



Growth Support: Helping a Nonprofit Lead Underrepresented Young Professionals Into the Workforce

As part of FTI Consulting's commitment to making a difference at the community level, we recently partnered with Braven – a nonprofit with a mission to bridge the education-to-employment gap faced by underrepresented young leaders. Our experts recap their partnership program findings and operating model development.

Organization Overview: Introducing Braven

Braven is a Chicago-based nonprofit that partners with universities and employers nationwide to increase strong first-job attainment for minority, low-income and first-generation college students by empowering them with skills, confidence, experiences and networks.¹ Working with six key Higher Education Partners (“HEPs”) and countless Employer Partners (“EPs”), the organization has regional teams based in the Bay Area, Newark, New York City, Atlanta and Chicago.

Situation: Rapid Growth Facing Braven, and How FTI Consulting Partnered with the Nonprofit to Identify an Operating Model to Carry It Into the Future

FTI Consulting engaged with Braven to help design the next phase of growth for their EP operating model. Braven EPs are companies across any number of industries who offer a source of volunteers, job placement opportunities for Fellows (underrepresented college students who participate in Braven programs) and funding for the organization. Braven has grown

substantially over the past five years — from 156 Braven Fellows and fewer than ten employees in 2016 to more than 900 Fellows and over 70 employees in 2022.¹ The organization recognized a need to build a model that would allow it to become more sustainable and scalable as it endeavored to grow its network of Fellows, HEPs and EPs. Specifically, during this period of fast growth, Braven's operating model transformed in ways that weren't optimized, incongruent program matching to align Fellow interests with job opportunities, inconsistent employee roles and responsibilities across regions, and complex shared internal ownership of EP relationships, leading to occasional mixed messaging or onerous communication handoffs. Historically, each of Braven's five regions built processes without a standard division of labor. This individuality could be crucial in internal and external relationship building, but it also accentuated and, at times, drove the inconsistency between regional locations. As an example of the differing regional operations, the Braven team in Newark could have an employee own the introductory phase of an EP relationship, whereas the Chicago team would have an

employee of the same title owning the execution phase of a relationship.

FTI Consulting worked with Braven to help in developing an operating model that would ensure the nonprofit could grow their partnerships with continued excellence. Over a six-week project and three phases of work, the team developed organization-wide guiding principles, a decision tree to dictate who owns an EP relationship internally, and two org-structure alternatives to address operating and communication issues. Before workshopping solutions, the FTI Consulting team wanted to confirm the issues experienced within each region of the organization and identify any unique problems in specific locations. After collecting insights through a series of client interviews, the team conducted working sessions with Braven leadership to begin iterating on each of the desired deliverables. As the team closed out the six weeks, the goal was to put Braven in position to use the outcomes of the project to engage each of their five regional teams through a more centrally driven set of standards and processes. The hope was that the organizational structure modifications and guiding principles would allow for improved working relationships between locations and a better-defined set of roles and responsibilities as Braven looked to expand their team. The consistent processes would also equate to increasingly beneficial and more well-rounded EP

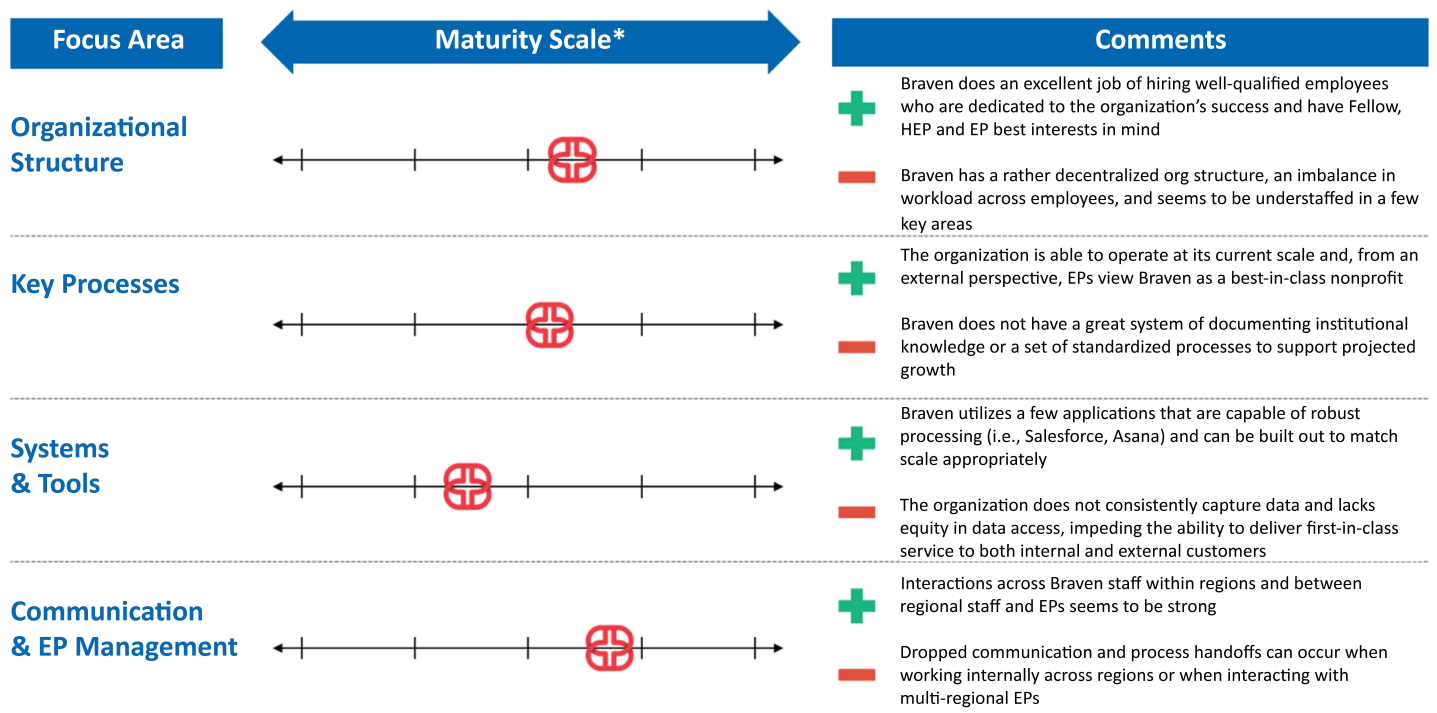
relationships, which, in turn, would accomplish their goal of providing a better program experience for all Fellows.

Our Impact: Highlighting the Work Driven by FTI Consulting, in Partnership with Braven

During the initial phase of work with Braven, FTI Consulting’s goal was to develop an understanding of Braven’s operating model. Although the nonprofit had identified many pain points in their existing operations, it was critical for the FTI Consulting team to validate this feedback and identify any additional areas of concern. To execute this in Phase I, FTI Consulting:

- **Conducted interviews** (30 staff + 10 EP interviews) of both internal and external stakeholders to inform operating model recommendations
- Drafted and distributed roles and responsibilities templates across the Braven organization to **gauge employee role fragmentation**
- Developed a **current-state overview (Figure 1)** from interview feedback and internal Braven documents; this overview included major vulnerabilities, internal and external communication statuses and organizational-maturity scores across key focus areas

Figure 1 — Subjective View on Current State Maturity Across the Organization



*Subjective opinion based on employee interviews and provided data files

Once the FTI Consulting team was confident in understanding existing areas for growth, the work transitioned to a second phase. In this stage, the team's goal was to propose a target operating model based on centralization and operational excellence. These more centrally driven principles would allow for increased consistency in the EP experience and internal roles, and responsibilities across regions would have less variability. The new operating model would also allow for an aligned system of prioritization — the more value an employer provides to the Fellows, the higher the level of service they would receive from Braven (i.e., more face-time with Braven employees or increased flexibility in the events they would like to hold alongside Braven). While working closely with Braven's National Director of Employer Partnerships, FTI Consulting used functional SMEs and internal leaders — FTI Consulting's Managing Directors and Senior Managing Directors — to build out recommendations. Elements of the operating model suggestions included:

- Helping Braven establish **organization-wide guiding principles** and **acceptance criteria** for assessing the efficacy of Braven's future-state operating model (see **Figure 2**)
- Developing two **centralized org-structure alternatives** that split EP management across two core working teams
- Designing an **EP decision tree** to **assign internal ownership** of new EP relationships and ensure appropriate level of service to each partner
- **Mapping the EP lifecycle** and beginning the design of process flows for each portfolio, or grouping of EPs

The final phase of FTI Consulting's work was meant to ensure that project deliverables were easily transitioned to Braven resources and to build out an action plan for implementing each element of the model. As the six-week period concluded, Braven would be able to:

- **Continue to validate** operating-model elements through working sessions and acceptance-criteria testing
- Use a **strategic roadmap** for operating-model implementation and **begin to execute** on short-term (3-6 months), mid-term (6-12 months) and long-term (12-15 months+) goals

Figure 2 — Operating Model Guiding Principles



We are building *local talent solutions*

Given how uniquely local our partnerships and labor markets are, we operate with an understanding that we need strong and empowered local sites, leaders and boards in order to build the talent solutions that will meet each community's needs.



We operate as *One Braven*

Given the interwoven nature of our employer partnerships and brand across the country, we make decisions based on what will be in the best interest of Braven as a whole, versus thinking only about our specific local contexts.



We strive to achieve *operational excellence*

Ensuring a future-state operating model provides cross-functional efficiency to foster scalability, relieves tension between conflicting program and revenue priorities and allows for balance between individual decision-making autonomy and aligning decisions with the needs of the broader organization.



We deliver a high level of value to our *Employer Partners*

The formal relationships we build with all organizations should be mutually beneficial to ensure strategic success, delivering great benefit to Employer Partners by offering Fellow hiring potential, mentorship opportunities for EP employees, and opportunities to strategically advance internal Diversity, Equity & Inclusion initiatives.

Next Steps: Where the Organization Aspires to Be; and Our Continued Pro Bono Effort

FTI Consulting met with various members of the Braven team throughout the project to ensure that a well-rounded proposal was developed to align with the needs of the organization. The engagement was iterative, as FTI Consulting and Braven worked in collaboration to identify pain points, develop solutions, and think through potential implementation. FTI Consulting's work with Braven is part of FTI Consulting's continuing effort to assist local communities and organizations that work with them to positively impact people of all demographics and backgrounds. These projects further the firm's intention to represent the core values that FTI Consulting professionals embody inside and outside the workplace.

Once fully implemented, the findings and recommendations developed during this engagement should assist Braven in accomplishing their mission of empowering promising, underrepresented young people on their path to college graduation and strong first-jobs leading to meaningful careers and lives of impact. The work that Braven provides each day is helping some of the nearly one million students¹ every single year who are not on the path to great economic mobility.

What Braven Said...

The team's work ethic, determination and resolve made a world of difference. Not only were they organized, insightful, and talented problem solvers, they gave so much of themselves. We really appreciated the team's perceptiveness, attentiveness to nuance, and adaptability. The Pro Bono team was deeply sensitive to Braven's cultural strengths, thoughtful about their role, and really able to add value as a result.

DANIEL ALTER, National Director of Employer Partners at Braven

¹ Braven, <https://bebraven.org/> (last visited February 2023).

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