Executive Summary--Feedback of Participants in the Buckman Program

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Brief questionnaires were sent to six different audiences affiliated with the Buckman Fellowship. The intention of the questionnaire was to 1) gauge the effectiveness of the program, and 2) what motivates people to be involved in the Buckman Fellowship. We distributed questionnaires to current and former Buckman Fellows, current and former Advisory Board members, Department Heads and Deans.

The following summary highlights responses from each of the six audiences polled.

Overall, the vast majority of respondents in all six audiences indicated strong support for the Buckman Fellowship program. Across the board, strengths are seen in the opportunity provided through a program of this nature where fellows are given structured time to devote to a project or leadership development goal.

Recommendations for the longevity of this program would be to consider expanding the program to more people/departments within the university, as well as building strategic partnerships within and without the university with local philanthropic partners.

Programmatic recommendations include securing stakeholders within the university, securing funding to maintain staffing at a level needed to maintain and expand the program, as well as time and money to fine tune the recruitment process in order to attract and provide programming for a more competitive group of applicants. To accomplish the goals of continued growth and expansion, the Buckman Fellowship program should be housed and supported in a department within the university that can provide the stability (guidance, support, funding, staffing, etc.) that is needed to build this program over time.

I. Current Buckman Fellows. The following responses are in rank order reflecting the perceived benefits to the current Buckman Fellows of their participation in the Buckman Fellowship.

Q1. What are the benefits to you from applying and being selected as a Buckman Fellow? The top five benefits stated most often by respondents are as follows: taking action/producing desired outcomes, to build & use skills, program aligned with personal values/beliefs, meet new people, and have structured time & support for project.

Additional benefits stated include, viewing the fellowship as a “bridge” to next stage of professional development, a network to philanthropic people, to make an impact, creative outlet, increased curiosity in philanthropy, access to resources, and recognition of the value in one’s project.
Q2: Please describe what motivates you to do so? The top five motivations noted are as follows: increased effectiveness in project/helps achieve desired outcomes, values the role of philanthropy in helping people, flexibility of program design that provides an “exemplary environment” for learning about philanthropy, has a vision or dream, receiving financial support/the stipend, and developing leadership in philanthropy.

Additional motivations include that the fellowship is a match for personal values/personality, i.e., empathy, life-long learning, creates a collaborative rather than competitive environment, excellent outlet for development, guidance through a project, engaged with other self-motivated people, to become more effective in relationship skills, contacts to other avenues of financial support for projects, fits into whole career plan, and personal invitation.

Q3. Please also indicate the strengths and challenges to success of the program

Strengths  Respondents indicated the greatest strengths to the program are found in 1) its format, program design, and process, 2) the quality of people (fellows, advisory board, inherent network), 3) seminars and professional development opportunities, 4) and having an experienced coordinator.

Various other references to personal growth and values alignment were highlighted, such as the sharing of information & ideas, goal driven mission, expectation of growth, freedom to explore and dream, an excellent balance between “dreaming and doing”, can reach out if struggling, self-awareness training, increasing recognition for program as cohorts graduate, and that the impact of fellows’ projects is “an impact aided – almost guaranteed- by the Fellowship program”. Several also noted the strength of the newly created Moodle site to help facilitate communication within the cohort between sessions.

Challenges  The top challenges noted to the success of the program seem to be around certain aspects of the process: that Fellows are at differing stages in projects, Fellows are sometimes not clear if meeting expectations (recommend a mid-year assessment conducted by the advisory board), and creating/conceptualizing project.

Other challenges are noted in the design of the program: it is only a one-year process, difficult to keep up with cohort between meetings (before Moodle site), not enough time for the project as it was visualized (add deadlines for projects), limited commitment to a monthly meeting, having more individual time with coordinator to process the direction and scope of project…”as there seem to be pivotal shifts in project developmental process.”

Additional challenges of note relate to the work of the advisory board, program supervisor, and administrator, such as keeping up to date with changes in
philanthropic/funding world, that the fellowship is not more widely known, managing the demand for the program – “effectiveness of program could be diluted by pressure to increase cohort size”, having stipend increase with inflation and costs of conferences, education, etc., maintaining involvement of alums, refreshing advisory board with new members, and the strengths and challenges of a program made possible through an endowment.

II. Former Buckman Fellows

Q1. What are the benefits to you from applying for and being selected as a Buckman Fellow? Former Buckman Fellows named many of the same benefits as did current Fellows, such as the structure of the program that allows for dedicated time to their project, the learning experience and skill building that occurs through seminars and professional development opportunities. However, the number one benefit for former fellows was the connection with leaders in philanthropy, and the ensuing networking opportunities the fellowship provided. Also noted was the opportunity to reconnect with the University of Minnesota and to renew old connections and make new ones.

One Alum made the following comment and recommendation: “The stipend, in all honesty, was not a motivator (many leadership trainings are just the opposite – they require tuition). MCN, MCF, Bush, Wilder, amongst others offer leadership trainings which focus on the role philanthropy has in addressing the needs of the community – I think Buckman would be more successful if modeled in a similar manner (and the connection to the U offers so many collaborative opportunities and expertise”).

Q2: Please describe what motivates you to do so? Former Buckman Fellows were very clear, in retrospect, about their motivations to be engaged in the Fellowship. Motivations included to obtain access to making connections to nonprofit/philanthropic leaders, to access learning opportunities from nonprofit/philanthropic leaders, to be sure “I am spending time and money on issues that are important to me, i.e., issues “that I am passionate about”, and clear statements such as “I want to invite others to pursue their passions, too”, and “I want to be effective at influencing change”.

Q3: Please also indicate the strengths and challenges to the success of the program.

Strengths From a retrospective view, former Buckman Fellows noted three areas of strength for the program: 1) the design of the program: it is situated in an innovative community, speakers and events are customized for members of the cohort, is a very willing community to provide support, program allows individualized design of outcomes, individual attention, having a cohort is great. A former fellow offered the following, “I
feel I received information and guidance in every area needed to prepare for my role as board president”. The second and third areas of strength noted are 2) connections to different entities/community leaders, and 3) the management of the program as very organized, providing high caliber speakers, and receiving the stipend.

One fellow, looking to the future and how to improve the program design and offerings suggested the following:

“|I’d structure in looking at Philanthropy 101 (with Audrey Kinzi who was phenomenal/is a recognized leader). | Randi Yoder of GTCUW on individual donors (among a myriad of other expertise) | Jodi Sandford (on Policy Field Analysis which explores the nonprofit/public sector funding landscape). | Charities Review Council (Rich Cowels, ED) as it relates to standards of operating a charity, possibly a panel discussion involving program officers from a family foundation, community foundation, and corporate giving program to discuss how their connections impact funding direction, ideally an expert in international philanthropy (sorry – no ideas there), and someone to balance by exploring ethical issues within philanthropy (approaching the haves often on behalf of the have-nots). | Other leaders that’d make great speakers – Trista Harris of Headwaters (blog author as well as Epiphanies and all around amazing/thoughtful), Frank Forsberg of GTCUW on measuring impact of investments, Peter Heegaard on Return on Investment of philanthropic investing, Bill King of MCF, amongst others. The strength is drawing leaders like this in for an intimate conversation”

**Challenges** Few challenges to the success of the program were stated by former Fellows, but the number one challenge noted was that there were not clear enough expectations and deadlines. This perspective can be seen in the following statements: too focused on updates on projects, “this wasn’t as helpful (still pursuing the project – has simply taken a different shape”, and “I felt unsure whether I was meeting program expectations…but not sure how to change that without limiting the freedom to design our own philanthropic outcomes”. Finally, a reference to the need for ways to stay engaged with one another between sessions as follows, “On-line communication would encourage more communication among cohort”. This has now been addressed by the creation of a Moodle site by the current administrator. This year’s cohort are engaged in and using the site for communication with one another.

**III & IV. Current and Former Advisory Board Members**

**Q1. What are the benefits to you of serving on the Buckman Fellowship Advisory Board?** Benefits named by current and former advisory board members
overwhelmingly indicate that connecting to others interested in learning about philanthropy, networking with others in philanthropic circles, strengthening own philanthropic skills, and their own institution, including gaining a closer connection to the philanthropic network represented by board members, and gaining a greater understanding of the composition and impact of the program.

The next clearly perceived benefit is that of service. Comments acknowledging this include personal statements such as “I believe I have a lot to give.” “I have some expertise”, and this allows me to “bring my experiences back to the board…the Buckman led me to leadership positions on other boards”. The opportunity to serve is depicted in statements acknowledging a sense of service to community, advancing a broader and more integrated sense of philanthropy in the community, giving back to the college/reconnection to the St. Paul campus. A third area of perceived benefit comes from the ability to help others advance their professional skills-set, and the emotional reward of doing so, reflected in the flowing statements, “addressing the fellows (at seminar) was very moving for me…I feel more connected since given that venue to be with the Fellows” and “it is an honor to be a past Fellow and current Advisory Board member”, also “being inspired by your dedication to the program, as well as Marilyn’s”. Another indicated simply, “I like and enjoy other board members and fellows”.

**Q2. Please describe what motivates you to serve on the Board?** Motivation to serve on the board mirrors the perceived benefits in many ways, the number one reason stated for serving on the board was because the topic of philanthropy is considered very important and of interest to the respondent. The second reason cited for serving on the advisory board is that they “were asked” to serve: coupled with the importance and interest in philanthropy, the vast majority of respondents listed these two in some form. Following the importance of philanthropy and being asked to serve, is a feeling of being “honored” by being asked.

Additional comments indicate the desire to be a part of a process that allows further connection to the college, to give back in areas where expertise or insight may assist in the growth of the fellowship, pleased to be able to do something innovative that is good for the colleges as well as the community, and individual fellows, enjoyed mentoring those who are interested in philanthropic/serving their communities, this is an excellent model for encouraging community engagement, and it came with my role at the university.

Reasons noted for one former fellow to serve on the advisory board highlight the motivation to give back:

“*As a former Buckman Fellow whose institution has benefited from two Buckman Fellowships, I was honored to be asked to serve on the board*
as a way to contribute to the ongoing operation and health of the program.”

Q3. Please indicate the strengths of the program  Strengths of the program are most strongly noted in the design of the program where fellows become a learning cohort, in a non-threatening, very learning friendly environment, that can be tailored to the individual needs of each fellow. The following quote captures the uniqueness of the Buckman Fellowship Program:

“We are enticing people to participate in the program and to learn about leadership and philanthropy in a way that is not readily available in the marketplace”.

The next most frequently cited strength of the program is seen in the outcomes produced by fellows as the program evolves and builds sustainability over time, reflected in the following statements, “there is a relatively small time commitment vs. the outcomes that are possible for the fellows”, “we are seeing growing strength in the fellows year after year in terms of qualifications”, “our fellows learn so much in taking the leadership role and learning what it takes to accomplish what at first appears easy”.

Other strengths of the program are the strong philanthropic community in the Twin Cities from which to draw candidates and speakers, the association with the University of Minnesota & building the collegiality at the U of M, having the current administrator more than one year is “a bonus for moving forward”, and finally, “we have only scratched the surface of what this can become”. This program is perceived as “a great opportunity to introduce people to philanthropy and to make their dreams a reality”.

Q4. Please describe the challenges to the success of the program  Top challenges of note are in marketing the program, such as lack of visibility, a relatively small scale and obscure program, limited to only certain faculty, staff, or graduate students, getting information out to qualified people, and the need for a clear “home” that ensures ownership by stakeholders.

Programmatic challenges of note are in consistently staffing at a level that assures the attention and time the program deserves, recruiting a board and large pool of applicants to have the greatest impact, projects vary widely making it difficult to meet everyone’s needs. “Most participants could use a lot of mentoring and I don’t know that there are people with that kind of time”. Also noted was the small stipend for fellows ($1,000) and that the application process needs some refining so that potential recipients understand what is required of them.
An additional challenge and possible opportunity is offered with regard to former Buckman Fellows: “It would be an advantage to keep the cohort groups together to share what they have learned and perhaps keeping them moving forward. The lecture can partially do this.”

Noting the current economic downturn, one respondent commented that recessionary times have hit the NFP sector very hard and offered the following perspective:

“Philanthropy is both in jeopardy with the economic downturn and more in demand than ever for the same reason – as the Buckman Fellowship progresses it will need to address the availability and accessibility of its training to an audience that may not understand that philanthropy is not just the exclusive prevue of the rich. New methods of content delivery should be considered and greater public offerings concerning its topics explored”.

Q5. What opportunities for the Buckman program are yet to be tapped?
Opportunities yet to be tapped are overwhelmingly noted in the possibility of expanding the program opportunity beyond its current audience. Some comments offered for consideration are “perhaps a greater reach within the University community to attract the most qualified participants to the program”, be open to having more applicants and being more selective”, “the fellowship reaches a small cohort of individuals annually; can this information be more broadly disseminated to enhance a wider number of grass-roots organizations?”

Building long term growth partners and strengthening communication with not-for-profit (NFP) constituents in the Twin Cities was noted. One respondent offered this idea,

“The Humphrey Public and Non-profit Leadership Center is a formal delivery system for this information. The Minnesota Center for Non-profits offers a wide range of workshop training and connection opportunities, most with a fee attached – Could the Buckman offer something similar?”

Other possible opportunities include considering increased access such as webinar delivery to reach larger groups of interested non-profit professionals, and tracking the outcomes of past participants.

“In order to secure funding, there will need to be a demonstration of success. How many participants implemented their projects? What were the outcomes? Are they still moving forward?

Highlighting success stories of former Buckman Fellows is suggested,
“If there are a couple star stories, it would be a benefit to try to get them placed in Minnesota Magazine or even the Foundation’s Legacy publication. It would draw awareness to the program and potential fellows. Getting support from some of the organizations which draw from our colleges to support us by having programs from the cohorts or a board member or staff. Also having them recommend potential fellows as it could benefit their programs. We could follow up on the recommendations. The lecture series is great and should be better every year”

V & VI. Deans and Department Heads  Respondents from this audience indicate their strong support of the program and offer recommendations for future expansion.

Q1. On a scale of 1 – 5 where would you place the significance of the Buckman Fellowship for your constituents?  (1 = no significance to 5 = high significance)

The significance of the program was rated as a five by the majority of respondents in this audience, with an added clarification by one respondent as follows, “For those who participate at “5”, for the masses, a “1”.

Q2. What are the benefits to you of having faculty, staff, and graduate students participate in the Buckman Fellowship?  Key comments from Deans and Department Heads are as follows:

“I believe this is an outstanding program that brings a sense of ethics and caring. Personally, it truly warms my heart to see people involved in the program”

“The benefits to me (as dept. head) is that the participants seem to have a stronger connection to the college/program because I perceive the Buckman experience to be such a positive professional development activity for them”

“It can be a transformative experience that offers incredible opportunities for Fellows”.

Q3. Please describe what motivates you to get the word out about the Buckman Fellowship, specifically to recommend that someone apply?  Key comments noted are as follows:

“I think it nurtures an innate caring for mankind. Seeds are planted and this program nurtures them to grow”

“The motivation for me to share is based on the results I have seen of past participants”

“It can be a transformative experience that offers incredible opportunities for Fellows”
Q4. Please indicate the strengths of the program

“I would say the opportunity and mentoring it provides”

“I believe it allows the participants involved with a project to devote structured and mentored time to it. The projects seem to reach a higher level than they would have otherwise because of the investment of the participants in this program”

“It provides a structure that lets Fellows pursue their interests in a community of peers, while giving them chances to learn what it will take to realize their goals.”

Q5. Please describe the challenges to the success of the program

“Demands for time and money. There is no free time or free money so the program must compete for these very limited resources”

“The commitment and ability to perceive an outcome that otherwise would not be reached”

“One challenge lies in the funding available for the program, which is enough to maintain the program at a modest level, but not enough to fund Fellows at a level that would help them implement their ideas. Promotion of the program is another challenge, both in terms of attracting new Fellows and attracting more funding. I believe that all of these challenges can be overcome, however.”

Q6. What opportunities for the Buckman program are yet to be tapped? Looking to future partnerships is identified in the following statement, “I think a real opportunity exists with the growing partnership with the philanthropic institutions in the area.”