

**ALP Member Profile**  
**Interview with ALP Member for electronic newsletter**

**Name:** Aradhna Dhanda  
**Title:** President & CEO, Leadership Pittsburgh, Inc.  
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**Snapshot:**

Masters in Psychology, & MBA  
President & CEO at Leadership Pittsburgh for 5 ½ years  
Leadership Pittsburgh Inc. is an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to developing a diverse group of leaders to serve southwestern Pennsylvania.

**Staff structure:**  
Five staff members and a board of directors

**Tell us about you**

**Q: What's your background?**

**A:** First masters in Psychology when I was in India.  
MBA from Rutgers. I didn't expect to work full-time. But after getting my masters, I thought perhaps I would do something in the corporate sector. But at this point in my life I was primarily a homemaker. I started getting engaged in the community. My chance to get involved in community leadership was "by accident" But really probably not!

I started dabbling with engagement in non-profits in Princeton NJ, then Pittsburgh. I came across non-profit in the arts/education arena who needed executive director. It seemed to be good fit. From there, I was recruited to apply to Leadership Pittsburgh. I only applied because of someone I respected and admired told me I could fit it in my calendar and that I should do it. So, I received a scholarship and went through the program. It opened my eyes and mind to the possibilities in the Pittsburgh region. I began to see myself differently. I started to see my role in Pittsburgh differently. My notion of personal leadership changed.

Very shortly after I went through the program, I was asked to serve on the board. I was then hired as a grants officer for a small foundation- The Forbes Fund. When her predecessor and beloved figure in the community Beth Wainwright announced her retirement from Leadership Pittsburgh, I was recruited to apply for this position. I said no. I didn't feel I could do the job. But, I was convinced to apply and got selected.

**Q: What's on your bookshelf right now? (What are you reading?)**

**A:** Just finished reading "The Three Marriages."  
Working through "Our Brain at Work" now. I am very interested in the neurological basis for leadership development.

**Infrastructure**

**Q: Tell us a little about your program(s)? What do you offer?**

**A:** Founded twenty-six years ago as an expression of faith in Pittsburgh and its promise, Leadership Pittsburgh Inc. is now recognized as the premier resource for community leadership in Southwestern Pennsylvania. LPInc. has an alumni network of more than 1,700 influential civic leaders working to maximize the potential of our community.

Modeled after existing programs around the country, the Leadership Pittsburgh program was created in 1983 to enhance the quality of regional leadership through programming focused on awareness of community issues. Leadership Development Initiative (LDI) was added as a companion program in 1994, and, in the fall of 1998, Leadership OnBoard was developed to facilitate board

placements of young professionals. In January 2005, Leadership Pittsburgh Inc. and the Allegheny Conference on Community Development entered into a partnership that has evolved in recent years to enable two new offerings to a broader audience, Champions Connections and Executive Welcome. In November of 2009, LPI presented a regional changemakers' conference modeled after the TED conferences; soon thereafter the LPI Board adopted a bold new plan for Leadership Pittsburgh Inc. which creates a continuum of opportunities for targeting, fostering and engaging leaders in the Pittsburgh Region through four programmatic prongs

### **1. Leadership Pittsburgh (LP)**

The flagship, highly-selective program geared towards established leaders is designed like a hands-on MBA in community leadership. The twelve-day curriculum distributed over ten-month period examines critical community issues (such as education, regional economy, inclusion, human services, local government and the arts), enhances civic-engagement, develops executive-level networks and empowers senior managers to impact their business and the regional agenda at a leadership level. Applications are accepted throughout the year and are due on the first Friday of May each year with a fresh cohort of established, successful professionals from the corporate, non-profit and public sectors, starting the program every September. Tuition (currently \$4,750) is due upon acceptance.

### **2. Leadership Development Initiative (LDI)**

A program distinct in approach from the flagship LP program, LDI is geared toward top emerging talent within organizations. The program uses a data-driven model of leadership development created by Dr. Robert Kelley of Carnegie Mellon University that outlines strategic approaches to cement the participants' status as STAR performers in their professional and community work. These leadership skills are developed in the context of community awareness and exposure to the benefits as well as needs of our region. Participants in this nine-month program include young leaders from diverse backgrounds and a variety of disciplines. Many high-performing firms in our area utilize LDI as a part of their talent management strategy. Applications are accepted throughout the year and are due on the first Friday of June each year with a fresh cohort of young professionals from the corporate, non-profit and public sectors, starting the program every October and meeting 1-2 times a month from 3:30 - 8:00 PM. Tuition (currently \$2,750) is due upon acceptance.

### **3. TEDx Pittsburgh**

An invitation-only exciting retreat for regional changemakers offered every other year (next one in 2011) to inspire cross-sectoral connectivity, creativity and innovation. The unique format capitalizes on rapid fire succession of over-the-horizon thinking from multiple disciplines.

### **4. Alumni & Community Engagement Offerings**

- **Public-Policy Breakfasts and Special Professional Development Programs:** Breakfast are offered on an occasional basis every year featuring timely issues and elected officials to offer a time-efficient and engaging way to keep abreast of policy debates in the Commonwealth. The organization is also beginning to offer some special programming around topics such as Women in Leadership; Inspiring Excellence in Workplaces with Gen Y and Millennials; and Leadership Innovation.
- **Board Placements:** A "high-touch" approach matching the needs of local nonprofits and PA State Board and Commissions with the talents and interest of LPI graduates. Requests for referrals from agencies and LPI graduates accepted year-round.

- **Leadership OnBoard:** Graduates of LDI (young professionals) gain practical training and experience (no fiduciary responsibility or voting privileges) with non-profit boards, their governance and development processes through a one-year guest board placement. Applications from interested host agencies and LDI graduates invited once a year.

“Continuing Connections” Alumni Engagement Events: Held two-three times per year in a local establishment to provide a relaxed opportunity during the happy hours for alumni to reconnect.

### Presented Through a Partnership with The Allegheny Conference on Community Development

- **Champions Connections:** After-hours business networking and information-sharing events featuring exciting developments in the region, open to all interested civic-minded professionals offered four/five times a year.

- **Executive Welcome:** An invitation-only opportunity for senior-executives (with partner/guest) who are new to the Pittsburgh region or new to their position to link them to a network of their peers in the community. Hosted by a local CEO and held quarterly these are typically dinner events in an intimate setting meant to welcome the newcomers and fast-track their connectivity to the region.

**Q: If you had to list the 2-3 things that you felt contributed to your programs success?**

**A:** I call it the the 3 legged stool.

1. The right board leaders
2. The right vision from CEO
3. The right (committed and inspired) staff team.

If even one of the legs is missing you can't live up to your potential.

**Q: What do you see on the horizon for community leadership programs?**

**A: Programmatic:** I don't have a crystal ball but I do see some level of a more systems approach to programming rather than silos. How our program is presented is changing. We have already moved our flagship program into a public policy focus. Instead of presenting issues as they are, we are integrating public policy.

In the next few years, we will look at curriculum through themes such as equity, sustainability etc. , and the how does public policy shape the activity? If you press one side of the balloon, how does it impact the shape of the issue?

We wrestle with technology- how do we integrate without losing the richness?

As our communication base gets fatter, information is delivered in easier to get to format, the importance of relationship building is going to increase. Hence, in some ways, the value of vehicles like our leadership programs is going to get that much more unique. It's not going to be just about information.

Magic happens when you're in the room with others. It's the meshing of the hard with the soft. It's the cohort with information, in a condensed, prioritized way alongside other folks who care....that is where the magic lies.

**Strategic:** From an organizational perspective, I don't think we can remain vital contributing entities unless we make a conscious effort to form strategic partnerships within our communities.

### Volunteers/Boards and Committees

**Q: What volunteer resources do you have and what systems/infrastructure helps you run your programs well?**

**A:** We have a Corporate Governing Board. But we, the staff, do the programmatic. The board represents us in the community, helps me raise money, etc.

Beyond the board structure, we have high expectations - extremely high expectations for content, speakers. On everything. It's a core principle.

**Q: What advice would you share on how to keep your volunteers inspired and engaged?**

**A:** Communication of a sense of high aspiration. The better we do the more people want to associate with us.

**Alumni Engagement:** We believe in rapid prototyping. We aren't afraid to take risks and be creative. We do this all the time. Our marketplace told us we are on the right track. Where we weren't reaching our potential is that alumni weren't connecting back to Leadership Pittsburgh. They were serving on the community but we needed them connected to us. Their engagement is important for the sustainability of our program.

We tried Public Policy forums, but participation declined.

We are working hard on placing our grads on non-profit boards which seems to be of value.

We are challenging our alumni to give. We are setting proper goals. We are communicating but not over communicating.

We have just created an alumni engagement task force and we sent a survey to alumni. What we discovered was they wanted different things, at different times. Next survey- How much will you be willing to pay for these different things. What will people pay for?

### Sharpening your Saw

**Q: What resources help you make your programs better? (Where do you look for best practices, process improvement, curriculum?)**

**A:** I read a lot. HBR, Fast Company, TED, .Non-Profit Quarterly

**Q: What keeps you going?**

**A:** The belief that hard work pays off.

**Q: What advice do you have for other program directors?**

**A:** Watch your board, watch your staff. Be very careful who you invite on your board and who you hire. People make all the difference. It's not the computers. It's very heavily creativity and work ethic and creativity.

### Great Ideas

**Q: What new projects/initiatives is your organization developing to advance your mission and/or generate revenue? New ideas that have upgraded/improved the operation of the flagship program and/or organization (e.g., something around recruitment , opening retreats, etc.)**

**A:** The development and adoption of our new strategic plan has had the most impact because it is focusing attention on our more than 1,700 alumni. It's helping us correct previous mistakes we made in not engaging alumni. Our programs get people to care about other issues - the arts, children and women's issues, the environment or economic development - and in the process, our alumni get so involved in these issues that they almost forget their alma mater. That became a sustainability problem for us financially. While we had been concentrating a lot on recruitment in past years, we had been ignoring our ability to engage our alumni with the organization. We needed to make that an important guiding light, so that even while individuals are in the program, we're

always thinking that they are going to be alumni soon, and we need to work on keeping them connected with the organization as well as with their civic responsibilities.

**Q: What new initiatives have been started?**

**A:** We've launched the region's first ever TEDx - a Regional Leadership Retreat; conducted a TEDWomen simulcast; developed a program to match our alumni to nonprofit and state boards and commissions; and created an alumni-engagement task force to examine what more can be done to better connect our alumni with the organization. We also established several new partnerships with organizations such as Presbyterian Senior Care, for forums related to our aging population; Pittsburgh Social Venture Partners, in support of innovative philanthropy; and a consortium of civic agencies led by the Community Design Center of Pittsburgh, to raise the quality of dialogue around collaborative solutions to civic change.

One of the most creative and fun partnerships has been with Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development, which has been a critical component of our Emerging Leaders Program and has helped this year's class of high-potential leaders create and film a zombie movie with and for the Fineview section of our city. As part of our leadership development program, we allow these young people to practice those skills that benefit the community. Among their project parameters are that they have to work with the neighborhood to see what residents want to highlight and their event has to be one day only. This year's class picked Fineview and with the help of Pittsburgh-based LUMA Technologies, which specializes in generating creativity and innovation in Fortune 100 companies, the group decided to film a movie. They chose a zombie movie because another requirement for our projects is that they have to be something that can bring about 400 outsiders to the neighborhood. So, this group is going to have a call for zombies to get the 400 people, and they're going to film that day. They are thinking about taking it to a film festival. They're dreaming big dreams and good for them.

**Q: As head of this organization, what goals do you have for it next year?**

**A:** My focus, along with the board and staff, is to excel in the quality of our programs, as measured by our participants' responses; enable significant increases in alumni and corporate support; lay the groundwork for an endowment; and analyze staffing structure to prepare the organization for the long-term.