

CASE STUDY

Expanding The Encore Fellowships Network™

After a successful pilot, many nonprofits find themselves asking how best to scale their impact. A new case study examines Civic Ventures' experience using an innovative network scaling model to expand its Encore Fellows program quickly and efficiently.

In just 18 months, The Encore Fellowships Network (EFN) has grown from a single pilot program, involving 10 fellows and nine nonprofits in the Silicon Valley, to a network of 100 fellows and 120 organizations operating in 12 metro areas nationwide. And the number of new fellowships is on track to double to 200 in 2012.

How did this expansion unfold? What contributed to the program's success? And what challenges does the network face? A case study of the expansion of The Encore Fellowships Network – written by Beth Benjamin, an independent research consultant, and supported by The David and Lucile Packard Foundation – describes key decisions, the ins and outs of production networks, and lessons learned.

Background

Civic Ventures® – a think tank on boomers, work and social purpose – created The Encore Fellows program to test whether fellowships could help professionals at the end of their midlife careers find high-impact roles in social purpose organizations and, at the same time, significantly increase the capacity of those organizations to deliver on their missions.

A pilot program, sponsored by The David and Lucile Packard Foundation and HP, paired 10 former corporate executives with nine nonprofits, matching each to the organizations most in need of their particular skills

If it continues to meet its growth projections, by 2013 The Encore Fellowships Network will be one of the nation's largest programs bringing experienced private sector professionals to the nonprofit talent market.

and expertise. The program exceeded expectations. Encore Fellows were “thrilled with their experience, and nonprofit executives raved about the impact of their new talent,” the case study notes.

Production Networks

To expand the Encore Fellows program, creator Civic Ventures opted to use a production network model to produce very specific outcomes (or products) quickly and efficiently by leveraging existing assets and creating a network hub.

The model avoids a large, expensive, centrally-run program office and relies instead on cross-sector collaboration, partnerships, distributed responsibility and shared ownership among otherwise independent entities.

Civic Ventures acts as the hub, providing a well-documented, fully-vetted program model, common tools and processes, and technical assistance to help other organizations design, launch and operate Encore Fellows programs tailored to the needs and interests of their local communities.

Network Nodes

Each Encore Fellows program involves sponsors or funders, a program operator, host organizations and fellows. Program operators manage the big picture issues, including bringing in their own sponsors, and the details and relationships involved in running a high-quality program. Operators carefully match fellows with nonprofits that incorporate the fellows into their organizations and assign them high-impact, meaningful work.

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Program operators value the network model because it provides a simple and effective way to start up and operate a high-quality encore talent program that brings much needed expertise to the nonprofit sector. And sponsors make an impact with an innovative program that enhances employee, community and market engagement.

Fellows typically receive stipends of \$20,000 to \$35,000 for half-time, yearlong assignments and get hands-on experience to help them transition to encore careers for the greater good. In most cases, sponsors and the nonprofits that host fellows share the costs.

The Encore Fellowships Network has managed to achieve its impressive growth rates while carefully protecting the integrity of its program design, maintaining quality and developing its brand.

Lessons Learned

Drawing from the EFN's experience, the case study identifies four themes to consider when expanding promising social programs through networks:

1. Manage the network for quality and growth. Network builders must find ways to maintain consistent program standards while cultivating the network's potential for growth, learning and innovation.
2. Plan, evaluate and coordinate. Network members need to develop a shared understanding of the program they are trying to expand and the brand they're trying to create.
3. Be deliberate. Contrary to popular belief, strategic planning and formal processes can foster dynamic, bottom-up creativity.
4. Prepare to "lead then cede." Provide strong leadership during the network's formation to establish direction, then cede control as the network evolves.

Challenges

As expansion continues, the network must encourage its members to take collective responsibility for long-term governance and sustainability, balance the need for network-wide collaboration with the need for local flexibility, and learn how much growth and variation the network can handle.

Conclusion

The Encore Fellowships Network has become a highly effective program and replication model, bringing experienced private-sector professionals to the nonprofit talent market. So far, fellows have contributed 100,000 hours of new expertise – in financial management, human resources, information technology, strategic planning and more – to nonprofits. And most fellows continue their work in the nonprofit sector after their fellowships end.

In addition, the production network model has encouraged and engaged a diverse and growing set of funders, including HP, the California HealthCare Foundation, the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, Goldman Sachs Urban Investment Group, Intel and Agilent Technologies. Intel recently announced that it would offer all of its U.S. employees who are eligible to retire the chance to apply for Encore Fellowships, a bold move to expand the program that would not have been logistically possible without the network model.

Other nonprofits and philanthropic organizations may want to explore production networks as they think about scaling successful social change programs. The full case study, posted at Encore.org/research, includes a checklist and planning templates to help determine if this expansion strategy could work for you.

About Civic Ventures® and The Encore Fellowships Network™

Civic Ventures (Encore.org) is a think tank on boomers, work and social purpose. Civic Ventures created The Encore Fellowships Network (Encore.org/fellowships) to make it as easy as possible for organizations to start, sponsor and operate their own effective and high-quality Encore Fellows programs.