



LEADERSHIP FORWARD

# Proposer Workshop

*Writing a proposal that gets selected*

**In-person working session · Friday, June 19, 2026 · 3:30 – 5:00 PM**

# Welcome — this is a working session

Bring out your draft. We won't lecture — we'll build. You'll leave with a short list of changes that make your proposal stronger.



## See what wins

We walk through real, selected proposals — section by section.



## Crosswalk your draft

One-on-one with a coach, you hold yours up against a strong one.



## Leave with a punch list

2–3 concrete fixes to make before the July 10 deadline.

Facilitated by **Cassius Johnson & Audy Johnston** with James Garvin

# How your proposal gets selected



## Submission

By July 10, 5 PM

## Committee scores

Out of 100 points

## 4–6 advance

Round 1 finalists

## Pitch the class

Orientation · Aug 19

## New class selects

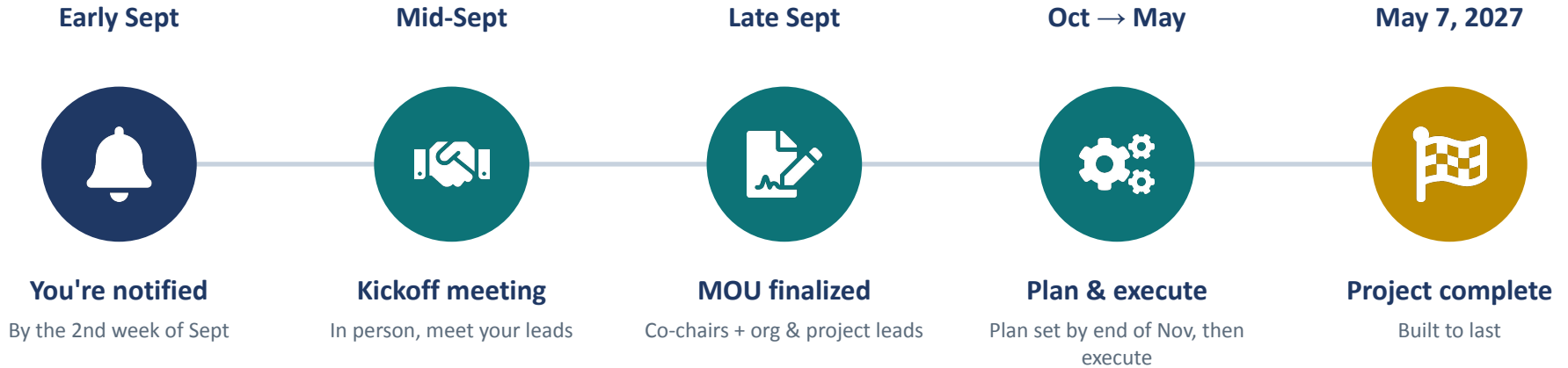
Retreat · Aug 28–29



**Your proposal goes to the class exactly as you wrote it — unedited.** How you write it is how 55 leaders read it. Clarity on the page is the project.

# If you're selected — the year ahead

A heads-up on the commitment, so there are no surprises after selection.



**Plan for it:** about 10 hours of staff time a month. We handle the MOU; you and your project leads build the project plan from our template — tasks, milestones, and deliverables, set by the end of November.

# Where your 100 points come from



25

POINTS

## Problem

One specific issue, clearly framed.



25

POINTS

## Solution

Goals, deliverable(s), and the class's role.



25

POINTS

## Objective

Community impact + one non-money metric.



25

POINTS

## Sustainability

How it keeps running after the class.

**Plus a required one-page endorsement letter** signed by your CEO or ED.

# What reviewers are really looking for



## A specific, bounded problem

Not your whole mission — one issue, with a real cost.



## A deliverable the class can finish

Something concrete in their hands by May.



## A metric you can measure

Never about money. Tied to what actually gets built.



## A plan to keep it going

Capacity that lasts after the class leaves.

**Guardrails:** no fundraising · no marketing/awareness · no political projects · non-monetary metrics · 1,500 characters per answer

# Don't get cut on a technicality

These set a proposal aside no matter how good the idea is.



## Content red flags

- A money-based metric of success
- Fundraising of any kind
- Marketing- or awareness-only projects
- Political or partisan projects
- No signed CEO/ED endorsement letter



## Eligibility musts

- At least 2 full-time staff (incl. ED/CEO)
- ~10 hours of staff time per month
- 3+ years since your last selected project
- Attend a proposer workshop — you're here ✓

**Not sure you qualify?** Ask us today — better to find out now than after you've written it.

# We'll learn from four real proposals



STRONG

## CROS Ministries

Rebuilding volunteer recruitment & retention.



STRONG

## Azul Fashion, Art & Design

A mentor playbook for designers with disabilities.



STRONG

## Children's Home Society

A mentor–mentee recruitment & tracking system.



DIDN'T ADVANCE

## Anonymized example

A youth-mentorship expansion — strong heart, unscoped plan.

**Note:** These are real past submissions (under the program's former name, “Engage Forward”). The fourth is anonymized — we're studying the pattern, not the organization.



## SECTION 2 · THE PROBLEM · 25 PTS

**The ask:** Describe one specific issue you or your community face. Stay on the issue — don't restate your mission. (1,500 characters)



### STRONG

#### CROS Ministries

Names a measurable, bounded problem: the people they serve grew 71% in four years while volunteers stayed flat — so pantries sometimes have to close.

**Why:** *Specific, quantified, one issue — with a clear cost.*



### DIDN'T ADVANCE

#### Anonymized example

“In Title 1 schools... there is a critical lack of positive representation and mentorship... mentorship can profoundly impact these students' lives by improving academic achievement and fostering personal development.”

**Why:** *Reads like an essay on why mentoring matters — not a problem the class can target.*

**Takeaway:** Name ONE problem. Make it specific, bounded, and show what it costs to leave unsolved.



## THE PROBLEM · IN THEIR WORDS

*Two strong examples in the applicants' own words — the actual text the committee read (lightly trimmed).*

### “ CROS Ministries

*“Over the last four years, CROS has experienced a 71% increase in the number of clients we serve. However, our volunteer base has not grown at the same rate... Occasionally, our pantries have to close because we do not have the volunteers to help run our pantries. We need to recruit new volunteers and increase volunteer retention.”*

### “ Children's Home Society

*“One of the key issues we face is the difficulty in attracting and retaining both Mentors and Mentees... The issue is twofold: First, we lack a comprehensive recruitment strategy that resonates with potential mentors... Second, there is a need to create engaging, structured activities that both mentors and mentees can participate in.”*



## SECTION 3 · THE SOLUTION · 25 PTS

**The ask:** Spell out the goal, the deliverable(s), and exactly what the class will do. No fundraising, marketing/awareness, or political projects.



### STRONG

#### CROS & Azul

CROS lists three concrete deliverables — a policy manual, fillable applications, an orientation video — with the class's role under each. Azul asks for one clear product: a recruit-train-assign mentor playbook.

**Why:** *You can picture the finished product and what the class hands over.*



### DIDN'T ADVANCE

#### Anonymized example

“We plan on gathering 200+ mentors, targeting 50 schools, and impacting 1,000+ students in one academic year... The Leadership Class will provide resources towards the leadership program.”

**Why:** *Vague — nothing the class can finish or own. Reaches for broad strategy, not a problem in executing it.*

**Takeaway:** Right-size it. One finishable deliverable + a crystal-clear class role beats a big vision.



## THE SOLUTION · IN THEIR WORDS

*What the class will actually build — in the applicants' own words (lightly trimmed).*

### “ CROS Ministries

*“This project includes developing a comprehensive volunteer policy manual, creating standardized fillable application forms, and producing an orientation video... Leadership Class Participants will work closely with CROS staff to develop the manual, generate the applications and standard forms, and produce the orientation video.”*

### “ Azul Fashion, Art & Design

*“We believe that if we could assign each creative team a mentor, we could increase the chance of success for their entrepreneurial efforts... The project we are proposing would be to help us create such a mentoring program and its recruiting strategy — a plan for recruiting and training mentors, and the logistics once they are on board.”*



## SECTION 4 · THE METRIC · 25 PTS

**The ask:** How will the community benefit, and what's your ONE key metric of success? It cannot be about money.



### STRONG

#### Azul

Concrete measures — enough mentors recruited for current graduates, mentors trained and comfortable, teams able to build and manage a budget — and honest about what isn't measurable.

**Why:** *Measurable, and tied to what the project actually delivers.*



### DIDN'T ADVANCE

#### Anonymized example

“Metrics of success will include improved academic outcomes — higher grades and test scores, reduced dropout rates, and increased graduation rates... plus a decrease in behavioral issues and absenteeism.”

**Why:** *Too many measures — unclear which ties to the solution or the class's deliverable.*

**Takeaway:** Pick a metric you can actually measure, tied to the thing the class builds — never a dollar figure.



## THE METRIC · IN THEIR WORDS

*Measurable, non-money success — in the applicants' own words (lightly trimmed).*

### “ Azul Fashion, Art & Design

*“We would measure success in the following ways: enough mentors recruited for existing graduates (seven); mentors feel comfortable working with the population we serve; Creative Teams feel supported by their mentor... Not all of this is measurable, however a successful mentorship program will help us to achieve the objectives of our mission.”*

### “ Children's Home Society

*“The key metric of success will be the retention rate of both mentors and mentees over time. A high retention rate will indicate that mentors feel supported and are motivated to continue their involvement, while mentees will benefit from consistent, long-term guidance.”*



## SECTION 5 · SUSTAINABILITY · 25 PTS

**The ask:** After the class leaves, how does this keep running — and what will you commit each year?



### STRONG

#### CROS & CHS

CROS ties it to its 3–5 year strategic plan, folds it into operations and its annual recognition event, and commits \$5,000 up front. CHS embeds the program into ongoing services with annual staff time and training.

**Why:** *A clear hand-off and a real commitment of resources.*



### DIDN'T ADVANCE

#### Anonymized example

“We will integrate the mentorship program into our core operations... [and] continue to contribute the necessary resources annually to ensure the program runs smoothly.”

**Why:** *No specific commitment of resources — and no routine or procedure to sustain it in operations.*

**Takeaway:** Show the hand-off and a concrete annual commitment. This is the “Built to Last” test.



## SUSTAINABILITY · IN THEIR WORDS

*The hand-off and the annual commitment — in the applicants' own words (lightly trimmed).*

### “ CROS Ministries

*“We are working on a new strategic plan that will guide us during the next three to five years. A key stakeholder in this plan is our volunteer base... we plan to integrate the revamped recruitment, engagement, and retention strategies into our ongoing operations... vital when planning for our annual recognition event during Volunteer Appreciation Month.”*

**Committed \$5,000 up front**

### “ Children's Home Society

*“After the initial completion of the project, our organization plans to integrate the mentorship program into our ongoing services... our organization will commit to allocating resources annually. This includes dedicating staff time for program coordination, providing ongoing mentor training, and facilitating monthly activities.”*

**Annual staff time + training**



## REQUIRED · THE LETTER OF APPEAL

**The ask:** One page, signed by your CEO or ED — commit to the project and make the case to the class.



### A TRUE STORY

#### Azul

Opened with a real story — a designer they serve landed a year-long contract with a local brewery owner who became her mentor. Proof the model already works, before any ask.

**Why:** *A specific story makes the class care first.*



### REAL COMMITMENT

#### CROS Ministries

The ED and board state they're “fully committed” and frame the project as part of their strategic plan — and the ED signed as an LPBC alum herself.

**Why:** *Signals the work is backed and will outlast the class.*

**Takeaway:** Two ingredients of a strong letter: a human story + visible leadership commitment. One page, signed at the top.

# Strong vs. didn't-advance — the pattern

Section	Strong proposals	Didn't advance
<b>Problem</b>	One specific, quantified issue	General topic, no scoped gap
<b>Solution</b>	One finishable deliverable, clear class role	Big vision, vague class role
<b>Metric</b>	Measurable, tied to the deliverable	Unmeasurable, district-level outcomes
<b>Sustainability</b>	Named hand-off + real \$ commitment	“Resources annually,” no specifics

**Bottom line:** The difference is rarely effort or heart — it's scope and clarity.

# Your turn — what would you flag?

A real (anonymized) Solution section. Read it — what's missing? Call it out.



*“We'll expand our Saturday leadership academy to 50 schools, recruit 200+ mentors, and reach 1,000+ students this year. The Leadership class will provide resources to support the program.”*

## What the committee flagged

- Scope a small team can't finish — 50 schools in one year isn't realistic.
- The class's job is undefined — “provide resources” could mean anything.
- No concrete deliverable — nothing the class hands over by May.

# Same idea — rewritten to win

One Problem section, before and after. Notice: more specific AND shorter.

## BEFORE — broad & long

*“Mentorship profoundly impacts young people — improving academic achievement, building confidence and resilience, and connecting students to role models and career paths. Our community needs more positive representation for youth in under-resourced schools.”*

General benefits of mentorship — never names this organization's own gap.

## AFTER — specific & tight

*“Last year we turned away 58 students from our after-school mentoring program — we had 12 mentors for 70 applicants. With no repeatable way to recruit and keep mentors, we can't serve the waitlist or grow past one school.”*

One specific, quantified problem with a clear cost — in about half the characters.

**Takeaway:** Specific and short beats broad and long. Say something only YOUR organization could say.

# Your turn — let's crosswalk your draft

*Have your current draft open. We'll work it section by section, together.*

- 1 Pair with one of three coaches
- 2 Go section by section
- 3 Ask: does mine do what the strong ones did?
- 4 **Mark your single biggest gap**
- 5 Leave with 2–3 concrete fixes

~40

MINUTES — THE HEART OF TODAY

# The crosswalk worksheet

For each section: a prompt, a quick self-rating, and a line for your one fix.

Section	Does your draft...	Self-rating			My fix
<b>Problem</b>	Is it one specific, quantified issue?	<input type="radio"/> Strong	<input type="radio"/> Getting there	<input type="radio"/> Needs work	_____
<b>Solution</b>	Can a reviewer name the deliverable & class role?	<input type="radio"/> Strong	<input type="radio"/> Getting there	<input type="radio"/> Needs work	_____
<b>Metric</b>	Is it measurable — and not about money?	<input type="radio"/> Strong	<input type="radio"/> Getting there	<input type="radio"/> Needs work	_____
<b>Sustainability</b>	Is there a hand-off + an annual commitment?	<input type="radio"/> Strong	<input type="radio"/> Getting there	<input type="radio"/> Needs work	_____

*We'll hand these out — one worksheet per proposal.*

# Before July 10 — your punch list



## Fix your biggest-gap section first

The section you rated lowest today.



## Cut each answer to 1,500 characters

Tighter is stronger — every line earns its place.



## Get your CEO/ED letter signed

One page, one true story, signed at the top.



## Key dates & contacts

### PROPOSAL DEADLINE

July 10, 2026 · 5:00 PM

### SUBMIT TO

[info@LeadershipPBC.org](mailto:info@LeadershipPBC.org)

### OFFICE HOURS (VIRTUAL)

Wed, July 1 · 9–11 AM · sign up

### REGISTER & DETAILS

[leadershippbc.org](https://leadershippbc.org)

### SELECTION COMMITTEE RESULTS

Week of Aug 31, 2026

Questions? Contact Cassius ([cassiusjohnson@gmail.com](mailto:cassiusjohnson@gmail.com)) or Audy ([1inspiteof@gmail.com](mailto:1inspiteof@gmail.com)).



# Thank you — we're rooting for you.

*Strong proposals come from organizations that take time to get feedback and refine. Many selected projects were resubmissions. Yours can be next!*

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