



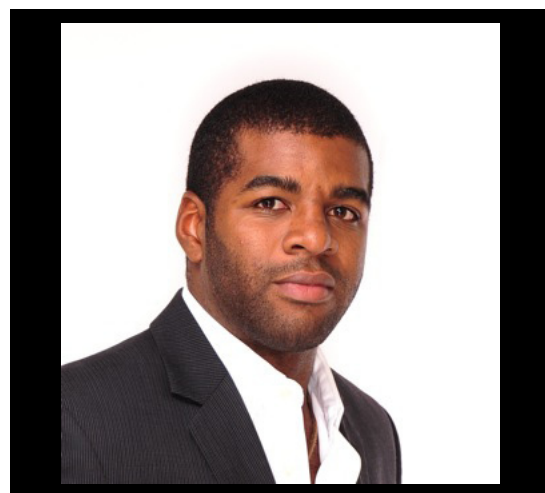
# alumni success stories

paying off student loan debt by volunteering

## RAYMAR HAMPSHIRE

**CEO AND FOUNDER OF SPONSORCHANGE.ORG**

**FELLOWS PROGRAM IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS, 2009**



Raymar Hampshire is passionate about volunteering, student loan debt, and the non-profit sector. While the connection between these three topics may not be obvious to those of us that are unfamiliar with Sponsorchange.org, Raymar has literally built an organization around these issues.

Sponsorchange.org provides non-profit organizations with high-level volunteers to complete specific projects. In exchange for their work, volunteers receive payments towards their student loans made by independent sponsors. “At the end of day its all about us helping those that give-back, pay-back,” states Raymar. “We want young people to really be able to explore their interests. Our program builds those bridges for those wanting to give back, but who may otherwise be unable to due to student loans.”

Currently Sponsorchange.org has distributed more than \$10,000 towards student loans, provided non-profits with 523 hours of skill based service, and have sponsored 20 “change agents”, which are how they refer to their volunteers. “We’re in this exciting space of having demonstrated our concept, and getting ready to scale the program up to reach more people,” says Raymar.

The scaling up will begin with a new, more robust website which will launch in December. But first, let’s start at the beginning...

In the summer of 2007, Raymar was driving through Tennessee with his brother, and the co-founder of Sponsorchange.org, Robert Hampshire, en route to a family reunion. As a recent college graduate, working in finance at Merrill Lynch, student loans were a topic Raymar thought about frequently, and soon enough, the conversation turned to micro-loans and crowd-funding. What if, thought the brothers, we could use a technology similar to that of Kiva, to help people pay off their student loans in exchange for service?

Later that fall Raymar came to Pittsburgh for a small group discussion Robert had organized, involving contacts of his who could provide insight/feedback on the idea of Sponsorchange.org. The group’s discussion was facilitated by Regina Anderson, who was then the Director of the Regional Internship Center, a program of Coro Pittsburgh.

“Regina used a lot of tools during that working session, that I now know to be Coro methodology,” recalls Raymar, “once the session was over, she asked me ‘have you ever thought about the Coro Fellows program?’”

After researching the Fellowship, Raymar applied, and began the Fellowship in the fall of 2008. “It was a defining moment,” says Raymar, “deciding to leave Merrill Lynch to join Coro, to eventually launch Sponsorchange.org. Coro set off this trajectory of meeting people who were instrumental in launching Sponsorchange.org. I felt very equipped after the Fellows program through the tools, methodology, and relationships I built during those 9 months to start Sponsorchange.org.”

Sponsorchange.org was officially launched in the spring of 2009. Pittsburgh Cares, one of Raymar’s placement organizations during the Fellows program, hosted the first two pilot programs of sponsorchange.org.

Since then, Raymar has been running Sponsorchange.org, as well as attending graduate school at Heinz College.

Raymar hopes the future for Sponsorchange.org includes a fully functioning national company that is continuously growing, while providing solutions for people who want to support volunteers, find volunteers, or volunteer themselves.

“One of the misconceptions we have about volunteering,” Raymar reflects “is that volunteers don’t need support, and that we don’t need to focus on their well-being. Sponsorchange.org deals with this by helping to remove obstacles such as financial constraints, lack of meaningful projects, lack of recognition, and making sure that the volunteer experience is meaningful and positive for everyone involved.”