FAST TRACK PROJECT CONSULTANT

IF YOU’RE LOOKING FOR A WAY TO USE YOUR SKILLS, ENERGY, AND ENTHUSIASM ON BEHALF OF A WORTHY CAUSE, LOOK NO FURTHER THAN ACT, THE PRO BONO CONSULTING SERVICE FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS RUN BY THE STANFORD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS. TWICE EACH YEAR, ACT OFFERS CONSULTING OPPORTUNITIES OPEN TO ALL BAY AREA ALUMNI. THIS DOCUMENT OUTLINES THE PROCESS YOU WILL FOLLOW AS A FAST TRACK PROJECT CONSULTANT FOR ACT. WHAT IT CAN’T DESCRIBE IS THE CAMARADERIE YOU WILL ENJOY AS PART OF AN ALL-ALUMNI TEAM AND THE SATISFACTION YOU WILL EXPERIENCE AT THE COMPLETION OF A JOB WELL DONE.

Regardless of client or project type—Full Team or Fast Track—each ACT project moves through a similar process, from client application through project development, execution, and evaluation.

1. THE CLIENT ASKS FOR ACT’S ASSISTANCE

Clients approach the ACT office throughout the year. ACT representatives screen each prospective client, select nonprofits that meet ACT’s criteria, and invite them to submit an application.

Then twice a year, ACT recruits volunteers to share their skills and expertise with selected nonprofits.

2. SCOPE THE PROJECT

As a Fast Track Project Consultant, you may work individually or in a small team of one to two other volunteers. Once you have received background information about the project, your first step is to arrange a hand-off with ACT’s Project Screener. Including the client in this meeting is usually a good idea so you can efficiently learn more about the organization and what the client hopes you will help them accomplish and further scope the project.
PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Objectives:
1. To gather the information you need to determine whether the project is feasible.
2. To understand the client’s perceived needs and goals.
3. To meet with all key stakeholders to determine who is responsible for ensuring the successful implementation of the ACT team’s recommendations.
4. To work with the client to establish project goals, scope, and timeline.

Key Challenges:
1. To balance the client’s desires against ACT volunteers’ interests, skills, and availability.
2. To set realistic expectations for the client and the ACT team.

End Result:
An email to the client summarizing what the ACT volunteers will do.

PROJECT EXECUTION

Objective:
To deliver a quality product to the client.

Key Challenge:
To stay focused and finish on time.

End Result:
Final meeting with your client to present recommendations and answer questions.

Fast Track projects address a specific question or offer advice about a particular concern. Designed to be completed in just two to three months, Fast Track projects need to be specific and concrete. While you may see many ways to help your client, beware of project scope. Stay focused and set your client’s expectations accordingly. Think about what you can realistically accomplish in 25 to 30 hours and don’t be afraid to set limits.

After your meeting, send a follow-up email to your client summarizing what you hope to accomplish, outlining what you will need from the client to be successful, and establishing the timeframe for your work, sending a copy to the ACT office.

3. EXECUTE THE PROJECT

If you are a team of two to three volunteers, you will also need to spend some time coordinating your group. Make sure that you all agree about responsibilities and deadlines and how you are going to communicate with each other. Some Fast Track teams meet regularly with the client; others stay in touch through email. It is also helpful to appoint one volunteer to handle all client communication such as keeping the client apprised of the team’s progress and making requests for information, contacts, or meetings.

4. EVALUATE THE PROJECT

When an ACT project is completed, ACT asks Project Consultants – and clients - to complete a short survey providing feedback about their experience. You and your client may feel that there is more to be done. If you think your client can benefit from another ACT project, encourage the nonprofit to contact the ACT staff to discuss the possibility.

Congratulations!
Now that your work is done, sit back, relax, and think about joining another ACT project soon.

Serving as an ACT volunteer is a powerful way to contribute your professional experience and leadership talent to the community. For more information about serving as an ACT volunteer, contact Susan Austin, ACT’s Director, at 650-736-1956 or info@stanfordact.org.