

**Brian Glaser**

          Describe your work and what drives you.

I am the Managing Editor of Big Red & Shiny, a small, Boston-based nonprofit arts organization, where I oversee and coordinate the editorial activities of our web-based journal. Founded in 2004 and re-launched in 2012, Big Red & Shiny strives to create a flexible, living document of visual arts practices in Boston and the Northeast and to expand their visibility through coverage and criticism.

In the months leading up to Big Red & Shiny's re-launch, the editorial team spent a significant amount of time developing our mission statement. Our ideas for it were many and varied, but our discussions often led back to the same question: What role could BR&S occupy within our community? That is, what was lacking, what could we adequately provide, and most importantly, what was needed? During this time we came across a document authored by Renny Pritikin, a San Francisco Bay area curator, that outlines Mr. Pritikin’s “Prescription for a Healthy Art Scene”—aspects that contribute to the overall well-being and sustainability of an art community. From that list we were able to identify our niche, as well as identify areas where Boston was already succeeding.

As artists, we are familiar with the need to wear any number of hats in order to make a living or maintain a practice. And in any arts community the participation of its citizens is paramount in ensuring its health. Working with Big Red & Shiny is, in part, my civic duty to my community and enables me to create opportunities for and encourage those within it.

* What was your first exposure to Pro Bono?

My first exposure to Pro Bono work was during this first web-based project with our team at John Hancock. Though I had volunteered at nonprofits before and witnessed a number of outreach programs while in New Orleans post-Katrina, I had never been on the client side of those relationships.

* Why did you become “hooked” on Pro Bono / Skills-Based Volunteering?

Big Red & Shiny is run entirely by volunteers. Those individuals who choose to be a part of the organization bring a number of diverse strengths to the work we do. Though not traditional skills-based volunteerism, we understand the importance of Pro Bono work and what it can do to transform a nonprofit. We believe strongly in the work that we do and realize that Pro Bono programs like the one we benefitted from are an integral part to our organization’s future.

* What has been most rewarding about participating in a Pro Bono program?

As an organization participating in a Pro Bono program, the most lasting impact has been the amount of capacity building we were able to acquire in such a short amount of time. Developing organizational and technical skills from individuals who utilize their skills in a different sector than our own has made our experience that much more profitable.

* What was most challenging, in your role, about leveraging or participating in a Pro Bono program?

Managing a small nonprofit often consists of finding ways to leverage capacity. We have learned to accept our limitations and to focus our time and mission, and have developed a keen understanding of what resources we need to sustain our current work. The most challenging aspect of participating in a Pro Bono program as a client was a result of this mindset: we struggled to identify what the organization *could* be, or what we *wanted* it to be given the right set of tools. When presented with this opportunity, and with help from our team of volunteers at John Hancock, we were able to tackle challenges that have prevented us from growing and were given space to imagine our future.

* If someone was in your shoes, looking to get started with skills-based volunteering for the first time, what advice would you give or tool would you point them to?

I would advise them to spend time at the beginning of the project to clearly identify the goals and the desired outcomes. It is also essential to create a constant and open line of communication between the client and volunteers is to keep the project on track and to build trust as it progresses.

* If Pro Bono were a celebrity, who would it be and why?

Theaster Gates—a social practice installation artist whose work has been shown at museums and galleries internationally, and is committed to the revitalization of poor neighborhoods through a combination of urban planning and art practices. He is best known for the Dorchester Projects, where he worked to restore formerly abandoned buildings on Chicago’s South Side and turned them into cultural institutions.

**Anmol Mehra**

**        Describe your work and what drives you.**

I had been a supporter of the arts for quite some time and was always interested in the theater, art, and music while I was growing up. Four years ago, I met Betsi Graves, the founder of Urbanity Dance and was really impressed by what she and the organization had already accomplished. I joined the Board at a point where the organization had no employees, no office, no studio. Betsi wanted to take the organization to a new level.

It has been eye opening that I have areas of expertise that is of real value to the community. Board service, to me, has been about helping the organization to grow by making sure it adheres to its value system and is financially sound. It’s been rewarding to watch the organization succeed and grow.

It’s refreshing to be involved in a really small organization where your thoughts and ideas get implemented and you can see the impact really quickly.

**        What was your first exposure to Pro Bono?**

Common Impact was really my first introduction to skills-based volunteering. I had heard of pro bono in the legal profession, but it didn’t become real to me until I knew of this specific opportunity in my community.

**        Why did you become “hooked” on Pro Bono / Skills-Based Volunteering?**

As I was learning more about the potential of skills-based volunteers, I started thinking about how it could be helpful in building the capacity of Urbanity Dance during a critical time in the organization’s lifecycle. Urbanity was growing financially and getting a bit more complex. Despite my financial background, we needed help building our financial systems, for day to day management and strategic decision making.

The use of a team of corporate finance professionals was a great experience, and an opportunity to leverage the expertise of people that were willing to provide their services at almost no cost. Common Impact made sure the team had the right skills, stayed engaged throughout, and that the project progressed as planned.

Our initial project helped lay the infrastructure for what we do now – without this resource, this would have cost us a lot of time and money, neither of which we had.

* You have a unique lens on this work – working for a company that has a robust community engagement and skills-based program and as a Board member for a small nonprofit who benefits from these types of programs.  Our philosophy is that companies get as much benefit out of skills-based volunteering as their nonprofit partners do.  **Can you talk about what you see as the benefit for companies to get engaged with this type of work?  What can a nonprofit environment “teach” a business?**

I work at a large company and I really enjoy my work – but I am a tiny cog in a really big wheel. For corporate skills-based volunteers, working on a nonprofit project with a tangible goal provides an opportunity to see the impact you’re having on an organization. And, when you’re working towards that goal with a team of your colleagues, there’s a sense of camaraderie built up between team members that may not have worked together before**.** It reengages you in your work. It puts a magnifying glass on the skills you already have and develops new skills.

**         What has been most rewarding about participating in a Pro Bono program?**

The two pro bono projects that we’ve done were very important to the organization. We didn’t have the expertise, time or budget to implement them ourselves. At the same time, our own staff members grew their skills as a result. They developed a different skill set that they didn’t have before, functional areas that they didn’t have and made them even more effective in their jobs. So, not only did we get these projects accomplished – we built up our own longer term capacity to sustain the organization.

**       What was most challenging, in your role, about leveraging or participating in a Pro Bono program?**

We could have done a better job investing time in the project at the beginning. We would have spent more time upfront planning, scoping, and ensuring we were available to answer the team’s questions. We also would make sure we were looking not just 3 or 6 months ahead, but 2 or 3 years ahead. On our second project, we were able to put forth more time upfront to understand the scope of the project and make it work even better than the first.

**       If someone was in your shoes, looking to get started with skills-based volunteering for the first time, what advice would you give or tool would you point them to?**

I’d talk to other nonprofits that have utilized Common Impact or other organizations that have taken on a skills-based volunteering project. It’s so important to understand the time that is involved and the effort needed to manage a team. It requires an honest assessment with the board and the staff to figure out why you are seeking this help and why it’s important.

**         If Pro Bono were a celebrity, who would it be and why?**

Kevin Durant, NBA superstar on the Oklahoma City Thunder, because he takes his fame and channels it to benefit the people in his community that need it most through his charitable foundation. And he teaches kids basketball – now that’s a skills-based volunteer experience I would have fun with!