FAQ
Frequently Asked Questions

What is the purpose of the Three Pillars Initiative?

The Three Pillars Initiative (TPI) is a national 501(c)(3) philanthropy service organization whose mission is to create and distribute youth philanthropy education programs and curriculum to communities committed to preparing the next generation of philanthropic leaders. The program model provides robust learning experiences in fund raising, charitable giving and service projects. Together, these components embody the *Three Pillars of Philanthropy*.

What youth population is served?

The population of Generation Z, those born after 1996, is the primary focus. It is the largest, most diverse and likely the most well-educated and competitive, generation ever. Given their high social awareness of the world around them and their entrepreneurism and inclusiveness, they are also likely to be the most generous donors of any previous generation. It is important that we support their core values and, at their formative age, start preparing them now to bring about positive change in our communities and in our world.

How does the Three Pillars model work?

The primary program consists of the following key components:

1. High school juniors apply and compete for participation in the 2-year program.
2. Adult community volunteer mentors deliver the program material.
3. Student fund raising activities utilize proven methods of gift solicitation.
4. Student charitable giving activities including an RFP-designed grant making process.
5. Service projects are designed by students to address unmet and/or urgent needs.
6. Students continue to engage in philanthropic activities while in college.
7. Career networking activities and events continue to spark philanthropic leadership.

What sets this program apart?

A significant distinction of the Three Pillars model is its comprehensive curriculum consisting of lesson plans, teaching instructions, student handouts, simulated exercises and interactive experiences focused specifically on fundraising, charitable giving and service projects. At the high school level, this curriculum is taught by adult community volunteer mentors who provide an important intergenerational component to the learning experience. Program content is taught in a highly interactive format wherein teens engage in numerous community outreach experiences to raise money, distribute grants and volunteer their time.

Who would actually run the program?

The sponsoring organization appoints a part-time program coordinator to organize, coordinate and direct all aspects of the program. This person might be a current employee or an independent contractor or a qualified volunteer, depending on current organizational resources and staffing. The time commitment during the school year is approximately 6-10 hours per month. In addition, initial pre-launch activities required to get the program organized and off the ground would be approximately 25-30 hours leading up to the initial start of the program.

When would the program begin?

There are two options. In the first option, the program timeframe mirrors the high school calendar year, typically beginning in September and ending in May. The curriculum is designed to be delivered at monthly sessions of approximately two hours in length. Some extra-curricular activities between sessions would be required for fundraising, charitable giving and service projects. In the second option, the program starts in January and runs through May. With this option, the initial program curriculum is delivered at bi-monthly sessions with similar extra-curricular activities as in the first option.

Who would teach the curriculum to the students?

The core curriculum is specifically designed to be taught by adult community volunteer mentors. Mentors represent leaders in the community who already engage in local nonprofit organization leadership, philanthropy, volunteerism or civic affairs. Mentors present the program content, provide direction, facilitate discussion, promote teamwork and coordinate activities throughout the program experience. The time commitment required of mentors is approximately 3-4 hours per month during the school year. Mentors are asked to make a minimum commitment of 2 years to ensure program continuity.

How many mentors are needed?

The ratio of students to mentors should be no more than 5:1. Thus, if you accept 25 students into the program (recommended), you will need 5 mentors. Mentors for the first junior cohort move ahead with their students into their senior year of the program. Thus, additional mentors for the next junior cohort, who will also move ahead with their students into their senior year, would be required. After their second year, mentors work with the next new cohort of juniors and move ahead with them in their senior year, and so on.

How are students recruited?

High school student advisors and counselors are the key to successful program recruitment. They are not only in a position to encourage high school juniors to submit an application, they can also help shape a diverse mix of student applicants based on such factors as gender, ethnicity, race, socialization level, extra-curricular activities and prior volunteer experience. Advisors can promote the program by making general announcements, junior class homeroom or study hall handouts, and postings on school bulletin boards or social media.

When and where are the program sessions held?

Regular program sessions are typically held on a mid-weekday evening, or a Saturday, in a space that can easily accommodate the total number of students and mentors. Providing food and drinks at each session is highly recommended. Other considerations in selecting a venue include the accessibility of A/V equipment and WiFi connectivity, availability of round or rectangular tables with chairs and storage space for program supplies and equipment.

How much startup funding is required?

Depending on the initial scope and scale of grant making, startup program costs all-in can range from $40,000 - $75,000 spread over the first 3 years of implementation. Operationally, the program is structured to financially break even in that timeframe. Going forward, the student's annual fundraising campaigns provide income to cover all program costs. Income in excess of costs is invested in a designated fund which supports the program in perpetuity. A key design feature of the program is its relatively short runway to reach financial sustainability.

How do we get access to the program curriculum?

The program curriculum is available from Three Pillars Initiative through a licensing agreement. The initial license fee is $10,000 for the junior cohort edition and $10,000 for the senior cohort edition. Thereafter, annually revised and updated editions of both junior and senior curricula are provided for a license renewal fee of $1,500 each *(these costs are included in the startup expenses outlined above)*.

What technical assistance and training is available to launch the program?

Per the licensing agreement, Three Pillars Initiative staff provide, at no extra charge, expert guidance and advice to your program leaders that includes assistance with pre-launch activities, mentor training and program support throughout the school year. If travel is necessary and approved, reimbursement of such reasonable expenses incurred by TPI is required.

For more information contact:

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The seminal TPI program is the Future Philanthropists Program which was launched in 2010 by the Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation, Oak Park, Illinois. Since then, teens in the program have raised the value of their designated fund to over $1,000,000 while distributing more than $225,000 in charitable giving to the community and providing nearly 2,000 hours of volunteer services.