

Penn School of Social Policy & Practice
University of Pennsylvania
Fall 2025

NPLD 7860: STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP OF NONPROFITS

August 27th – November 5th, 2025

Synchronous Sessions: Wednesdays, from 7:00-8:30 p.m. EST

Synchronous Session Zoom Links will be provided in Canvas

Instructors

Chao Guo, Ph.D.

Email: chaoguo@upenn.edu

Office hours: Upon request and as many as students wish for

Lauren Graham

Email: legraham@upenn.edu

Office hours: Upon request

Course Assistant

Dorothy Thomas

Email: dorth@upenn.edu

Office hours: Upon request

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to the fundamental issues in strategic management and leadership of nonprofit organizations. Through research, analysis, and dialogue, students will understand multiple structures of accountability and the various stakeholders in nonprofits; understand the duties and dynamics of boards of directors in conjunction with other mechanisms of governance (e.g. chief executive officers, advisory boards, etc.); develop an understanding of strategic priorities, management techniques, and leadership skills for enhancing the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations. Students will be asked to think about the challenges of running nonprofit organizations in a comparative context, with cases drawn from both the U.S. and abroad.

The emphasis of this course is on acquiring operational skills grounded in research and critical thinking. The course is designed for those who may have had years of experience managing other people and programs in the nonprofit sector but who want to develop a more systematic mastery of this challenge, as well as students from other sectors who aspire to a nonprofit leadership role. Most sessions will consist of a combination of discussion and lecture. Lectures will introduce new concepts; class discussion and group exercises will allow us to explore and apply those concepts. Guest speakers will share their insights and experiences.

This course depends on the contributions of engaged participants. Each student is a valuable resource in terms of insights, questions, and life experiences. The extent to which a student serves as a well-informed resource, which is different from highly opinionated or outgoing, and contributes to the quality of class discussions will determine the student's participation grade.

Course Materials

- All required readings (including book chapters, scholarly articles, etc.) will be posted on Canvas in the Modules for each class. Optional/supplemental readings will also be posted.

Recommended Texts

- Bryson, John M. (2018). *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, 5th Edition. Wiley.
- Hoefer, Richard & Watson, Larry D. (2021). *Essentials of Nonprofit Management & Leadership*. Cognella.
- *The Nonprofit Quarterly (NPQ)*. Many of their articles are available online. If you're interested in accessing additional resources from *NPQ*, please consider subscribing to the magazine (<http://www.nonprofitquarterly.org>).

Course Requirements and Grading Weights

A course calendar, which covers reading assignments and the topics to be covered in individual class sessions, is attached. This schedule is subject to change for reasons including the availability of guest speakers, the appearance of new and more interesting topics, etc. Changes to the calendar will be announced in class and posted on Canvas as soon as practical. Please check Canvas regularly.

Course grades will be assigned as follows:

1. Class Participation: 35%
 - a. In-class participation (10%)
 - b. Online discussions (15%)
 - c. Trio presentation (10%)
2. Individual Case Analysis: 20%
3. Team Project: 45%
 - a. Team presentation (5%)
 - b. Team report (40%)

Student performance will be based on the components below. We will discuss the components thoroughly in class.

Team Project “Strategic Analysis” (A Consulting Project): The primary project associated with this course is the Team Strategic Analysis Project. During the semester,

students will be organized into small teams of 4-5 people. This project offers an opportunity to apply what you have learned in the context of BleagLee (a short form for Blessed Eagles), a Cameroon-based social enterprise that recently won the 2025 Lipman Family Prize for its innovative approach to waste management. Facilitated by the course assistant/team project coordinator, each team will tackle a specific strategic problem or address an opportunity to improve the work of the partner agency. Using the tools and concepts introduced in the course, all teams will combine your work and provide the organization's management team with a report that analyzes the situation and provides recommendations on how to move forward. Detailed instructions on how to complete the team project and compile the final report will be provided separately.

A one-page status report is due on October 8th, 2025. Present your team project to class on November 5th, 2025. Your presentation has a maximum time limit of 15 minutes (including Q&A). Final report (maximum page length 15 pages plus appendices; Times New Roman, 12-point font size, double spaced, one-inch margin all around) is due on November 12th, 2025. Detailed instructions will be provided later in class.

Individual Case Analysis: You will analyze two of the three cases and submit a write up for each (maximum page length 2 pages; Times New Roman, 12-point font size, single spaced, one-inch margin all around). Please adhere to these formatting instructions. The study questions from the instructor are intended to help you identify the central issue(s) in the case. For the case analysis, focus on addressing the study questions and apply the most relevant theories/frameworks (most likely from the assigned readings of the same session).

Format for case analysis:

- Your case write-up should begin with a very short executive summary that highlights your stand on the case. The remainder of the case write-up should present in greater detail the analyses which support your conclusions.
- The case is designed to get you to think about issues. In analyzing and writing up the case, adopt the perspective of a consultant who has been hired by the organization to succinctly advise it on the critical issues at hand. Stitch together the arguments in a smooth way in your write-up.
- Be sure to use the data in the case when appropriate. Write-ups which ignore relevant data are incomplete. However, note that just because some data is presented in the case, it does not necessarily mean that the data is crucial or relevant to the solution you propose. Good strategists know what data to use, and how that data must be used.

Class Participation: This course is designed to be participatory in nature; that is, participants are expected to contribute productively to class discussion and learning. Your active participation is what makes the class engaging and interesting. Therefore, you are expected to attend all scheduled Zoom sessions. Your regular attendance and active participation in Zoom sessions count toward your final participation grade. The University makes allowances for students who must miss class due to observance of religious holidays. If you must miss class for a religious holiday, you should notify me of

this in writing by the second week of class. [The University's policy on religious holidays can be found here.](#)

If for some unavoidable reasons (e.g., medical issue, a job interview) you must miss a session, please submit within one week a make-up assignment (no more than 2 pages, single spaced) that summarizes the assigned readings and answers the study questions; you are also expected to watch the recorded class. The instructor will still grade your participation based on the submitted analysis, providing that you also submit the necessary documents as evidence of the excuse for your absence. The TA will take notes at the end of class regarding student participation.

Class participation includes the following three components:

1. *In-Class Participation (10%)*

Each week, you will be asked to focus on different readings and/or cases to prepare for our in-class discussion. I will be clear about which materials to prepare, and whether you need to submit anything in advance (such as discussion questions). Your in-class participation is graded on your completion of pre-session items, as well as your engagement during the session. Make-up assignments will substitute for in-class participation if you must miss a session, but all pre-session materials will still be required, even if you must miss a session. Make-up assignments are due by 11:59 p.m. on the Sunday following the missed session.

2. *Online Discussions (15%)*

Five times during the semester (Week 2 through Week 9), you are expected to participate in the class online discussions. These are weekly reflections of the reading and videos of the week and how they inform your knowledge of nonprofit management and leadership. In every session in the course calendar, there are recommended ideas for the weekly posting. These are not questions to be answered and not all of them must be discussed. These are suggestions of how to fashion your posting. You can decide to focus on one or a few of these ideas and develop them with clear references to the relevant week's readings and videos (and even for readings and videos from past weeks).

In addition, a good discussion post also introduces a new idea, responds critically and thoughtfully to an existing post (without restating what the other person has said in different words), and/or connects course content to professional and personal experience as well as class or others reading.

3. *Paired Presentation (10%)*

You will work in pairs of three to adopt a weekly reading and present its core arguments and/or key findings to your classmates during the class meeting that

week. Your presentation should be about 10 minutes in length, followed by up to 10 minutes of Q&As. Please upload your presentation to Canvas after class.

Weekly Readings to be adopted:

Week 2: "Managing for Value"
Week 3: "How stakeholder mobilization saved Sweet Briar College"
Week 4: "Kaplan's Nonprofit Balanced Scorecard"
Week 5: "Balancing Margin and Mission"; "Existential angst and identity rethink"
Week 6: "Designing and Implementing Cross-Sector Collaborations"; "Competition and collaboration in the nonprofit sector"
Week 7: "Social Intrapreneurship: Innovation from Within"
Week 8: "An Enterprising Failure"
Week 9: "Attention Philanthropy"; "Social Media Capital"

Grade Scale

The following grading scale will be used for final grades.

98 – 100%	= A+	80 – 82.9%	= B-
93 – 97.9%	= A	77 – 79.9%	= C+
90 – 92.9%	= A-	73 – 76.9%	= C
87 – 89.9%	= B+	70 – 72.9%	= C-
83 – 86.9%	= B	Below 70%	= Failing

Students completing this course as part of the Masters in Nonprofit Leadership core requirements must obtain a grade of C- or higher to receive credit. This policy can be viewed on the [NPL Specific Policies page](#).

Withdrawals and Incomplete

A grade of "Incomplete" may be arranged for a student who is unable to complete the course for reasons beyond their control. The instructor reserves the right to refuse to issue an incomplete in cases where sufficient cause or evidence is missing. Poor performance does not provide a basis for an Incomplete. Completion of an "I" grade is expected in the following semester. After discussing with the instructor, the student must submit the [SP2 Grade of Incomplete Form](#), according to [SP2 master's student policy](#). A "W," for withdrawal, will be given in conformance with [university policy](#).

Academic Integrity

You are expected to adhere to the [University's policy on academic integrity](#). Each of you have read and signed a copy of this policy as a requirement for enrolling in the University. The University has a zero-tolerance policy for cheating and plagiarism. Depending on the severity of the offense, anyone who fails to uphold the expectations for academic integrity outlined in the policy will face one or more of the following: a grade of F for this class; a meeting with the program director and/or Dean; expulsion from the program.

A Note on Self-Plagiarism: If you wish to draw on work that you have completed for another class for any of the assignments for this class, you are required to schedule a meeting with me to discuss how previous work will be used. Anyone who submits past assignments from another class as original work for this class will be considered plagiarizing and will receive a grade of F for the assignment.

Information on the Code of Academic Integrity can be found in the [SP2 Master's Student Handbook](#).

Course Calendar

Session 1: Wednesday, August 27

Setting the Stage: Key Concepts and Major Players

Warmup Readings:

- Drucker, P. F. (1989). What business can learn from nonprofits. *Harvard Business Review*, 67(4), 88-93. Available at: <http://faculty.bcitbusiness.ca/kevinw/4800/drucker89.pdf>.
- Meehan III, W. F., & Jonker, K. S. (2017). Filling essential gaps in nonprofit leadership. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Available at: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/filling_essential_gaps_in_nonprofit_leadership.

Required Readings:

- Renz, D. O. (2007). Nonprofit Governance and the Work of the Board. *Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership*, 1-11.
- Ebrahim, A. (2003). Making sense of accountability: Conceptual perspectives for northern and southern nonprofits. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 14(2), 191-212.
- Guo, C., & Musso, J. A. (2007). Representation in nonprofit and voluntary organizations: A conceptual framework. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 36(2), 308-326.

Videos:

- Pre-recorded video lecture: “Key Concepts and Major Players” (approx. 45 minutes)
- Introduction to BleagLee: <https://lipmanfamilyprize.wharton.upenn.edu/winners/2025/bleaglee> (approx. 4 minutes)

Questions for Online Discussion:

- What is governance, and what is its relationship with the Board of Directors?
- What are the legal duties of the nonprofit board?
- What are the responsibilities of the nonprofit board, and what are the responsibilities of the executive director? Where to draw the line?
- What is management, and what is leadership? What are the connections and distinctions?
- What is representation? What are its major dimensions? Why is representation important to nonprofits?
- What is accountability? How do you differentiate accountability among nonprofit types?

Activities:

- Watch the pre-recorded video lecture prior to class
- Get to know each other
- Course introduction; review of syllabus and expectations
- Form groups

Session 2: Wednesday, September 3

The “Soul” of Nonprofit Strategy

Required Readings:

- Moore, M. H. (2000). Managing for value: Organizational strategy in for-profit, nonprofit, and governmental organizations. *Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly*, 29(1suppl), 183-204.
- Thomas, D., Qiu, E., & Guo, C. (2025). BleagLee: Trailblazer in Sustainable Waste Management (Background Paper).
- Case Study 1: **Casa de Esperanza**

Lectures:

- Pre-recorded video lecture: “Public Good; Public Value; Strategic Triangle” (approx. 30 minutes)

Questions for Online Discussion:

- What is private good? What is public good? What is public value?
- What is the “soul” of nonprofit strategy? How is it different from business strategy?
- What is Mark Moore’s Strategic Triangle?
- What is the mission of a nonprofit organization? How to write an effective organizational mission statement?
- What are organizational values? Why are they important?

Activities:

- Watch the pre-recorded video lecture prior to class
- Paired presentation: “Managing for Value”
- Case Discussion: **Casa de Esperanza**
- Team-based discussion: Identifying Strategic Triangle: Casa vs. BleagLee
- Post-class group activity – work on your team project.

Deliverables:

- **Case Analysis 1** due before class

Session 3: Wednesday, September 10

The “Eyes” of Nonprofit Strategy: Environmental Scan and Internal Analysis

Required Readings:

- Bryson, J.M. (2010). The future of public and nonprofit strategic planning in the United States. *Public Administration Review*, 70, s255-s267.
- An, S., Wu, V., & Guo, C. (2017). How stakeholder mobilization saved Sweet Briar College. *Journal of Nonprofit Education & Leadership*, Special Issue 2, 4–10.

Supplemental Readings:

- Bryson, J.M., (2018). Assessing the Environment to Identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges. In Bryson, J. M. (2018). *Strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations: A guide to strengthening and sustaining organizational achievement*. John Wiley & Sons.

Pre-recorded Video Lecture:

- Tools for Strategic Analysis: *Stakeholder Analysis; SWOT Analysis; Matrix Map; McMillan Matrix* (approx. 30 minutes)

Questions for Online Discussion:

- What is strategic planning? What is its relationship with strategic management?
- Why is it important to create a strategic plan for your nonprofit organization? What are the key components of a strategic plan?
- What are the key lessons of the Sweet Briar case study? To what extent do you think the “miracle” that saved Sweet Briar College might happen in service nonprofits, such as homeless shelters or faith-based nonprofits? Why and why not?
- Who are BleagLee’s stakeholders and why do they matter?

Activities:

- Watch the pre-recorded video lecture prior to class
- Paired presentation: “How stakeholder mobilization saved Sweet Briar College”
- World Café discussion: Use and Improve Strategic Analysis Tools
- Post-class group activity – work on your team project.

Session 4: Wednesday, September 17

Performance and Impact

Required Readings:

- Lee, C., & Nowell, B. (2015). A framework for assessing the performance of nonprofit organizations. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 36(3), 299-319.
- Benjamin, L. M., Ebrahim, A., & Gugerty, M. K. (2023). Nonprofit Organizations and the Evaluation of Social Impact: A Research Program to Advance Theory and Practice. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 52(1_suppl), 313S-352S.
- Kaplan, R.S. (2001). Strategic performance measurement and management in nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 11(3), 353-370.

Questions for Online Discussion:

- How can nonprofits ensure that they are doing what they say?
- How can organizational effectiveness be measured and monitored?
- What are the common symptoms of an ineffective organization?
- How shall we understand and evaluate social impact?

Activities:

- Paired Presentation: “Kaplan’s Nonprofit Balanced Scorecard”
- Case Study 2: **Seattle Day Nursery**
- Post-class group activity – work on your team project.

Deliverables:

- **Case Analysis 2** due before class

Session 5: Wednesday, September 24

Wings of Nonprofit Strategy (1): Competition

Required Readings:

- Barman, E. A. (2002). Asserting difference: The strategic response of nonprofit organizations to competition. *Social forces*, 80(4), 1191-1222.

- Chetkovich, C., & Frumkin, P. (2003). Balancing margin and mission: Nonprofit competition in charitable versus fee-based programs. *Administration & Society*, 35(5), 564-596.
- Sharp, Z. (2018). Existential angst and identity rethink: The complexities of competition for the nonprofit. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 47(4), 767-788.

Pre-recorded Video Lecture:

- Competition (approx. 16 minutes)

Questions for Online Discussion:

- How do nonprofits compete with other organizations for resources and clients?
- What is cost-leadership strategy? Use an example to illustrate.
- What is differentiation strategy? Use an example to illustrate.
- Does BleagLee compete with other organizations? For what? And how?

Activities:

- Watch the pre-recorded video lecture prior to class
- Paired Presentation: “Balancing Margin and Mission”
- Team-Based Discussion: Assessing BleagLee’ Competitive Strategy
- Post-class group activity – work on your team project.

Optional Session: Wednesday, October 1

Interview with the BleagLee team.

Note: the interview will need to be scheduled for the morning or early afternoon, as Cameroon is 5 hours ahead of Philadelphia.

Session 6: Wednesday, October 8

Wings of Nonprofit Strategy (2): Collaboration

Required Readings:

- Austin, J. E. (2000). Strategic collaboration between nonprofits and businesses. *Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly*, 29(1_suppl), 69-97.
- Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Stone, M. M. (2015). Designing and implementing cross-sector collaborations: Needed and challenging. *Public administration review*, 75(5), 647-663.
- Curley, C., Levine Daniel, J., Walk, M., & Harrison, N. (2021). Competition and collaboration in the nonprofit sector: Identifying the potential for cognitive dissonance. *Administration & Society*, 53(8), 1293-1311.

Pre-recorded Video Lecture:

- Collaboration (approx. 12 minutes)

Questions for Online Discussion:

- Why do nonprofits collaborate? What types of collaborations do nonprofits enter into?
- How can organizations share resources but maintain autonomy? When should you give, when should you hold back?
- How shall nonprofit leaders reconcile collaboration and competition?
- Does BleagLee collaborate with other organizations? For what? And how?

Activities:

- Watch the pre-recorded video lecture prior to class
- Paired Presentation: “Designing and implementing cross-sector collaborations”
- Team-Based Discussion: Assessing BleagLee’s collaborative strategy

Deliverables:

- 1-page team project status report **due**

Fall Break – October 9-12

Session 7: Wednesday, October 15

Wings of Nonprofit Strategy (3): Innovation

Required Readings:

- Guo, C., & Bielefeld, W. (2014). Social intrapreneurship: innovation from within. In Guo, C., & Bielefeld, W. (2014). *Social entrepreneurship: An evidence-based approach to creating social value*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Jaskyte, K., Amato, O., & Sperber, R. (2018). Foundations and innovation in the nonprofit sector. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 29(1), 47-64.
- Brimhall, K. C. (2021). Are we innovative? Increasing perceptions of nonprofit innovation through leadership, inclusion, and commitment. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 41(1), 3-24.

Pre-recorded Video Lecture:

- Innovation (approx. 14 minutes)

Questions for Online Discussion:

- Why are innovations important, and how do they occur in the organization?
- What is the role of government and foundations in encouraging and supporting innovation in nonprofit organizations?
- Is BleagLee an innovative organization? What shall the BleagLee leadership do to foster innovation?

Activities:

- Watch the pre-recorded video lecture prior to class
- Paired Presentation: “Social Intrapreneurship: Innovation from Within”
- Team-Based Discussion: Assessing BleagLee’s Innovation Strategy
- Group activity – work on your team project.

Session 8: Wednesday, October 22

Wings of Nonprofit Strategy (4): Growth

Required Readings:

- Lu, J., Shon, J., & Park, Y. J. (2022). Beyond revenue diversification: Service diversification and service costs in nonprofit acute care hospitals. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 33(2), 427-440.

- Young, D. R., & Faulk, L. (2018). Franchises and federations: the economics of multi-site nonprofit organizations. In *Handbook of research on nonprofit economics and management* (pp. 300-322). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Tracey, P. & Jarvis, O. (2006). An Enterprising Failure. Why a promising social franchise collapsed. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Available at: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/an_enterprising_failure.

Pre-recorded Video Lecture:

- Growth Strategy (approx. 11 minutes)

Questions for Online Discussion:

- What is needed to help the organization grow and scale up successfully?
- What is social franchising and how does it work?

Activities:

- Watch the pre-recorded video lecture prior to class
- **Case Study 3: ADES**
- Paired Presentation: “An enterprising failure”
- Progress report: where are you on the team consulting project?

Deliverables:

- **Case Analysis 3** due before class

Session 9: Wednesday, October 29

Technology as A Double-Edged Sword

Required Readings:

- Guo, C. & Saxton, G.D. (2014). Attention Philanthropy: The Good, the Bad, and the Strategy. *The Nonprofit Quarterly*.
- Guo, C. & Saxton, G.D. (2016). Social media capital for nonprofits: How to accumulate it, convert it, and spend it. *The Nonprofit Quarterly*.

Supplemental Reading:

- Nova & Hager, M. (2021). Remote Technology in the Pandemic: Rebalancing Toward Equity and Access. *The Nonprofit Quarterly*. Available at: <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/remote-technology-in-the-pandemic-rebalancing-toward-equity-and-access>.
- McNutt, J. G., & Goldkind, L. (2022). Civic Technology and Data for Good: Evolutionary Developments or Disruptive Change in E-Participation?. In *Research Anthology on Citizen Engagement and Activism for Social Change* (pp. 1330-1345). IGI Global.
- McNutt, J., Guo, C., Goldkind, L., & An, S. (2018). Technology in nonprofit organizations and voluntary action. *Voluntaristics Review*, 3(1), 1-63.

Pre-recorded Video Lecture:

- May I have your attention, please? (approx. 26 minutes)

Questions for Online Discussion:

- What are the pros and cons of technology use in nonprofit organizations?
- What is “data for good”, and what are its implications for nonprofit management and strategy?

- How do the “new media,” and particularly the diffusion of “Web.2.0” and “social media” applications, influence the work of nonprofit organizations?
- What is “social media capital”? Why is it important?

Activities:

- Watch the pre-recorded video lecture prior to class
- Paired Presentation: “Attention Philanthropy”; “Social Media Capital for Nonprofits”
- Team-Based Discussion: How and in what ways can technology improve BleagLee’s work?

Session 10: November 5

Present Your Work!

Activities:

- ***Group Project Presentation***
- Concluding remarks

Deliverables:

- ***Group project report*** due on November 12th, 2025