



MissionSpark

Strategies for Social Impact

Kara Penn, MBA, MPP

Consulting & Facilitation

kara@missionspark.org | 303.579.2219



Kara Penn, MBA, MPP is a Principal Consultant for Mission Spark. Kara cares about positive and innovative social change and her career and education reflect that passion. She strives to take the best and most practical ideas, lessons and tools from policy, management, community development, social movements, and systems thinking to help strengthen and innovate the social sector. Kara has 15 years of experience as a manager, facilitator and consultant in Colorado and through out the United States.

She's served in senior leadership positions in a variety of organizations, including as founder, director, program manager, chair and board member. Kara cares deeply about social, cultural and environmental issues and has experience in a wide range of areas including health, human services, environmental justice, community development, youth development, international development, affordable housing and the arts.

Kara understands the unique challenges and opportunities facing nonprofit organizations, and sees the social sector as an innovative, effective and essential part of our societal fabric. Kara's approach is collaborative, inclusive and direct. She focuses on exceeding the expectations of her clients and getting lasting results. She sees the client/consultant relationship in a long-term context and cares about the results the organization achieves long after the contract ends.

Key Services

While Kara has experience in all facets of management, she typically focuses her work in the following areas:

- Organizational assessment and strategic planning
- Business planning & earned revenue strategies
- Program assessment, innovation & implementation
- Program evaluation
- Fund development strategy and planning
- Mediation & Facilitated Dialogue
- Organizational Structure and Systems Analysis

Professional Experience

Kara started as grassroots community change agent-- developing scalable community-based programs and services in conjunction with a wide-variety of partners to address environmental health issues in East St. Louis. Since these early formative experiences she's designed and led departments, programs, collaboratives, community initiatives and projects for more than 15 social sector organizations including St. Mary's Hospital in East St. Louis, IL, Jonathan Rose Companies in New York, NY, and MIT's Center for Collective Intelligence in Cambridge, MA. She's consulted to approximately 50 non-profits, NGOs, government entities and social enterprises on core management and leadership areas, including board development, program management, fund development, evaluation and assessment and strategic planning. She has also led several organizations through mediation processes and organizational transitions as they resolve inner conflict and move to the next level of performance. Kara has facilitated several large-scale community collaborative efforts, including the award-winning Metro East Lead Collaborative in East St. Louis, subject of an US EPA documentary focusing on effective collaborative efforts.

As a senior consultant and trainer for the Community Resource Center, Kara authored "Start Up for Success: Planning, Founding and Initiating a New 501(c)(3)", a comprehensive and practical workbook for nonprofit start-up and early implementation. She also developed and delivered trainings in program evaluation, strategic planning, and early implementation for new nonprofit organizations. Kara also develops tools and thought pieces on organizational learning and practical management in conjunction with a faculty member at MIT.

Educational Background

Kara graduated from The Colorado College, where she was a Boettcher Scholar. She completed her MPP with honors at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy, and her MBA at MIT Sloan School of Management. While at MIT Sloan, Kara received the Seley award, the highest honor given to a graduating student. Kara has been the recipient of several national fellowships including the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship to encourage world citizenship, the Coro Fellowship in Public Affairs to develop principled public leaders, and the Forte Fellowship to promote women leaders.