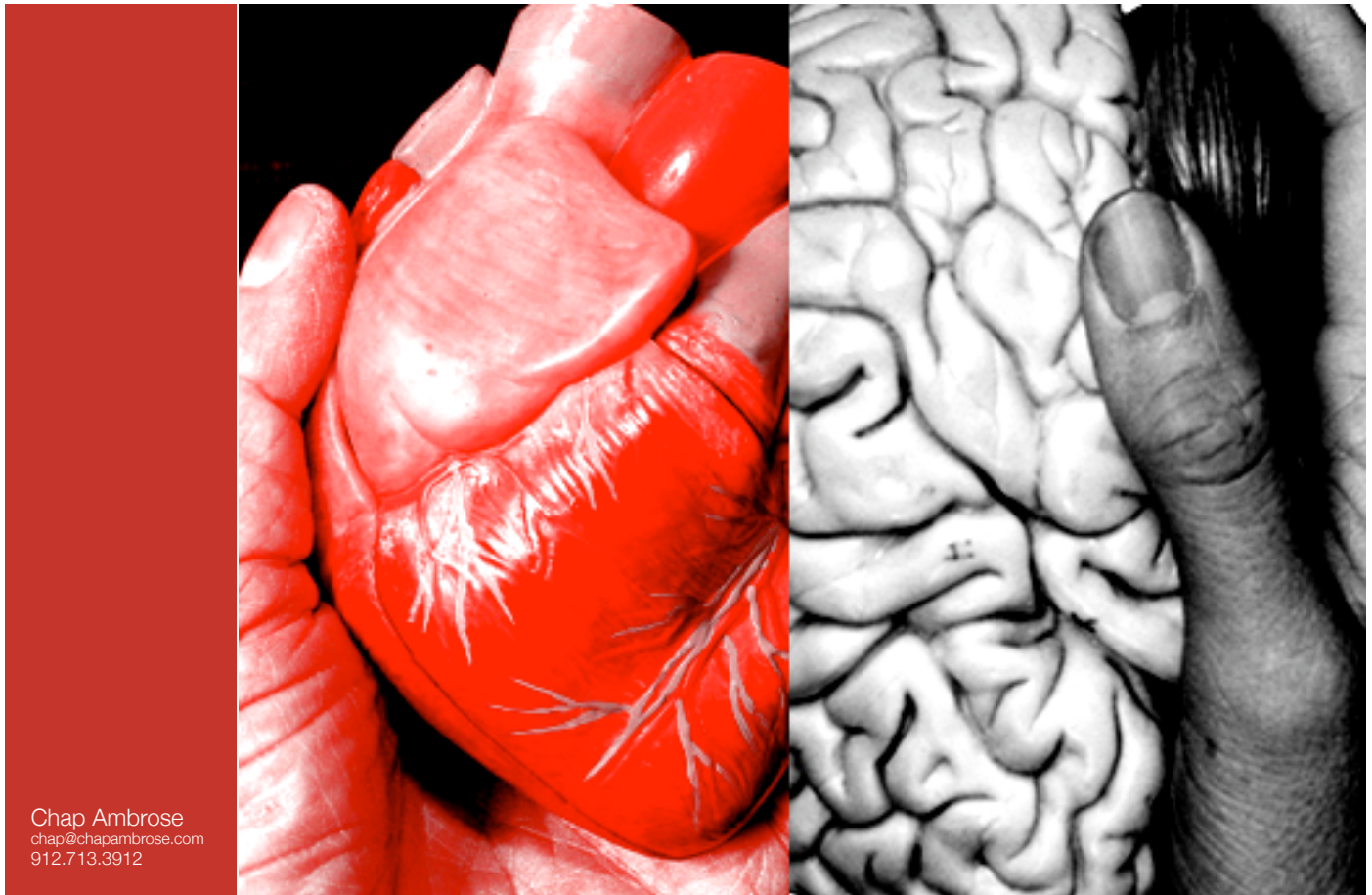


A RED & GRAY GROUP



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Proposal for a Nonprofit Design Consultancy

A Chance for Designers to Volunteer with Their Hearts & Brains

Mission Statement

The mission of A Red & Gray Group is to provide a respite for professional designers while allowing them to use their skills to address social problems and empower people in need. To achieve this, we will do the following:

- Recruit top design talent from corporations and consultancies to volunteer their expertise for a two-week retreat.
- Foster relationships with humanitarian nonprofit organizations that are interested in forward thinking and innovative ideas.

- Utilize contextual research techniques to assist humanitarian nonprofit organizations in achieving their mission or refining it.
- Educate social workers and philanthropists on the benefits of a user-centered, iterative design process and how they can utilize these techniques on their own.

Vision Statement

This organization is envisioned as an interdisciplinary design consultancy that places a high value on the greater good, individuals, education, and

aiding the impoverished. We aspire to change the perspectives of designers who feel like tools of industry by offering a meaningful experience. We will awaken their passion for ingenuity through the unraveling of complex social problems. We will encourage designers to bring this enthusiasm back to their workplace. We seek to inspire the nonprofit sector with a radical approach, irreverent enthusiasm, and untraditional insight. We have a hunger to enlighten altruists about the power of design.

Overview

This document presents a case for the creation of a nonprofit design consultancy. It outlines the organization's employees, volunteers, services, and marketing strategy. It also discusses the need for designers to have a meaningful volunteer opportunity and the potential of design thinking in the nonprofit sector.

"Meaning is the new money."

Daniel Pink ¹

Employees

A Red & Gray Group will employ two full-time employees. I, the founder, will serve as the executive director. For the past four years I have been studying at the Savannah College of Art and Design and I will graduate with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in June, 2006. My major is industrial design with a minor in interaction design. I have focused my studies on learning and developing a human-centered design process.

As a result of my research of existing organizations, I have recognized the need for a second, like-minded, employee. I observed first-hand how an executive director can become bogged down with day-to-day tasks and lose sight of the overall vision. Therefore, I will work primarily with design and research while my co-worker serves in a more administrative capacity. This additional staff person will need a background in the nonprofit sector, allowing us to empathize with the

industry we wish to assist. His or her experience will give us the language to communicate with altruistic professionals. My partner will also need strong project management and organizational skills to provide the consistent force necessary to balance the spontaneous and impulsive nature of a design consultancy.

A volunteer board will work with us to develop a strategic vision for the future. The board will also serve in an advisory capacity regarding the organization's operation and development. This group will be a mix of professionals, each with a distinct specialty. Members may include an executive director from another organization, a designer, a lawyer with nonprofit experience, and an expert in organizational planning. Meetings will be held at regular intervals to assess the current state of the organization and its alignment with the larger mission.

Volunteers

Volunteer designers will be recruited from commercial design consultancies and corporations. Some examples include; a graphic designer from Bank of America, an industrial designer from Phillips Electronics, or a computer interface designer from Frog Design. These volunteers will be required to donate two weeks of their time, travel to our headquarters, and work on an altruistic project with four other volunteers. Projects will be collaborations with humanitarian nonprofit organizations, concentrating on the exploration and fulfillment of their mission statement. Designers will be asked to raise a program fee, but these volunteers will be encouraged to seek support from their employers. This may be in the form of paid leave or monetary support to cover their expenses.

A document that describes the benefit for employers will be readily available to volunteers. This will assist them in the explanation of the program and highlight the importance of company support. Some advantages for businesses include; the donations are tax deductible, the experience encourages career development of the designer by teaching new design methodologies and offering networking opportunities, and the company's involvement serves as a charitable outlet for the company.

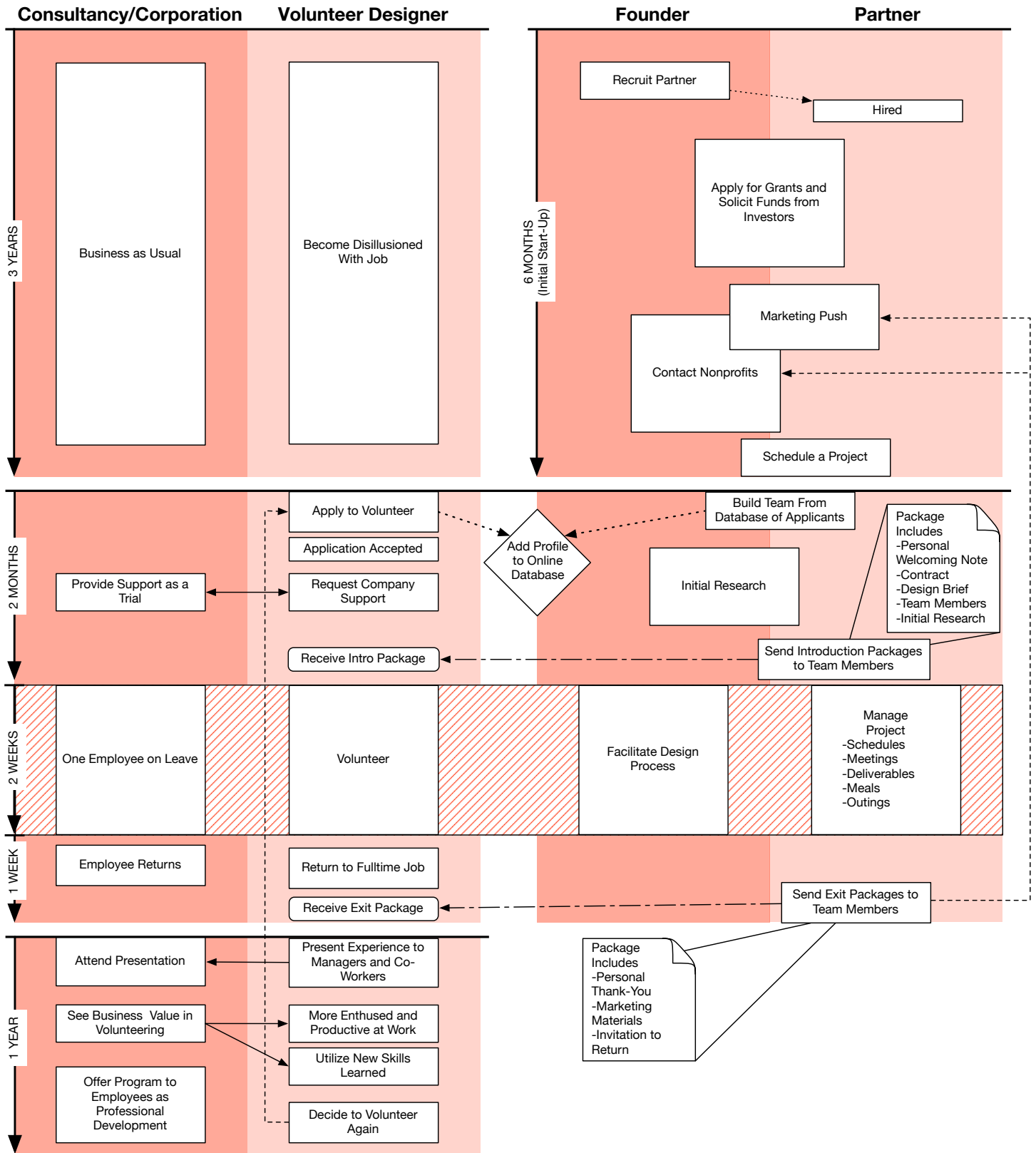
This nonprofit will be successful because the creative force in America is growing; more people work in the arts, entertainment, and design industries than as lawyers, accountants, and auditors. There are now ten times the number of graphic designers than a decade ago.² As this force grows, so does the need for meaningful and significant volunteer opportunities. This profession is more open to altruistic opportunities than most because creative people often view themselves as secondary communicators and translators.

They are "tools" within business to accomplish goals and send messages about which they have little say. As a result, designers are not finding contentment within this system. Of the practicing designers I know personally and through acquaintances, most have an increasing

need for purpose that is not being met within the context of their current positions. Some have turned to governmental jobs or education, but this is counterproductive. In order for changes to occur, these professionals must remain a consistent voice within business. Only

as respected and participating members of these structures can they have an impact.

Business Flow Diagram
 Illustration of the employees division of tasks, volunteers experience, and the influence on commercial businesses.



Katherine McCoy, addresses these frustrated designers working in business when she writes, "We cannot afford to be passive anymore. Designers must be good citizens and participate in the shaping of our government and society. As designers, we could use our particular talents and skills to encourage others to wake up and participate as well."³ While I agree with McCoy that designers must become active contributors in our society, I am convinced she underestimates their impact. Designers can engage and address social issues directly, not merely offer marketing campaigns for these causes.

Victor Papanek presents a more compelling view in his revolutionary book, *Design for the Real World*, when he writes:

"As long as design concerns itself with confecting trivial 'toys for adults,' killing machines with gleaming tailfins, and 'sexed-up' shrouds for typewriters, toasters, telephones, and computers, it has lost all reason to exist."⁴

Papanek was one of the first to take a stand against the over-commercialization of design. He saw the true potential of design not as an economic business appliance, but as a force for cultural and social change. It is in this spirit that I recognized the real power of this company in its volunteer base--the design community. These are a group of highly creative, innovative, and extremely inspired individuals who carry the vision and roadmap for a better future.

"We view design as a 'finishing-off process'. But we must understand that a thoroughgoing 'design sensibility' can effectively drive enterprise strategy..."

Tom Peters ⁵

The Power of Design

Since the inception of modern philanthropy in the late 19th century with John Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie, nonprofit organizations have sought to confront the toughest problems we face as a society. This alternate sector addresses issues overlooked by a commercial economy; poverty, illiteracy, disabilities, etc. But these complex problems are not easily understood. They are "wicked problems" as defined by Richard Buchanan, a design theorist, in his essay *Wicked Problems in Design Thinking*. A "wicked problem" is unique with no definitive formulation, a problem with more than one possible solution, and is a symptom of another higher-level problem.

While design is conventionally viewed as a styling and superficial profession, it is increasingly becoming recognized for its leading role in these high level, wicked problems. Daniel Pink recognizes this shift in *A Whole New Mind*. He writes,

"The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind-- creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers, and meaning makers." ⁶

These are exactly the attributes contemporary designers embody. Designers are trained to view situations differently and more holistically than lawyers, MBAs, or social workers.

Designers' skill sets and processes enable them to quickly become experts in a topic through contextual research, identifying opportunities, and executing innovative solutions. Furthermore, it is this sort of non-linear, out-of-the-box thinking that nonprofits are in dire need of as they address our culture's wicked problems.

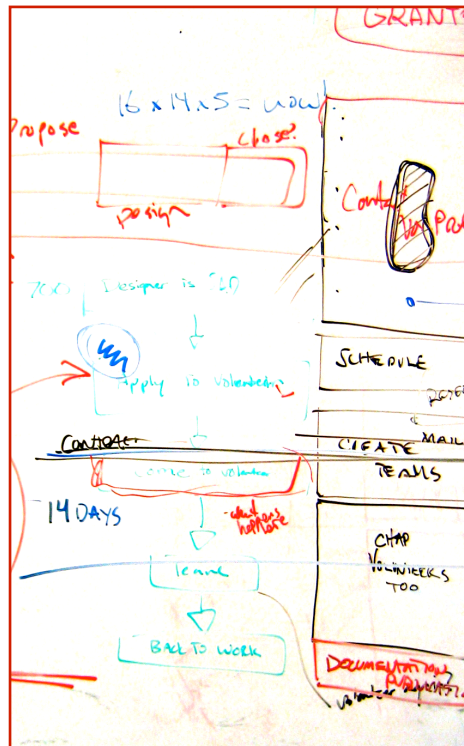
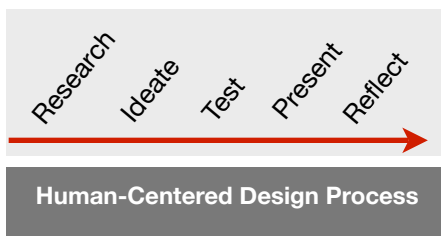
An encouraging example of a newcomer's venture into nonprofits comes from Robert Egger. In the book, *Begging for Change*, Egger tells the story of his entrance into philanthropy. Originally a nightclub manager, he happened into the sector by chance. Once fully initiated, he was able to make a profound impact through the creation of the DC Central Soup Kitchen, whose programs have been copied nationwide. He also served as interim director at the Washington, D.C., United Way. What makes his ideas so revolutionary is their simplicity and feasibility. This is a clear result from his entrepreneur background and his inexperience with traditional nonprofit management.

Services

Our consultancy services will focus on the organizational systems, programming efforts, and daily operations of nonprofit organizations. Staff from the nonprofit will be included in all steps of this process so that they may learn and introduce the value of design thinking in their daily operations.

In order to design effectively, a designer must first have knowledge of the nonprofit and the specific need their mission addresses. This initial research will be done by my partner and myself and distributed to the team members before their arrival. This document will include historical knowledge about the organization, testimonies from affected individuals, and statistical evidence relevant to the services and social problems it serves. Included will be the proposal's timeframe, goals, and expected outcomes.

When the team arrives, more in-depth and contextual research will begin to identify possible areas of design. These methodologies may include affinity diagramming, environmental evaluations, documented ethnographies, group interviews, participant observation, and technology explorations. Recently a collection of sociological, anthropological, and psychological techniques have permeated the design process. These skills are being adapted and utilized by a growing number of designers working in business. These techniques can help products stand out and compete in a crowded market, but these methodologies can be just as valuable to the nonprofit sector. This research will create a shared understanding for all parties and identify an opportunity for design to direct the remainder of the project. The opportunity



"One arena where design matters most-- and is least considered-- is in the creation of essential enterprise systems. Indeed, systems of all sorts."

Tom Peters ⁷

statement will describe the context of the design problem and the constraints placed on the designers.

The next phase of the design process is to ideate from this opportunity statement. We will create a comprehensive design solution by brainstorming, mind mapping, developing personas and storyboards, and by making rapid sketch models. This step synthesizes all the knowledge learned in the research and uses it as fuel to create innovative solutions to the problem. These designs may include the visual layout of brochures, interior design recommendations, or introduce concepts for organizational restructuring.

Testing and prototyping will take place next, helping to refine our concepts. This phase will involve getting feedback from the end users of our designs, which may include the staff of the organization or the people the organization services. This evaluation step will involve models, paper prototypes, and usability testing.

A finalizing stage involves the implementation of recommendations resulting from the

testing. These refined designs will be presented to the staff, directors, and boards with explicit advice on putting the designs into practice. The presentation will include delivery of the final designs, scenarios of use, and visual aids.

Ultimately, a reflection phase will be conducted. This will involve the directors and boards of the client giving open feedback on the project. Volunteers will reflect on their experience of working on the project and will be encouraged to give input. This will help us to continually refine our process and analyze our own systems so that we can improve the next project.

Throughout this undertaking, a human-centered, iterative design process will be utilized. A human-centered process is one in which all designs are aware of the people and end users who will be affected by our design. An iterative process is one in which at any stage in the process, one may step backwards or forwards to further understand and develop the design. Our primary focus will be a feasible and quality design.

Advertising

To promote A Red & Gray Group an initial press release will be distributed to local news sources and to nonprofit organizations in the local area. Next, consultations will be scheduled with their respective directors and boards.

Throughout these meetings the benefits of design thinking, the advantages of partnering with our group, and our converging missions will be discussed.

This volunteer opportunity will be advertised on websites and forums frequented by designers, to simultaneously inform and recruit design talent. Examples of such websites include Core77.com, BoxesAndArrows.com, and HowDesign.com. These websites, as well as the professional trade groups like the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) and the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) will be approached for potential sponsorships. The possibility of providing discounted advertising and other partnership opportunities exists.

Invitations extended to my personal contacts in the design industry will also help raise interest for inaugural projects.

A company website will be created to highlight the mission of the organization. There will be specific information available for designers, employers, and nonprofit organizations interested in collaborating. This portal will include the functionality for designers to submit their resume and profiles. The database will serve as a resource as we begin to assemble teams for projects.

Finally, as designers complete their volunteer experience with us, we will consider the best format for them to present the experience to their home companies, including the possibility of a company-wide presentation. We will also assist them in exploring the impact of their experience on their daily routine and job. An exit package will be sent to all participants a week after their departure. This will include a poster for them to display at work and information cards to share with interested coworkers. We anticipate the sharing of this personal experience with other friends and associates in the design community to be the most effective form of advertising and recruiting.

Identity Recommendations

A Red & Gray Group should have a clean, modern, professional brand.

Courtesy Cameron Frantz



Business Activity

Collaboration with organizations will pivot around listening to and learning their specific situation and viewpoint. A Red & Gray Group will emphasize that the two parties must be unified in the goal of improving the organization. Inclusion of the staff in the design process is vital to its success and a significant effort will be made to educate the organization as to how it can incorporate design thinking into everyday routines.

Although relevant grants will be applied for and sought, the daily operating expenses will be fully covered by the fee paid by volunteers. Eliminating this dependency on donations and external funds will provide greater freedom in the operation of the organization. It will be less susceptible to certain regulations and requirements associated with classic forms of fundraising. This will provide a consistent source of income in times of slow governmental and charitable giving.

Comparable Offerings

Although motivated and skilled volunteers exist, few organizations have taken advantage of them. The following are a few attempts to introduce designers into the nonprofit sector.

• Worldstudio Foundation

www.worldstudio.org

Worldstudio Foundation is a nonprofit subsidiary of the for-profit graphic design studio Worldstudio, Inc.. This spin-off offers a scholarship and mentoring program to low-income students interested in graphic arts. The foundation provides an opportunity for the principal owners to volunteer their time, while still receiving a salary from the commercial business. The organization also produces a magazine "that highlights the social and environmental work of artists, architects, and designers from around the world that we admired, and, in effect, to inspire other creative professionals by example."⁸

While the Worldstudio Foundation is a great example of mixing design culture with the nonprofit sector, it serves an even greater role by promoting the actions of some motivated individuals. This is the gap that A Red & Gray Group would fill. By providing a volunteer opportunity to professionals, we make it accessible and viable to more than just the lone activists.

• Media Natura

www.medianatura.org

Media Natura takes a traditional advertising agency model and focuses its efforts on nonprofit clients. It has served organizations such as the United Nations and the UK Film Council offering event creation and management, campaign strategy, and public relations.

Advertising is a major need for any nonprofit and this company does a great job in addressing that need. This differs from A Red & Gray Group because we utilize the design process to look at deeper issues within nonprofits. We seek to understand their mission and goals, actually assisting the organization in achieving them.

• Ntech Collaboration

www.tauw.ntechonline.org

Ntech Collaboration's primary goal is to assist United Way and its member agencies in utilizing technology. They offer consultations with organizations, training classes for employees, and general guidance in technology issues.

Projected Yearly Budget

Income	Expenses
\$2,000 Program Fee -\$300 Food Expenses x 5 Volunteers Per Project x 12 Projects Per Year	\$25,000 Founder's Salary \$25,000 Partner's Salary \$50,000 Rent and Utilities
\$102,000 Yearly Income	\$100,000 Yearly Expenses

Personal Motivation

From the beginning of my design education I had a desire to use the skills learned to empower people in need rather than to design material goods for mass consumption. This document and the organization it proposes represents the struggle and resolution of that conflict.

One of the main inspirations for this direction has been my upbringing. I was raised to value relationships and human life over tangible objects. My parent's example and my witness to their lives continue to influence my daily life. Throughout my middle and high school years I also volunteered in a number of capacities for various causes.

Without exception, every one of those experiences reinforced the importance of helping others and the revelation that my personal comfort is not the ultimate goal.

Another profound experience for me was an internship I completed at a design consultancy. I had worked very hard to secure this opportunity because I saw it as the next logical step in my professional career. But through that experience, I learned that commercial design was not in my future. Its profit-driven culture and get-ahead attitude did not satisfy my internal desire to contribute to the greater good.

I treasure these invaluable lessons and desire to give others the opportunity to learn them.

References

- 1 Daniel Pink, *A Whole New Mind*, 61.
- 2 Daniel Pink, *A Whole New Mind*, 55.
- 3 Katherine McCoy, Good Citizenship, *Citizen Designer*, 2.
- 4 Victor Papanek, *Design for the Real World*, 15.
- 5 Tom Peters, *Design*, 12.
- 6 Daniel Pink, *A Whole New Mind*, 1.
- 7 Tom Peters, *Design*, 54.
- 8 Steven Heller, Not for Profit, *Citizen Designer* 54.