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The Kateri Tekakwitha Fund is a small 501 (c) 3 non-profit corporation, whose purpose is to aid Guatemalans, especially women, better their lives through education and development. Donations to the organization and expenses incurred as a Board member are tax deductible. It is incorporated in the United States and has an all-volunteer Board of Directors and Staff who support the programs of the Fund in Guatemala. In Guatemala, a small local staff operate the programs.

History of the fund

The Kateri Tekakwitha Fund was founded in 1997 by retired teacher, Kay Sweeney while volunteering in a religious community for indigenous women. Kay was struck by the natural beauty of the country as well as the beauty of the fabric woven by the indigenous women. However, she saw a problem - these women and their families were living very limited lives.

Kay learned that many had not attended school and did not speak Spanish, the national language. They longed for an education to learn new things and to earn money to provide a better life for themselves and their families.

The Fund's mission

Kay established the fund to accompany Guatemalan women as they worked to change their lives. The programs have evolved over the years to meet the needs of the women involved and the surrounding communities. The fund currently supports the **Kateri Intern Program - "Mi Primer Empleo," Nursing Scholarships, and the Women's Development Program.**

The Intern Fund assists recent high school graduates transition from school to work by placing them in intern positions to gain work experience. A program coordinator recruits employers, matches candidates with positions, facilitates intern/employer relationships, and helps with follow-up job placement. Workshops provide career skills and support.

Our Nursing Scholarship program provides funding for those studying healthcare-related fields. In addition to the scholarships, which cover not only tuition, but also travel expenses, uniforms, materials, and more, the program includes

mentorship for the students both during their studies and as they begin their careers.

The Women's Development Program recognizes that the indigenous peoples of Guatemala have endured a long history of struggle to achieve recognition and justice. A large percentage of the population lives in poverty. Children receive little education and often go hungry. The very identity of Guatemalans is threatened as tourism, new technologies, and commercialism seems to push them out or exploit them.

The Women's Development Program, originally called Mission: Guatemala, initially acted as a way for indigenous Guatemalans, especially women, to market their handicrafts in the U.S. As a member of the Fair-Trade Federation, it guaranteed a fair price for their products and promises to maintain a long-term relationship with the artisans.

Over the years, the Fund has evaluated this process and decided that this is not a sustainable way for the women to lift themselves out of poverty. The income had helped them feed their families, but had not made it possible for them to move ahead. With this in mind, the Fund started to work with a new process, first doing a needs assessment with the women, and then facilitating implementation of projects to meet their expressed needs. Over time, this developed into a small microcredit program.



Women's Group in Santa Clara la Laguna

The Guatemalan Staff

The staff of the Fund in Guatemala is headed by the coordinator, Carmela Paz Bal who was the first young woman helped by the Fund. She is responsible for the Intern Program and coordinates the staff. Candelaria Sut, another graduate of the Fund, has previously worked with the Women's Development Program. She is currently working as office manager. Rosa García is bookkeeper, Karyn Choy works as a mentor for the nursing students, and Ana Lucía Gonzalez, the newest member of the staff, works with current and former interns.

Why Kateri Tekakwitha?

Kateri Tekakwitha was a Mohawk-Iroquois woman born in New York State in 1656. An early convert to Christianity, she spent her life in prayer, penance, and care of the sick and aged. She died at the age of 24. A statue of her rests in front of the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi in Santa Fe, NM. She was canonized in 2016.

Kay named the fund after Kateri because she was Indigenous, as are the majority of the women involved in the Fund's projects, but also because Kateri in the Iroquois language means Catherine. Kay, growing up in upstate New York, has always thought of Kateri as her name saint.



2025 Interns

Won't you join us?

Kateri Tekakwitha Fund board members come from all walks of life. Because meetings are remote, members participate from multiple locations. Materials are bilingual in order to accommodate both English and Spanish speakers. We are a small group who share a belief in the importance of giving women the tools and resources they need to meet their goals. Efforts support the people who can become the community leaders and change their villages and towns and work to ensure that deprivation is not the hallmark of their lives.

Share your expertise and enthusiasm with us. Join the Kateri Tekakwitha Fund Board of Directors.

Board of Directors' Job Description

Responsibilities and Expectations

- Board members are expected to attend all board meetings, participate in committee work, and fund raising and promotional activities.
- Board members are asked to serve on at least one committee. Committees are formed based on the needs of the Fund and will vary from year to year. The active committees are Governance, Internal Affairs and External Affairs.

Terms of Office: Three years with possibility of renewal

Time Commitment: Board participation requires a time commitment of approximately six to eight hours a month. Board meetings are held four times a year in July, October, January, and April. A planning meeting is scheduled in September to review goals and plan for the following year.

Board Assumptions and Method of Operation

- Everyone is here for the benefit of the organization and to learn how each can add value to the mission of the organization.
- Respect for one another and for differing opinions is a given.
- Everyone is encouraged to hear others and to be heard. The Board Chair will often ask for each member's opinion to be sure all are heard.
- Board Meetings begin with the reading of the Mission Statement to focus our attention on our purpose for meeting.
- A Consent Calendar is included for those items that can be approved without further discussion. Board members may ask that items be removed from the Consent Calendar if they feel further discussion is needed. The Consent Calendar is approved as a block.
- Decisions are made by consensus. A board member may call for a vote if she feels the consensus is unclear.
- Because of the size of the board, motions are not required. Proposals are read by the Chair and may be modified by board members until a consensus is reached. The final decision needs to be clearly stated by the Chair before moving on to the next item of business.
- Questions are expected and are asked in a professional manner respecting the person reporting.
- Board agendas and backup materials are sent out on the Monday before each board meeting by email. Board members may request a hard copy.

- Board members are expected to review the materials before the board meeting and come prepared to discuss and make decisions at the meeting. If there are questions about the materials, it is best to contact the Managing Director or Board Chair before the meeting, so that they can be prepared with the information necessary to answer the questions.
- Meetings are normally held on the last Saturday of the month following the end of the quarter. A planning meeting is scheduled in September to review goals and plan for the following year.

How Do Non-Profits Operate?



The information below has been synthesized from a variety of online resources as an introduction to membership on any non-profit board.

Responsibilities of non-profit boards

- Determine strategies and priorities through active participation in the planning process.
- Monitor and strengthen programs and services consistent with the organization's mission and evaluate their effectiveness.
- Ensure adequate financial resources and a realistic budget.
- Protect assets and provide proper financial oversight.

- Select the chief executive, provide the moral and professional support needed to fulfill responsibilities, and evaluate performance.
- Ensure legal and ethical integrity.
- Enhance the organization's public standing by acting as ambassadors to the community, articulating the organization's mission, accomplishments, and goals to the public.
- Build a competent board through careful recruitment and selection of the chief executive, orienting new members, and periodically evaluating their own performances.

Responsibilities of individual board members

- Attend all board and committee meetings and functions, including special events.
- Be informed about the organization's mission, services, policies, and programs.
- Review agenda and supporting materials prior to board and committee meetings.
- Serve on committees or task forces and offer to take on special assignments. Committee work normally takes 5 to 6 hours per month.
- Make a personal financial contribution to the organization.
- Inform others about the organization.
- Suggest possible nominees to the board who can make significant contributions to the work of the board and the organization.
- Keep up-to-date on developments in the organization's field.
- Follow conflict-of-interest and confidentiality policies.
- Assist the board in carrying out its fiduciary responsibilities, including review of the organization's annual financial statements.

Evaluate your interest in serving on the board

Once you are satisfied with the information you have received, it is time to evaluate your own interest in serving on the board. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I committed to the mission of the organization?
- Can I contribute the time necessary to be an effective board member?

- Am I comfortable with the approach and tone of the organization's fund-raising efforts?
- Can I contribute financial support consistent with the organization's expectations of board members and my own means and priorities?
- Are the challenges facing the board and the organization ones that I am interested in helping with?
- Does the board's understanding of what I can contribute match my own understanding? Have I clearly communicated what I am prepared to do?

If you accept an invitation to serve on the Board

- Use your sense of humor. Non-profit work is serious business, but putting the fun in activities like fund-raising is a gift.
- Celebrate accomplishments and milestones.
- Do what you say you'll do.
- Ask questions. The only dumb question is the one you wanted to ask but didn't. As the board makes decisions, be sure you understand the history and context of an issue enough to exercise good judgment. If you don't understand financial information, say so.
- Don't assume you're an expert your first year on the board. Listen and learn first.

Documents to help you understand

A useful overview of the Kateri Tekakwitha Fund, the board's work, and the responsibilities of board members can be found in the following documents, which you are invited to study:

- Minutes of board meetings for the last year
- The most recent financial statement
- The long-range program and financial plan
- A list of current board members
- A description of board members' responsibilities
- A board organization chart

- The Kateri Tekakwitha newsletter

Conclusion

The vision of the Kateri Tekakwitha Fund can only be realized with the help of dedicated individuals who:

1. Possess the skills and expertise needed to establish and achieve the Fund's strategic goals.
2. Have a strong passion for the Fund's mission.
3. Reflect a wide diversity of values and perspectives.
4. Have the time and energy to actively participate in the Board.
5. Will contribute to fundraising.
6. Wish to enhance the image of the organization by speaking to others about the organization's importance and needs.