

Students Today Leaders Forever Backgrounder

All of our leaders and participants should know about STLF's history, current operations, leadership model and programs. This document provides that information in a concise way for your own knowledge and so you can share with those who have questions such as parents, school administrators, other students and the media.

STLF History: Founded by College Freshmen

Students Today Leaders Forever was born at the University of Minnesota—Twin Cities on September 18, 2003. STLF began with a late-night dorm conversation and the dream of four college freshmen with hopes of changing the world. This combination of youthful energy, optimism, commitment to one another, and hard work has been since carried on by thousands more as young people continue to turn a far-fetched idea into real impact on communities and countless lives changed.

STLF Staff and Volunteers: Six Staff, Hundreds of Volunteers

STLF is currently comprised of a national office headquartered in Minneapolis, with six full-time staff. Also, STLF has student-led college chapters on 17 campuses and programming partnerships with dozens of high schools mostly across the Minnesota and North Dakota, but also stretching across the country. Hundreds of college student volunteers are the backbone of STLF as they provide all the leadership for all STLF programs.

STLF Innovation: Core Model of Leadership

STLF operates on its self-created model of leadership, the Core Model. Based on functionality instead of hierarchy, the Core Model allows responsibility to be shared. This model of leadership creates leadership roles for students and gives the organization the ability to expand. The innovativeness of the Core Model was cited as a major reason for Social Venture Partners awarding STLF the Social Entrepreneur's Cup in 2008.

STLF Programming: Pay It Forward Tour

STLF's mission is to reveal leadership through service relationships and action. The main program STLF employs to carry out its mission is the Pay It Forward (PIF) Tour. The PIF Tour is a multi-day, multi-city community service road trip. This experience engages students in service and leadership. Students travel to and serve in a new city each day, learning about social issues, building lasting relationships, and making a commitment to continued action when they return home.

The Pay It Forward Tour encompasses a wide variety of experiences and opportunities all in one cross-country adventure to make a difference. In addition to the fun and the friends, there are three main structured components of the program:

- Reflection – Every night on the Tour ends with various leadership and reflection activities. In the beginning, they are ice breakers and get-to-know-you activities. As the trip progresses, increasingly meaningful activities provide a safe space for

students to look deeper within themselves, exploring how these issues affect them personally and the group as a whole.

- **Education** – Pay It Forward Tours provide a binder for all participants with information on the communities visited, educating people on the social issues and the realities of the communities they serve in. Further discussion, activities, and reflection on each day help the group to collectively better understand how that issue affects their own community, and most importantly what they can do about it.

- **Action** – Students are also exposed to different cities, diverse people, and a wide range of issues. They serve in each city, meet community members, and learn about what affects other people. Most importantly, they take what they learn and commit to action within themselves, in their lives, and with their communities. The lasting and limitless impact of STLF lies within each student impacted on an STLF experience.

STLF Milestones

- **September 18, 2003**—STLF is founded by Irene Fernando, Nick Lindberg, Brian Peterson, and Greg Tehven
- **October 17, 2003**—STLF officially becomes a student organization at the University of Minnesota
- **March 12-19, 2004**—First College Pay It Forward Tour
- **May 2005**—Granted non-profit status, with 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt status granted in March 2006
- **March 2006**—First High School Pay It Forward Tour out of West Fargo, ND
- **June 2006**—First High School Leadership Camp held in Crookston, MN
- **December 2006**—STLF holds its first Board of Directors meeting
- **February 2007**—*Everything Intangible*, a documentary of the Pay It Forward Tour premieres in Fargo, ND
- **September 2007**—STLF hires its first paid staff
- **September 2007**—First Middle School Pay It Forward Tour
- **October 2007**—STLF hosts its first Annual Fundraising Event
- **June 2008**—STLF is awarded the Social Entrepreneur's Cup of Minnesota
- **February 12, 2009**—The 100th Pay It Forward Tour departs