

Kara Penn, MBA, MPP, is owner and principal consultant of [Mission Spark](#), a management consultancy dedicated to organizational change and improvement in complex and often resource-constrained settings.

# Kara Penn

In guiding her clients' thinking, planning, and action, Kara focuses on best practice and implementation, an approach that puts her at the front lines of practical management in varied domains.

Kara leverages more than fifteen years of experience in senior leadership positions with organizations throughout the United States, including as founder, director, chair, and board member. She has led award-winning community collaboratives; designed, managed, and evaluated multiyear social change initiatives; and provided in-depth consulting services to more than 75 NGOs, social enterprises, corporations, government programs and philanthropic foundations.

Kara started her career developing scalable community-based programs and services in conjunction with a wide-variety of community partners to address environmental health issues in East St. Louis, Illinois. She's worked the night shift as a milieu counselor in a juvenile detention facility and worked throughout South-East Asia in partnership with low-income artists and craftsmen to develop effective business practices for producing their wares for distribution and sale through World of Good.

Since these early formative experiences she's designed and led departments, programs, collaboratives, community initiatives and projects for more than 15 organizations including St. Mary's Hospital in East St. Louis, IL, Jonathan Rose Companies in New York, NY, and MIT's Center for Collective Intelligence in Cambridge, MA. Kara has facilitated several large scale community collaborative efforts, including the award-winning Metro East Lead Collaborative in East St. Louis, subject of an US EPA documentary focusing on effective collaborative efforts.

Kara authored [Start Up for Success: Planning, Founding and Initiating a New 501\(c\)3](#), a comprehensive and practical workbook for nonprofit start-up and early implementation published by the Community Resource Center in 2010. In November 2014, [Harvard Business Review Press](#) published Kara's first book [Fail Better: Design Smart Mistakes and Succeed Sooner](#) (coauthored with Anjali Sastry), which focuses on learning and experimentation within project-based work.



Kara graduated from Colorado College, where she was a [Boettcher Scholar](#). She completed her MPP as a Harris Fellow at the University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy and her MBA at the MIT Sloan School of Management. MIT Sloan staff, faculty and peers recognized Kara with the Seley Award, the highest honor given to a graduating student.

Kara is the recipient of several prestigious fellowships, including the [Thomas J. Watson Fellowship](#), which supports independent, purposeful travel to foster fellows' effective participation in the world community; the [Coro Fellowship in Public Affairs](#) to develop principled public leaders; and the [Forté Fellowship](#) to promote women leaders in business. She is a member of the Consultant's Leadership Forum, and a member of the [Leadership Denver](#) Class of 2015. She has chaired several boards, most recently the MIT Alumni Energy, Environment and Sustainability Working Group, and the Boettcher Scholar Alumni Board.

