

## Steve's Story

"When I was hired as Executive Director of Boston Debate League (BDL) in 2008, we were a new non-profit with no budget and no concrete plan for how to make our mission a reality. High school debate has long been seen as an activity that can benefit the individual students who participate, but we had a vision of growing the Boston league to the point where we could make a district-wide impact. There was only one problem. While I had worked as a high school history teacher and a debate coach, I had absolutely no non-profit or fundraising background. I knew what I wanted to do on BDL's programming side; I simply didn't know how to go about doing it.

When I first read about SVP, I said to myself, "This is exactly what we need!" Luckily, we, too, were precisely the sort of organization SVP was looking to invest in: one that had the potential to make a large impact in Boston but needed more resources and guidance in order to do so. When SVP decided to take us on as an investee, I was thrilled. The guidance and expertise SVP has provided us have simply been invaluable.

In a matter of months, working with SVP has enabled us to accomplish two significant goals. First, with the help of a small committee of SVP partners, we have re-written our mission statement so that it now provides clear guidance about the programs and policies we need to adopt. Previously, I was not even aware of the weaknesses in our mission statement. SVP helped me engage our trustees in the process of refining our mission so that now, we are unanimously aligned in our vision of BDL's purpose and future.

Working with another committee of SVP partners, we have achieved a second goal: restructuring our board so its members can work more productively together. At BDL's inception, we did not put much thought into how our board's members should function as a group. With SVP's help, we now have clear bylaws, a plan for what our board should like, and a process for getting ourselves there.

I knew from the beginning that SVP partners would have knowledge and expertise to share with us. What has amazed me is how much of their time they have shared with us—and their unbelievable dedication to something they were originally not a part of. And they have been so careful to provide guidance that is wanted, at a pace that works for BDL. Working with us has never been about ego or control or receiving credit, but about offering genuine support in a way that is not imposing.

In recent months, I've gained so much knowledge that I am confident that, over the next couple years, I will have the skills to be not only a terrific Program Director, but a terrific Executive Director—one who can effectively lead BDL as it enriches the lives of more and more students throughout Boston. This transformation simply would not have happened without SVP."