portion of the development session was divided into three main parts: an interactive exercise, a short panel discussion, and a few guest speakers. The interactive exercise, named "Funds Actually, Starring Huge Grants," was created by Quinn Lammie and Ashly Chirayil to initiate their fellow leaders into the terminologies and mechanisms behind grant writing, particularly within the non-profit realm. These lessons were then applied to a panel discussion between Scott Lauer of Open House New York, and Irfan Hasan of the New York Community Trust. They discussed founding and working

for and with local non-profits. They shared advice and resources about applying for grants and initiating the first steps in taking a project or program from idea to reality. Afterwards, Sam Brisendine from Every Shelter talked the group through his experiences in transitioning from co-founding a start-up that manufactures emergency floors for refugee shelters, to becoming a non-profit design firm that could address multiple design-based issues within refugee camps. Many of Brisendine's points were reiterated by the final speakers from MASS Design Group. Justin Brown, Design Principal, and Matthew Smith, Director of Operations rounded out the development session with a presentation on who MASS is, their mission, the pros and cons of being a non-profit design firm, and the lessons learned from six years of operation in Africa and the United States.

Though the session took many different forms and presenters came from various backgrounds, many themes were echoed throughout the day:

Grant funding is about research, relationships, and mission alignment. It is a slow and methodical process. Being proactive in funding allows for a broader scope as well as more control over the final outcome. Research and quantifiable data are imperative for matrix creation and outcome assessment. Architects can utilize knowledge of grant funding to help clients find additional resources for a project or, more directly, by operating as a non-profit design firm. It takes many types of team players to tackle the big issues. Architects and designers are needed in broader civic discussions.



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