

San Francisco Business Times: Okta for Good gives boost to tech-centered nonprofits

Thursday, July 26

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Erin Baudo Felter, executive director of Okta for Good.

Okta is a company centered around connecting people and tech by making it simple to use one sign-in to access multiple software services. It's applying that philosophy to its philanthropy work now, too, by focusing on connecting groups with the right resources they need to spark change. Partnering with San Francisco-based nonprofit Fast Forward, which supports tech-centric nonprofits, is the latest example of that. In May, Okta gave \$100,000 to Fast Forward for general support through its Okta for Good Fund. In addition to the grant, Okta is helping Fast Forward build out its community, volunteer board and other products to help the broader tech nonprofit space.

Established in 2016 and with its fund launched in August 2017, Okta for Good is a relative newcomer to the space of strategic philanthropy.

That makes an investment in a group like Fast Forward especially important for Okta's learning curve. The benefit of an investment with an intermediary partner like Fast Forward is "we have

something of value to give, but we also get to learn what the sector needs and how we can serve them better,” said Okta for Good Executive Director Erin Baudo Felter.

One thing Okta is learning is that “a lot of the needs aren’t as technical as they might seem on the surface,” Baudo Felter added. Many organizations need basic help thinking through how to grow, she said. Tech is an important part of that, but it is not everything.

Okta for Good’s work with Fast Forward reflects that by offering a variety of support both to Fast Forward and the tech nonprofits it works with.

Fast Forward, founded in 2014, builds products and programs to help the next generation of tech nonprofits like Khan Academy and Wikipedia, as Fast Forward Co-founder and Executive Director Shannon Farley puts it. It hosts a summit for tech nonprofits called Accelerate Good Global, keeps an online directory of tech nonprofits from around the world, and has online listings of paid and volunteer positions.

One of the key components of Fast Forward’s work is its accelerator program, a 13-week training course that gives \$25,000 to each tech nonprofit in that year’s class and provides training, mentors and access to networks to help them grow. Okta is giving Fast Forward support through mentorships and is providing space to help host this year’s accelerator program.

“We are ripping a page out out of Silicon Valley’s playbook and applying it to tech nonprofits,” Farley said.

At Okta’s annual customer conference this May, Okta for Good also highlighted Fast Forward’s work by giving \$10,000 grants to three of its accelerator alumni teams: Careervillage.org, which provides career advice resources to students in low-income communities; One Degree, which helps low-income families find social services in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles County; and Beyond 12, which aims to increase the number of low-income, first-generation and historically underrepresented students who graduated from college.

Having a company like Okta offer mentorship, advice and skills-based pro bono support helps provide a level of access that has been missing from the social sector, Farley said.

“They bring all of the things tech nonprofits desperately need,” Farley said.