

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
Master of Science - Nonprofit Management

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PLEASE EXPAND ON WHY YOU ARE PURSUING THIS PROGRAM (500 Characters or less):

I have enjoyed a fulfilling career in nonprofit management for 20 years, which is amusing because I didn't plan to make a profession out of it. Because I stumbled into the field, I sometimes feel I lack proper academic footing for the work I lead. I've reached an inflection point in my career where my continued advancement is limited by not possessing a master's degree to reinforce my depth of experience. It is time to take the next step I've always wanted to and finally tackle my graduate degree.

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU MOST TO COLUMBIA'S PROGRAM? (500 Characters or less)

'Caliber' is the word that best describes what attracted me to Columbia's program. In exploring graduate degree options that best fit the demands of my career and sector, I found incredibly few that stacked up to the relevance, rigor, connectedness, and quality of Columbia's Masters in Nonprofit Management program. The caliber of Columbia's reputation, quality of faculty, depth of research, and vibrancy of thought leadership represents an institution that I absolutely want to be a part of.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

PURPOSE: To create opportunity for the most vulnerable through management excellence, thought leadership, and social innovation.

I have been part of the nonprofit sector for two decades now, having started in college by co-founding a tutoring partnership between undergrad students at our school and the Rochester City School District. Today, I manage public grants and program development for one of the largest direct providers of children and family services in the country. Throughout my work, I have always been struck by the incredible difference a nonprofit can make in a community through sound administrative practices. While most people only see the external delivery of services from a nonprofit, it is made possible only through competent, dedicated staff and

management behind the scenes. I want to be equipped to lead that management to the best of my ability.

My career is quite amusing because I had no intention of going into nonprofit management. I stumbled into it fresh out of college by managing a transportation program helping newly arriving refugees find and retain employment. But I found the work incredibly fulfilling, and one thing led to another, being promoted to management and director roles as well as becoming involved on various nonprofit boards of directors.

Today, my work impacts entire communities and regions as I lead and collaborate with numerous stakeholders to develop, fund, implement, and manage a wide array of services. My work seeks to bridge the gap between societal need and economic opportunity through leveraging public funding and private philanthropy. My efforts have resulted in \$105 million in funding being brought into our communities for the provision of a wide scope of nonprofit services and capital (\$37 million in direct funding leveraging an additional \$68 million in matching investments) through a diverse portfolio of local, state, federal, corporate, and philanthropic dollars. *(The scope of these services is detailed further in my resume.)*

While public and private sectors have historically remained separated in their work, many now understand that societal challenges are also economic challenges and that, in order to have a vibrant economy and acceptable quality of life for all, we simply cannot ignore the impact that poverty has on our collective potential. The scope of my work, from clinical services to bricks-and-mortar economic development, has afforded me a holistic perspective on the complex systems that shape the modern work of nonprofits. As nonprofit leaders, we are stewards of public dollars. And the target outcome for our work is nothing short of the improved quality of life for the individuals and communities we serve - communities that are dealing with seemingly insurmountable challenges.

The agency I work for, the Hillside Family of Agencies, is one of the largest direct providers of children and family services in New York, and in the country. Hillside helps people impacted by poverty through a wide array of services for individuals with a broad range of emotional, behavioral, and life-circumstance challenges. Our organization helps to reduce poverty through the work of 2400 staff providing 120 types of services to over 15,000 youth and families a year at more than 40 locations in 30 counties throughout Western and Central New York State as well as in and around Prince George's County, Maryland. Our services operate throughout many of the most impoverished communities in the entire country, cities including Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C.

A very brief glimpse at the context within which we operate:

- Rochester, NY exhibits some of the highest concentrations of poverty in the developed world, with 1 out of every 2 children in the city living in poverty and a poverty rate of more than 30% (*Rochester Area Community Foundation*), making it the poorest of any similarly-sized city in the United States.
- 27 of Rochester's neighborhoods are distinguished by a poverty rate of over 40% (*Brookings Institution*), making Rochester the 3rd poorest city in the United States, and the poorest city in New York State (*U.S. Census Bureau*).
- While Rochester's unemployment rate hovers just under the State's unemployment rate, the poorest communities in Rochester, within which the majority of those we serve reside, have an unemployment rate multiple times the average at over 21%.
- Syracuse is one of the poorest cities in the United States, with 34% of the City's population, including half of its children, living in poverty (*U.S. Census Bureau*) and 44% of the residents of Central New York remaining underemployed.
- Syracuse has the highest concentration of poverty among blacks and Hispanics in the country (*Rutgers University*), with 1 out of every 2 children in the city living in poverty (*U.S. Census Bureau*).

This is the context in which I carry out my daily work. Our services are a very real microcosm of the challenges that poverty presents to the United States and the developed world. As such, the work I find myself engaged in has very broad implications. I am cognizant that the decisions I make, ideas I promote, and contracts I negotiate have direct impact on the lives of marginalized individuals across a vast geography. My work, done well, creates tangible and sustainable opportunities for thousands, and a blueprint for other communities to follow. My work, done poorly, perpetuates poverty. This is why I take the quality of my work and my capacity to lead so seriously. This is why I am seeking out a graduate program up to the task to further equip me in my work. Columbia University, through its understanding of complex problems and capacity for innovative solutions, is one of the few programs up to the task.

SUPPLEMENTAL ESSAY

Today's nonprofit leaders are faced with truly complex challenges. We have to understand clinical social work as thoroughly as we understand government relations, public policy, fundraising, human resources, finance, economics, and marketing. (And that's not a comprehensive list.) Simultaneously, we have to understand, embrace, and help shape the future of our field where knowledge of social finance vehicles, evidence-based and trauma-informed practice, and data analytics will be critical to the success of our organizations. Columbia's program understands this incredible complexity and is able to bring it together in one place, within a passionate community of learners, researchers, and practitioners who are

eager to lead the delivery of innovative services. That is the type of program I want to be part of in order to impact my own community, enhance my work, and advance my career.

One of the things I most appreciate about Columbia's Master of Science in Nonprofit Management program is the comprehensive approach it offers. As a nonprofit leader, it is difficult to decide between a business-oriented MBA program and a government-oriented MPA track. I could easily pursue either of those degrees online or through a local institution, but I would not be able to access the caliber of instruction, insight, community, and connections that Columbia offers. Columbia's uniquely blended approach offers incredible benefit to a practitioner such as me in being able to cover the diverse array and depth of subject matter that is uniquely required of today's nonprofit leaders.

After 20 years in nonprofit management, I am finding that my opportunities for further advancement are limited by not having a graduate level academic foundation to complement and underscore the depth and scope of practical experience I bring to the table. I would like to remedy that deficiency. As a busy husband and father (of four!), returning to school to pursue my graduate work became something "I'll get to eventually..." for the past 15 years. As I resolved to return to school for my master's, while maintaining my job and family responsibilities, I began looking for the highest quality program I could find that also afforded the most flexibility, with the best connections, at a reasonable cost. Columbia's program offered all of that.

A Master of Science in Nonprofit Management from Columbia University will offer me (i) a strengthened foundation of knowledge from which to perform my work, (ii) improved advancement opportunities through possessing a graduate degree from a leading university, and (iii) lifelong connections to an innovative community of practitioners and researchers to which I can contribute and draw from, including future PhD work I would like to pursue.

Throughout my career, many of the best resources I've drawn upon and used for my own work have come out of Columbia University, either directly or through graduates of the institution. What has struck me is Columbia's strength in successfully blending highly complex areas of practice. For example, when I need to learn about how sustainability and quantitative economics impact public policy decisions, Columbia has resources around that through its commitment to development practice. When I need to better understand how entrepreneurship incubation and finance can be harnessed to catalyze nonprofit practice, Columbia has already been exploring that through its Business School alumnus. Or, when I need to understand how artificial intelligence and machine learning may change the fields of psychology and social work, I find that Columbia is already exploring it. I have constantly been impressed with the integrated scope of Columbia's practice.

Since my own work has frequently involved social entrepreneurship, and I am now in the thick of developing social finance opportunities for my organization, I most look forward to exploring the areas of entrepreneurship and finance in Columbia's curriculum. My long-term goal is to progress from my Master's work to pursue a PhD in social innovation, and being connected to Columbia will help in that endeavor.

At the end of the day, I want the decisions I make in my nonprofit leadership roles to have a positive impact on my community as well as to serve as a model for other communities to create their own sustainable change. Being part of Columbia's learning community will help me achieve this better than any other program I have available to me. Thank you for your consideration of my application. I would be humbled and honored to be part of the Columbia family.