

Allocations Board Annual Report

2013 – 2014 Academic Year



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(1) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Allocations Board is an organization tasked with distributing a portion of the Community Service Fee (previously the Undergraduate Student Fee) to on and off campus events organized by Boston University undergraduate student groups. The AB is composed of undergraduate students from BU's various schools, residence halls and student organizations. The Dean of Students office oversees the AB, while we work in conjunction with the Student Activities Office. While our members are all present for weekly Monday evening meetings and hold office hours at our desk within the Student Activities Office, members receive no monetary compensation, just the pleasure of encouraging great student programming.

This report aims to shed light on the internal and external operational changes the Allocations Board has adopted to improve functionality. Our primary goal is to make programming easier for student groups. Our most recent policy change has been the implementation of a new food policy. Continued usage and monitoring of our old policy changes (rolling audit, allocating to travel teams on a per person basis, etc.) has also allowed us to optimize our portion of the Community Service Fee for student groups' programming.

This year the Allocations Board beginning budget was \$647,168.71. Throughout the course of the funding year (beginning May 22, 2013), the AB funded 442 regular and travel requests. While these events requested funds upwards of \$1,300,000, the AB actually had requests totalling \$1,600,000 throughout the 2012-2013 academic year. Although there are multiple factors that affect groups' programming, the Board previously recognized effects, such as decreased programming, could occur with the implementation of the new charitable funds policy established in Spring 2013. Despite the decrease in programming, the AB was able to allocate \$736,113.99 towards programming this year. Our rolling audit allowed us to increase the amount we allocated by almost \$90,000. While the amount of requests we receive always exceeds our budget, the AB strives to fund the essential costs of an event to guarantee it can happen.

(2) POLICY CHANGES & UPDATES

The Allocations Board continually reexamines our policies to best fit the needs of student organizations; our goal is utilize the CSF as best as possible and minimize red tape for student programmers. Below we discuss our new food policy, along with how the charitable donations, per person travel allocation and rolling audit policies have fared.

(2.A) NEW FOOD POLICY

This year the primary change in our policies was the instatement of a new food policy. Prior to this policy, we had funded food solely on the basis of its necessity to the event, with our Handbook stating “Food will only be funded if it is essential to the event.” This generally led to food being funded in cases of religious necessity, excluding food from culturally appropriate events, and resulted in groups’ uncertainty regarding the policy. In order to become more transparent to the student body we tried to formulate a policy based on aspects we deemed relevant when looking at whether or not we should fund food at an event. Our new food policy states:

“The AB will consider funding food provided it is a unique AND educational component relevant to the event. Funding will be further considered if the food supplements cultural and/or religious aspects of the group’s mission and the event. The AB may also fund with the discretion of expected attendance, creativity and other regular funding criteria.”

We believe that the food should be unique and educational to enhance the student body’s experience at events; leaving an event having tried new food and understanding its significance to the culture falls within the AB’s mission of funding enriching campus events. For food to be unique it may typically: be inaccessible to a student, examine a unique part of the organization’s mission, or contain a unique discussion surrounding the relation of the food to the event. However, the AB allocates on an event-by-event basis to remain objective and allow student groups the opportunity to grow. If food is unique in the manner it is presented or created, the AB may consider funding it. For food to be educational the AB expects the event to present information on the food itself and it’s significance to the organization, rather than solely using food as a means to attract attendees. Our main question is, what can attendees learn from the food that they would not have known prior to the event? While we established the policy in Fall 2013, we chose to implement it at the beginning of Spring 2014 to ensure student groups had time to familiarize themselves with the new policy.

(2.B) CHARITABLE POLICY UPDATE

After significant pressure from the BU Administration, a new Charitable Donations policy was implemented this year. The charitable donations policy was put into place by BU administration last year in hopes of retaining the Community Service Fee. The policy states, "Allocations Board funding cannot be used to cover event expenses if you plan to donate proceeds from ticket sales." By eliminating any AB funds going directly to non-profit organization, the aim was to have these recovered CSF funds go directly towards more programming on campus. We have been carefully monitoring the effects of this policy throughout the academic year. We found that while we allocated AB funds to 33 philanthropic events (that charged entry fees) during the 2012-2013 academic year, only 9 of those events requested AB funds again this year. However, this year some of these nine events were free and accepted donations in place of ticket costs. The AB also found while philanthropic events continued this year, many groups chose to request donations at the entrance.

Overall, we were able to audit funds from five events, increasing our budget by \$3,150. This amount was then re-allocated to student groups during our weekly meetings. This year we officially depleted our budget on 4/7/14, leaving nine events tabled until our rolling audit numbers updated the budget. This date could have occurred earlier, but we were able to continue funding events by reallocating the funds acquired through the charitable funds policy.

(2.C) INDIVIDUAL TRAVEL ALLOCATION

Last year, we updated our approach of looking at travel requests. We have now started to look at them on a per person basis. This means that we divide the total cost of the trip among the number of members going and see how much it would cost each member to pay if they were not getting funding. With this number in mind we look to subsidize essential costs for students. The change to per person funding allows the AB to fund students exactly what they need; for instance, if the group requests funds for 10 people, but only 9 people attend the event, the group only transfers funds for those 9 people into their account. This allows us to keep the funds for that tenth person in our budget and allocate it to other events.

We appreciate the importance of student groups' travelling for the purposes of competitions and conferences, but we believe the CSF's primary aim is subsidize on-campus events that are accessible to the entire BU community. Furthermore, we also ask groups to realize that if our policies are in conflict with University policies, the University

policies supersede our own. With this in mind, the AB can only fund travel events that have completed necessary paperwork through SAO prior to the event itself.

In sum, while we allocated \$133,594.66 to travel events, only \$95,764.19 of that amount has been used thus far by groups. Remaining funds were then rolled back into our budget, further discussed below.

(2.D) ROLLING AUDIT UPDATE

The AB implemented a rolling audit system 3 years ago in which events are audited two weeks after they occur. This process allows the AB to utilize the CSF to its fullest extent; it also requires student groups to submit their AB Funds Transfer Form within two weeks of their event's end date. This year, the AB's beginning budget was \$647,168.71, yet the rolling audit allowed us to allocate \$736,133.99 to student programming. The audit gradually created a parameter that allowed us to allocate 14% more money to groups on campus, effectively increasing our budget by almost \$90,000.

(3) INTERNAL OPERATIONS

In the past year, the Allocations Board has made an effort to improve the efficiency of our meetings through our internal operations. The AB is able to function with the help of a 1% operating budget. With the operating budget and collaborative leadership of Board members, the AB has made several advances in finding solutions to old problems, as well as implementing new programs to further improve the efficiency of the Board.

(3.A) INCREASED MEMBERSHIP

This year we had several new members join the Board, each representing a different perspective of student life. The Board strives to remain diversified in order to have the best understanding of how student groups function, ensuring our views are distinct and representative of the undergraduate community. The AB has rolling membership and has continued to reach out to groups that are not currently represented on the Allocations Board. Students interesting in applying to the Board are welcome to attend our office hours, reach out to us via email, or attend one of our weekly meetings to learn more.

(3.B) MEMBERS' ROLES

The Allocations Board has made several updates to our internal operations, specifically in how we function during our deliberation period. During deliberations, members enter decisions in the AB Database for recordkeeping purposes, double check calculations within requests, as well as other tasks as needed. Previously these tasks were assigned ad hoc and were generally completed by senior members. We have now implemented a rotating task list where we encourage both younger and older members on the Board to have the opportunity to be further engaged in the decision making process. These tasks include allocating decisions into our database, reviewing the status of student groups on YouDo, cross checking the calculations within requests, and several other hands on assignments.

One of the most important of these tasks is the note taker, who provides real time reasoning to the Secretary. Often times the Secretary and Treasurer of the AB become overwhelmed by the high volume of requests that we receive, so having a single person dedicated to logging our reasoning has helped us become more transparent within our minutes and has further helped expose each of our members to the relation between our decisions and the relevant policy within our Handbook and Bylaws.

(3.C) OFFICE HOURS

We have also made an effort to improve our internal communications during our office hours. Previously we had a year-long email chain where members would send out what they had completed at the end of their office hours. This became a hassle to organize and began to slow down our email account. To correct this issue we transitioned over to an Office Hour Member Tracking spreadsheet. This was a simple solution where each member now has their own dedicated page within a spread sheet where they can provide information on visiting groups, emails, sign-offs, printed requests, and notes for members who have office hours later in the day. This also led to greater member accountability since the spreadsheet can only be accessed from the desktop of our office computer, leading to fewer absences and more output per member.

Additionally, this year the AB made the official move to our own desk in the main office of SAO. In the past our desk was in the back hallway of SAO, which was not readily accessible to students and resulted in a lack of transparency. Now that our office hours are hosted directly next to SAO's Activities Consultants and Business Office, we have seen a rise in student groups attending our office hours for questions regarding their upcoming or previous funding requests.

(3.D) CAPITAL PURCHASES

During each of our open meetings, on Mondays at 6PM in the GSU Academy Room, we begin by introducing the Board members and then the representatives from each presenting group. After groups have presented the details of their events, the Board takes a short dinner break. A dinner break is necessary since most AB meetings last four to five hours, some even pushing nine consecutive hours. The length of the meetings presents an issue of efficiency of time where the Board loses valuable deliberation time to the necessary break. In order to gain back the lost time, the AB utilized its operating budget to supply dinner for the Board on a bi-weekly basis. By doing so we are able to gain back 15-30 minutes that would otherwise be lost for a small cost to our conservative operating budget.

During the actual deliberation period, the AB Chair reads the details of each request aloud. In the past we assigned a member to write important information on a white board supplied by the GSU Mavens' office. This led to a stall in time as well as the potential for information to be lost. To solve this problem, the AB chose to make a capital investment by purchasing a projector to display the requests for the entire Board. This has made a significant improvement in our efficiency as a board, with less time wasted in repeating

details and allowing all members to have equal access to the request information; it has been one of our most worthwhile investments.

(3.E) APPEALS REQUEST FORM

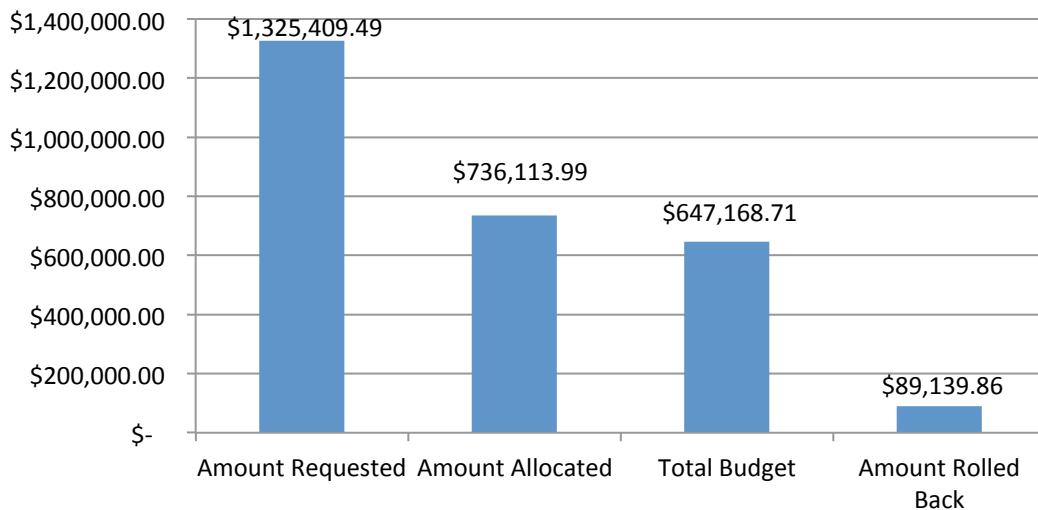
We also updated our appeals process. Previously we only asked that groups sent us an email with their decision to appeal to ease the process for them, unfortunately, differing levels of information within these emails led to more questions than answers, elongating the decision making process. This year we transitioned from emails to a more structured Appeals Request Form, found on our website under the Funding tab. This transition has helped us greatly in being more organized and transparent when making decisions on Appeals. The Board felt it was a natural decision to implement a form similar to the Regular and Travel Request Forms (received regularly) and would allow groups to more clearly communicate their reasoning for appeal.

(4) BUDGET ANALYSIS

(4.A) BREAKDOWN OF REQUESTS

This academic year, we received 398 regular event requests and 95 travel requests. Out of the total requests, 337 regular and 90 travel requests received funding. Over 240 different groups received some kind of funding from AB. Out of the \$1.3 million we received in requests; we were able to allocate \$736,113.99, or 56%. We have \$647,168.71 to allocate to groups at the beginning of the year, but throughout the year we were able to roll about \$90,000 back into our budget by taking back unused funding via our rolling audit.

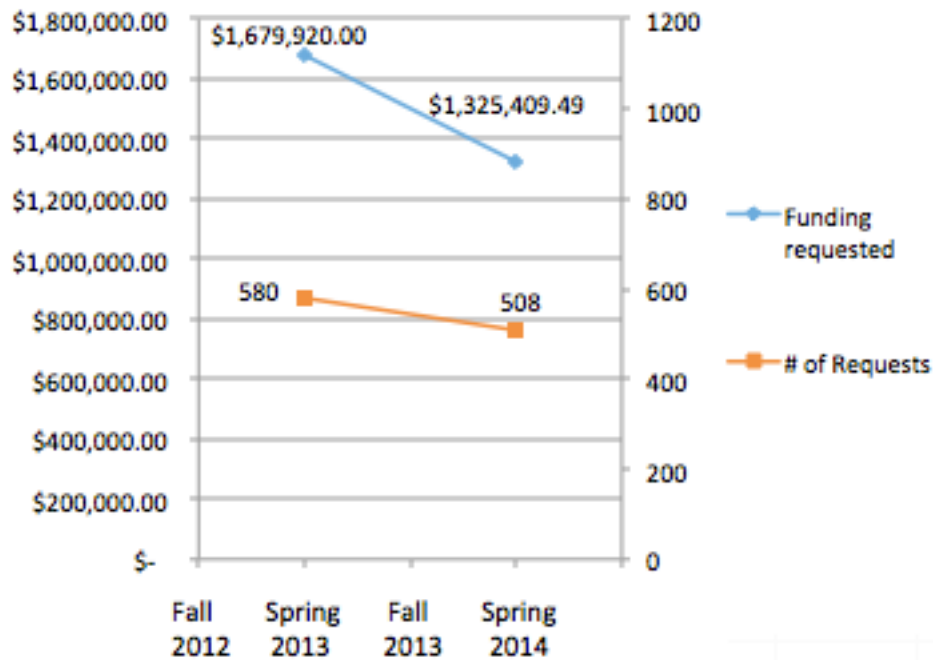
Breakdown of Requests 2013-2014



(4.B) TRENDS

While the AB does not have a sufficient database to track individual costs, the AB aims to track trends in requests, spending, and overall programming on campus. The major trend worth noting between this year and the last academic year is a decrease in programming. There has been a 23% drop in overall funding requested by student groups, while the total number of requests has decreased by 14%.

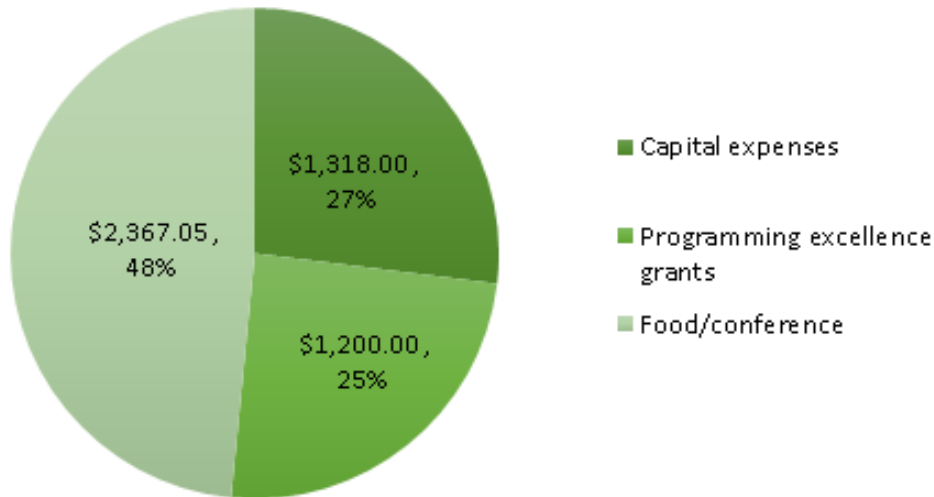
Funding Demand 2012-2013 vs. 2013-2014



(4.C) AB OPERATING BUDGET

As explained in Section 3.D, the AB uses up to 1% of budget for operating/overhead expenses. Our operating expenditures for this year are shown below.

Operating Budget Breakdown By Sector



(4.D) BUDGET CORRECTION

At the end of March, the AB updated its criterion for regular and travel events within our budget. After transitioning a handful of groups within our budget, the size of our regular and travel budget were no longer proportionate to our original breakdown. The AB begins the year with 20% of our budget solely dedicated to travel. After the update, our travel budget was almost three times greater than our regular budget. The Board strongly felt that the excess in travel funds was an inappropriate use of the CSF, especially so late in the year when there is an upswing in on-campus programming. To correct the updated numbers, the AB chose to combine our two budgets and reset the 80%-20% allocation. This resulted in an additional \$15,000-\$20,000 in the regular budget with the intention of improving programming on campus.

(5) AB ANALYSIS PROJECTS

A problem the Allocations Board continually faces is how to optimize the dollar; our budget comes from a fee every undergraduate pays and we allocate with this in mind. One such topic regarding the efficiency of every dollar is the amount that goes back to services

provided and often required by the university. With the aim to become increasingly efficient, an effort was made to better understand where the largest percentages of funds were allocated. Previously, a similar effort was made regarding travel requests, resulting in the creation of a travel budget. More recently, we updated our food policy after considering the magnitude of food requests we receive to increase our overall efficiency (see Section 2.A). These are just two examples of where the Board worked to spread the Community Service Fee fairly by understanding how a majority of the funding is spent. This conflict is always apparent when working toward making the most use of the undergraduate students' dollar; however, we strive to be able to allocate the funds in the best way possible.

(5.A) SUMMER SURVEY

Over the summer, an effort was made to discover possible outside sources of funding student organizations utilized and which of those were most common. The AB created and disseminated a student group survey to gain more information about how groups utilize outside funding, and what works or doesn't work in terms of outside funding. We found that more than half of the time that groups reached out to University departments, they were able to get some additional funding. Groups also stated that speaking to local businesses allowed them to pave the way for new funding sources in the future. The purpose of this project was to open the door to other opportunities for student organizations that might not have been able to receive the desired amount of funding from the Allocations Board. These results were published on our website.

While we reach out to groups throughout the year and during Splash, we also used the summer survey to remind groups of AB deadlines and updates to policies.

(5.B) BU SERVICES

An additional project the AB undertook this year involved enhanced monitoring of the costs students requested. Specifically, we wanted to see what portion of the CSF was going to BU services, costs that are usually required for events. Our Director of Operations took on the project, categorizing BU services from non-BU services, recording their monetary values for individual events, and highlighting costs that were directly or indirectly related to the university. Generally, AB executive board members have the responsibility of reviewing and completing sign-offs, the process through which an Allocations Board Funds Transfer Form is approved and a student group's AB funding may be utilized. Currently, sign-offs are kept track of via Google Docs Spreadsheet. In conjunction with the sign-offs this year, the Director of Operations created a Funds Breakdown spreadsheet, as our

current database's lack of advanced capabilities prevents such data from being accurately recorded. Details about specific costs for funded on-campus events was recorded and categorized based on payee information.

Using the aforementioned methodology, we found that 33% of our funds this year went directly to BU Services. Examples of BU Services include, but are not limited to: Boston University Police Department, Facility Management & Planning, Student Production Services, Catering, BCD Travel, and so on. In sum, groups spent \$178,661.33 on BU Service this year, about 29% of our beginning budget.

(6) CHALLENGES

(6.A) DENIED EVENTS

This year the AB denied 66 events. When we deny events, we generally do so on the basis that these events request funds that improperly use the CSF (with expenditures solely benefiting the group), or attempt to use the CSF to fund BU faculty, which is against university policy. Additionally, if the scope of the event is not within the mission of the organization (as per the group's Constitution), the AB does not fund the event. In other cases, events may not be open to the student body as a whole, which may constitute an improper use of the CSF considering every undergraduate pays the CSF.

(6.B) EVALUATING DATA

Currently, the Allocations Board funding policies are based on student needs. While we update on our funding policies based on student input and the numbers that we see every week, we work to create meaningful statistical analyses using our own data records. Unfortunately, our current database has very limited capabilities, forcing the AB to develop creative, but time-consuming, methodologies to collect and examine data. Furthermore, these projects can generally only be completed during the summer when AB members can fully devote their time to such projects or over a period of months during the academic year.

We firmly believe in constantly improving our policies, but without the necessary tools, the Board finds it difficult to conduct meaningful statistical analysis that can help us identify potential policy improvements. For these reasons, we have lobbied the Administration for years to assist us in implementing a new Database. Throughout the past semester, the Administration has made strides in helping us achieve this goal. With their support, we look forward to implementing a new database beginning Fall 2014.

(6.C) TRANSPARENCY

The AB aims to be as transparent as possible; we publicize our meeting minutes to the BU community, hold office hours regularly, stay active on social media and aim to increase our on campus presence through involvement in other campus organizations along side AB. Despite these efforts, we understand it is difficult to reach out to everyone regarding our policies. We currently live tweet during our meetings and have created an AB FAQ sheet for students to see during meetings. We also speak with student groups one-on-one during large scale events like Splash. While we recognize this a challenge for any organization, the AB strives to be as open to the student body as we can. For these reasons, we are undertaking projects to enhance the resources we do have (specifically our website) and

are constantly open to suggestions on increasing our transparency and best communicating with student groups. We encourage student groups to drop by in office hours or shoot us an email if they have any questions or concerns.

(6.D) JOINT FUNDING WORKSHOPS

Previously (until 2011), the Allocations Board required undergraduate student groups to send one Executive Board member to a formal workshop where we explained funding process and changes to policies. Unfortunately, these workshops failed to address aspects of programming beyond funding (i.e. they did not touch on SAO, SABO, reservations processes) and left students without comprehensive programming strategies. For this reason the AB discontinued these workshops and instead created an online presentation (on our website's homepage) that student leaders can access at their leisure.

This year, SAO implemented orientation workshops for newly recognized student groups. Each of these workshops has had a senior AB member present to help new groups better understand the AB process. While this has definitely helped spread awareness regarding AB, it only applied to new groups. As such, we feel having a joint programming workshop between AB, SAO, SABO and Reservations would help alleviate some of the issues groups face each year, especially with continually changing executive boards. We hope that this subject will be pursued in the future.

(7) CONCLUSION

The Allocations Board is constantly focused on improving our functionality for student groups and remaining a transparent organization. We enjoy providing student input into the funding process and aim to make the funding process easier for student groups. Over

the past year, we feel we have continued to improve our efficiency and are a useful resource for student groups as well as within the Student Activities Office.

In the future, we aim to enhance the quality of our individual members as to improve our efficiency as a whole. Additionally, with administrative support, we hope to implement a new database that will allow us to enhance our communication with the student body. Finally, we aim to become respected partners within the administrative decision making process.

We know there is always room for improvement and rely strongly on student and administrative suggestions and feedback. If you have any suggestions, comments, feedback or questions regarding the Allocations Board, please contact us at allocate@bu.edu.

Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

The Allocations Board

Shree
Chudasama

Chair

Rohan
Vaswani

Vice Chair

Steve
Xiarhos

Treasurer

Adam
Wolberg

**Director of
Operations**

Harshel
Aggarwal

Secretary