

A Student's Guide to the Professional Consultancy

Baruch College MA in Arts Administration Capstone Project

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CONSULTANCY OVERVIEW

Course Description: FPA 9180 Professional Consultancy/Thesis in Arts Administration

As part of the culmination of your work in the program, each student will serve as consultant to an arts business, organization or program. You will assist the organization in addressing a real challenge or opportunity by developing strategies that work within the organization's existing budget and human resources limitations and mapping out how those strategies will be implemented. You will complete a final written thesis based on your consulting experience.

Overview of the Timeline for the Consultancy

In any semester:

- Be aware of what issues and organizations are sparking your interest. This includes any guest speakers or opportunities to connect with people and organizations in the field. It is never too early to cultivate these relationships.

Beginning of the semester prior to consultancy:

- Identify the areas and/or organizations in which you have interest.
- Set up informational meetings with faculty if you would like additional ideas.
- Set up meetings with potential organization contacts.

Middle of the semester prior to the consultancy (about when registration opens):

- Attend a consultancy info session with David Milch, Program Director. This session will provide a list of possible advisers as well.
- Narrow down possibilities to one or two projects/organizations.
- Meet with the organization(s) and together with them, propose a topic and scope for the consultancy.
- Approach potential faculty advisers and ask if they are available and interested to advise your project.

When registration opens:

- Complete the [consultancy registration form](#) and have it signed by your faculty adviser and the Program Director, David Milch.

Prior to start of semester in which you are registered for the consultancy:

- Make sure you are properly registered for the FPA9180 course with your adviser listed as the instructor.

Within the first weeks of the semester in which you are doing your consultancy:

- Attend a meeting of the full consultancy cohort and the advisers for that semester.
- Work with your adviser to establish a plan, deadlines for assignments and mutual expectations.

End of the semester in which you are doing the consultancy:

- Submit your consultancy report to your adviser by the deadline agreed.
- Submit your consultancy report to the Program Assistant, Emily Caffery, for the program's consultancy archive.
- Present a brief summary of your consultancy at the Consultancy Presentations (each student usually has just 5 minutes for an overview).
- Celebrate!

What Is the Consultancy?

The consultancy is the capstone project of the Baruch College MA in Arts Administration. Operating similarly to an independent study, students identify an organization that could make use of a consultant to support current analysis and/or implementation of its goal(s) and activities. Consultancy projects are usually negotiated between the consultant (student) and one or more of the leaders in the organization. The shape of the issue(s) on which you focus may change as you learn more about the organization.

If there's not an analytical problem, there is no consultancy. Different from doing internship, (where you take on responsibilities and learn about an organization from working inside of it), the consultancy requires you to research and analyze the organization and the specifics involved in achieving its current goal(s). The consultancy is also very different from a research paper; though many analytic problems will ultimately require research and analysis as part of your contribution to solving them, your consultancy will address practical and current issues facing the organization.

Past consultancy reports are available here: blogs.baruch.cuny.edu/artsadmin/consultancy-archive (password: verticalcampus). There are many excellently written reports from years past, including Marlow Prize winners and finalists, which are denoted as such in the archive.

How Substantial Is a Consultancy Project?

The consulting project is somewhat equivalent to a master's thesis, culminating in a 30 to 60 page well written consultancy paper with research to support all recommendations and conclusions. It typically takes 12 weeks of full-time effort. It is set up as a three-credit course – however will often require an effort equal to something more similar to the workload of two full graduate courses.

Key Issues in Developing a Successful Consultancy Project

Scope: Oftentimes organizations will have needs greater than a consultant is able to address in one semester; sometimes the issue might seem too small and easily solvable in a few weeks. In your conversations with the organization, you can propose a reasonable scope of work (what you believe you will be able to accomplish in the time you have) and what deliverables you will provide to the organization. It may be helpful to frame your work with the organization as “phase one” in addressing a larger issue.

Demonstration of program-specific knowledge: Each consultancy should utilize the knowledge, experience, skills, and perspective that you have learned and developed throughout the Baruch MA in Arts Administration program. You can and should build on work you have done in other classes.

Field-wide perspective: The consultancy should provide information that adds to the knowledge base in the field of Arts Administration. Of course, the “client” (the organization) is your primary audience, but the final consultancy paper should demonstrate a more in-depth and thoroughly researched response to the issue making it a useful resource to others in the field as well. Additionally, the consultancy project is your bridge to your professional life after this program. Your consultancy is an opportunity to synthesize the separate streams of your academic work into who you are as an arts administrator – and can be used to demonstrate to the field (and future employers) what you have to offer.

WORKING WITH THE CLIENT ORGANIZATION

What Kinds of Organizations and Projects Work Best for a Consultancy?

In short, any arts or cultural organization (or department within an organization) which is facing an issue for which its current staff is either not able or available to address would be an excellent candidate for a consultancy. Organizations often engage professional consultants when their current staff and human resources require additional support and/or would benefit from an “outside eye.”

While students can consult with any size organization, most of our consultancies will be with medium-sized organizations – no longer surviving from one month to the next, and big enough to imagine growth and change. This usually means that they will have been around for at least a few years, have a board with at least some members who contribute substantially, and an annual budget of between \$250,000 and \$10,000,000. However, this is only a guide, and there have been many successful consultancies working with newer, smaller or even larger organizations.

The right organization for a Baruch consultancy is one whose leaders recognize that it has some issues – of structure, or mission, or vision, or management, or finances, or marketing, or space, or perhaps of relevance to the needs of their actual and potential audiences. The leaders may not understand the full range of the problems they face; but to make use of a consultant, they need to have at least a minimum openness to some advice and assistance.

Students are generally advised not to work on a Consultancy project if they are currently employed by the organization or if they are the primary owner or administrator of the organization. Exceptions to this can be made, but further conversation with the Program Director, David Milch, would be required.

How to Find an Appropriate Organization

Many of you have already worked in cultural organizations as staff or interns. Others among you have friends or professional acquaintances in cultural institutions. Several of our students have already found their way to organizations that suit them – small theaters or museums, dance companies, arts education programs, for example. The relationships students have with these organizations and their supporters are already helping them to understand what questions need to be asked and answered.

Finding an organization to examine is only part of the process. Your client must also understand the value of your consultancy to the organization, be willing to invest some time and resources (meetings with staff, providing historical information, etc.) and feel comfortable that your project will not cause the organization any undue strife or discomfort.

Many of you will need help in finding the right project. You should begin by setting up a meeting with the Program Director, David Milch, or any faculty member who seems likely to be able to help you talk about ideas that you have. These conversations can also include the specific knowledge and insights you are interested in developing further.

How to Describe the Consultancy to an Organization

Here is a brief description of the professional consultancy that you may include if you wish when reaching out to an organization with which you would like to work. You are welcome to customize this language as you see fit:

As their final project of the Baruch College MA Program in Arts Administration, students must complete a “consultancy,” akin to a practical thesis. In this project, each student serves as a consultant to an arts organization, addressing a real challenge or opportunity facing that organization and developing strategies tailored to its existing budget and resources. While each consultancy is unique, the student’s process often includes a review of various written materials, conducting interviews with people within the organization, and independent research, culminating in a written report. Students register for the consultancy as a semester-long course and receive additional guidance from a faculty advisor and the director of the program, David Milch. You are welcome to direct questions about the consultancy process to him at david.milch@baruch.cuny.edu or 646-312-4059.

The Baruch College MA in Arts Administration Program appreciates your consideration of working with students in this capacity.

What Do Consultants Do?

The first step is almost always to learn from various written materials. Interviews of people in the organization are often and eventually needed, but most of those are best informed by what you have learned from available literature on the topic.

One point worth noting is that consultancy projects DEVELOP. Initial ideas typically evolve once you start to talk to the potential client. Then, as you begin to interview relevant people and do the research the client suggests, you and the client are likely to see the problem differently, or even to discover that some more important problem exists about which the client was not aware (or not fully aware) at the start.

Only after identifying and describing the problem does it become possible to complete the consultancy – to fashion a statement of the problem on which you are working and to make recommendations about how the organization and its leadership might address the issue. You will no doubt have some advice to give, but perhaps more important you will have some options to outline for your client. Your job is not necessarily to solve every problem, but rather to help the organization understand its current situation better and to help it in figuring out how it can best move forward.

Are Consultants Paid?

They can be. But in most cases with a short-term student consultancy, organizations will not be able to provide compensation. If you think payment is likely, you should prepare a budget that includes reasonable payment for the time you expect to put in on the project.

What Does the Consultant Provide the Client?

The deliverables you provide your client will depend on the nature of your project and your mutually agreed upon scope of work.

You may wish to provide brief interim reports for the client as the project develops. These serve to help in rethinking the project and/or fine-tuning it in ways that make it more useful for the client, and in part (or sometimes in full) they may be included in your final report.

Although you may present your findings to your client and others in the organization orally, you should plan on writing a final report for the client, preferably one that can be shared with the employees, the board, and eventually the public. This should be a memo of publishable quality, carefully written, revised, and proofread. This is NOT the same as the consultancy final report that you will submit to your consultancy adviser (although it may be included in that paper) but is focused instead on the information that is most useful to your client.

Confidentiality

Sometimes at least a portion of a consultant's report may be confidential at the request of the client. In such cases, a candid and detailed final report for the client is still expected, but a shorter version for the board, staff, and public should still be written – omitting names and leaving out information where necessary. You may stipulate that only your faculty adviser and their supervisor may see the full final report, and that it not be copied or circulated.

All consultancy reports which are not labeled as “confidential” will be included in our web-available archive, for the use of future students and analysts.

CONSULTANCY ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

Faculty Advisors

Each student will have a Faculty Advisor who will be the instructor of the FPA 9180 course section for which you register. Any full-time faculty member, or any adjunct faculty member who is teaching a course in the semester in which you register for the consultancy, can serve as your advisor – this includes faculty from Marx and Zicklin as well as Weissman. These advisors will assist you in framing and developing a consultancy project and will assist in structuring assignments throughout the semester to support the creation of your final written consultancy paper.

Approving Your Consultancy Project

Once the project is identified, but before you begin work on it in earnest, you should fill out the Arts Administration Consultancy registration form provided by [Graduate Student Academic Advisement](#), have your adviser sign off on it, and then submit it to the Arts Administration Program Director for approval. Only after the adviser and the Program Director have signed off on the consultancy form are you able to be registered for the course. This has to be done during the official registration period of each semester (Due date for Fall, July 15 and for Spring December 15).

Currently, students may register for the consultancy for either the Fall or Spring semester. Students having questions about timing outside of Fall and Spring semesters should speak with the Program Director, David Milch.

Grading and Acceptance of the Consultancy

After completion and submission of your final paper to your adviser, they will assign the grade for the consultancy course and will recommend acceptance (or non-acceptance) of the project to the Program Director. Completing a project and having it judged acceptable is one of the necessary requirements for your M.A. degree in Arts Administration. Questions about grading or academic expectations may be addressed with your adviser.

What Does the Consultancy Report Require?

The appropriate length for a final paper will vary with the complexity of the project on which you have worked, typically 30 to 60 pages in addition to appendices. The equivalent of a master’s thesis, the report is a piece of academic writing presenting your research, analysis, and thoughtfully framed recommendations for action.

Additionally, there should in most cases be a more personal conclusion. We are interested in hearing what you learned from this process: (1) about the way the organization works, about its leadership, about the environment in which it operates; (2) about insights you may have gained about yourself, your skills as an analyst, even, perhaps, your initial blind spots; and (3) about how the issues on which you've worked connect with larger problems faced by cultural institutions more generally, and by artists, scholars, curators, and audiences who are their staffs and/or constituencies.

The Marlow Prize will be offered at the end of each academic year for the best consultant report completed within that academic year.

Writing Guidelines

- Use standard formatting as requested by your adviser, such as Times New Roman or Arial 11-point font, 1.5 line spacing, and standard margins.
- Page count should be between 30 and 60 pages, plus appendices as necessary.
- Be clear and concise. Use headings and paragraphs that express clear thoughts. Extremely long paragraphs are unacceptable.

The [Purdue Owl](#) is an excellent source of information for all aspects of writing.

Use a professional paper format. Start with a title page and a table of contents. This will be followed by your acknowledgments (if you include this section), and the abstract. These pages are known as the Frontmatter. None of these pages should be numbered. The start of your introductory section should be page number 1.

You need to use a section break at the bottom of the table of contents page to make this work. This is done using ¶ draft mode (a view option) or a Word button that displays hidden commands. You produce different sections that all can have their own unique footer and header material.

Sources must be used properly. Overall, I want to see your own thoughts and not a collection of quotations from the organization where you interned or from the relevant literature. In addition, any references to organization documents must be done properly. Cutting and pasting material without using quotation marks and a footnote is plagiarism. Information you look up and present in your own words (paraphrasing) must also be footnoted, though quotation marks are not used in such instances.

Footnotes are required. Footnotes appear at the end of a sentence AFTER all regular punctuation, and the full citation appears at the bottom of the page. For guidance, consult the [Chicago Manual of Style](#).

Writing Resources at Baruch

You are encouraged to visit the [Baruch Writing Center](#) *throughout the writing process*. Your advisor will provide assistance with both form and content, which includes editing. But the

responsibility for the editing process falls on the author – you. The Writing Center will be able to best assist you in writing clearly and cogently. Do not wait until the final draft is due to visit the Center, which serves all of the Baruch graduate and undergraduate students. The Center does offer a multiplicity of writing consultations for those unable to schedule an in-person visit, but be mindful that an in-person visit can be the most helpful so do try to schedule one.

While Baruch offers access to RefWorks, it is advisable to use [Zotero](#) as access to RefWorks ends upon graduation.

As a Baruch student you also have access to Qualtrics, an online survey, reporting and analysis software, which provides far more options (for free!) than SurveyMonkey or another free survey platform. You can find information on [Qualtrics on the BCTC](#) site.

Appendix: Structure of a Consultancy-Based Thesis

This writing guide from [Manchester Metropolitan University Business School](#) is an example for how to write an academic thesis. Please consult with your advisor for specific guidance about how to structure your report.

Abstract

This is a synopsis of your work, normally not more than 500 words long. This synopsis should describe concisely and clearly the main aspects of your finished research. The business context and the highlights of the strategic issues as determined by the client organization should be included. Other aspects that should also be referred to are the research questions, knowledge domain, research design, principal findings, and implications to management. A sharp synopsis suggests to the reader that the work is focused and that you have a good grasp of your accomplished work.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This chapter provides the underlying rationale and purpose of the study. It should set out the business context of the client organization and any existing strategic issues, demonstrating to the reader the relevance of the study in this context. Here you should outline and define the problem, discuss why there is a problem, the organizational brief, the organizational constraints, and how the problem has arisen. In the light of the client's brief of the problem area you are expected to describe aims and objectives for the investigation, and to identify specific research questions, which may take the form of hypotheses that will be tested within the study.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

In the process of depicting specific research questions, with the view of arriving to a business solution, it is appropriate for you to review the literature on the problem subject area. You are also required to review the literature on consultancy for guidance on how to manage a consultancy process. It is essential that, in developing this type of dissertation, you manage the consultancy process well. The literature will also provide guidance on issues such as negotiating entrance to the organization and working the contract.

This chapter provides a critical review of the literature related to the problem subject area you are studying. This means that you should demonstrate your ability to identify and to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the theories or schools of thought relevant to your topic (problem subject area). You should explain how the literature, which reports on previous work and the existing body of knowledge, informed your research questions and the formulation of your research design.

This chapter should close with the articulation of a conceptual framework, that is, a comprehensive synthesis of the analytical models and concepts which you used to answer your research questions. This framework consists of patterns of concepts and their interconnections. The conceptual framework informs your data collection, in determining what 'measurable'

concepts may constitute empirical evidence, and in determining the nature of the data to be collected.

Helpful information on literature reviews can be found on the, ever helpful, [Purdue Owl](#) and the [University of CA at Santa Cruz](#).

Chapter 3 – Research Design/Methodology (Your Plan of Action)

At your data-gathering stage it is expected that you will be collecting data on the client organization and conducting your own fieldwork (primary data) at the host business. In addition, you may also use some secondary sources (company data collected and summarized by others) to corroborate your findings. You may form hypothesis to be tested through the data collected, as research questions, in order to gain insight into the problem.

In this chapter consideration should be given to the anticipated and agreed stages in the consultancy intervention, for example, contracting and agreeing the remit, access, outcomes, exploring the issue, etc. It should also describe and justify the choice of methodology and methods adopted for collecting data – such as questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observation – and discuss the potential benefits and limitations of the chosen methods. You should also characterize your data source (who, when, and why), your sampling technique, the sample size, and the rate of response (if applicable).

In summary, this chapter presents your research plan. This includes a reference to agreed stages in the consultancy intervention, your ‘measurable concepts’ or research variables, a choice of method(s) for data collection, a rationale for the implementation of the method, how the gathering of raw data was operationalized, and a choice of method(s) for data analysis.

Chapter 4 – Data Analysis

In this chapter you would present your findings. Many of the points made for the empirically-based dissertation are equally relevant here. It is important that you critically analyze the data drawing attention to the issues and factors that have emerged as a result of your intervention. This chapter presents the application of your chosen methods or techniques to your raw data in order to generate data summaries and findings. Examples of such techniques are Chi Square test and Content Analysis. The outcome of your analysis provides the evidence that support the answer to your research questions. The findings of the research undertaken should be presented in a clear and unambiguous manner. Diagrams, charts and tables should be employed, where appropriate, to aid the reader in understanding these findings.

Chapter 5 – Interpreting the Research Material

This chapter should focus on drawing together the findings that have emerged from your analysis and relating them to other previous studies identified earlier in the literature review. You are expected to show your capacity for reflective and logical argument. This might include validating specific hypotheses related to the processes and dynamics of the client organization, which you advanced at the outset of the study. This may also include summarizing the degree to which

particular assumptions advanced in the literature appear to be borne out or contradicted by the findings. The interpretation of the research material reflects your understanding of and your insights into the processes and dynamics of the problem area.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions

This chapter should capture your reflections on your experience as a consultant. You should address your reflections and learning regarding for example the approach and role you adopted, how it might have changed during the intervention, the limitations you experienced in taking the approach you adopted and why. In other words, you are expected to reflect on how you might do it differently (and better!) in the future. Finally you should articulate your understanding of the organization through exploring the problem in this way, and demonstrate an appreciation of the implications of change brought about by the consultancy intervention itself.

Your final conclusions should relate back to the aim and objectives of the study stated at the Introduction. The conclusions, pointing to a revised organizational strategy, should be based on the new insight generated by your research findings. They summarize your judgement on the implications of the research outcomes for the management of the client organization, and for the wider management theory. As part of the conclusions, you are expected to make recommendations to the client organization and propose an implementation plan, that is, what choices should be made or what should be done and when (short, medium, long term) in response to the client's strategic issues. You are also required to include feedback from the client commenting on the value of your intervention, recommendations and suggested implementation plan.

References

Details of the bibliographic references made in the text should be included in this section. Students should use [Chicago Manual of Style](#). Be clear on the different ways in which footnotes and the bibliography function: FNs provide specific knowledge, which the bibliography provides general information. Thus, the style of each also differs).